

ART. 26 THE YOUNG TO WHOM WE ARE SENT

The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission first and foremost to the young, especially to those who are poorer.

We are called to the same mission and are aware of its supreme importance: young people are at the age when they must make basic life-choices which affect the future of society and of the Church.

With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the young who are "poor, abandoned and in danger",¹ those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty.

¹cf. MB XIV, 662; BM XIV, 536

Art. 26 introduces a block of five articles which define clearly and coherently the fields in which the Salesians intend to commit their resources. The section as a whole has two particular merits: it provides a complete list of those to whom our activity is directed, and through the very structure of the section and the inner components of the articles makes quite clear what the priorities and preferences are.

In particular the article establishes two elements:

- the choice of the field which characterizes the salesian mission: the young;
- the preference: those who are poorer.

Young people

First among those to whom we are sent are the young. By themselves they give to the salesian mission its original complexion, even though it be incomplete. Without them all the other aspects would not be sufficient. Don Bosco is chiefly the "father and teacher of the young". The most widespread and truest pictures of him are those which depict him surrounded by boys; without them he would be unrecognizable. With this priority for youth are linked many of the articles of the Constitutions which refer to our spirit, consecration and community.¹ If there were ever a day when youth no longer constituted the pastoral "portion" and "inheritance" of the Salesians, the Constitutions would have to be rewritten.

The text gives prominence to this unqualified priority by means of three elements.

In the first place we may note the solemn quality of the phrase: "*The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission ... to the young...*". The expression

¹Cf. C 1. 2. 3. 14. 15. 19. 20. 21. 24. 61. 81

takes us back to specific historic facts, like the dream at the age of nine and its repetitions in the life of our Father.²

Secondly, there occurs the explicit expression "first and foremost"; the work we do for any others is related in some way to the work for youth. In fact the young are mentioned too when other fields of work are spoken of: in presenting our pastoral involvement with poor people in general, art. 29 says that it fits in well with "our priority commitment to young people"; art. 30 describes the "missions" as mobilizing "all the educational and pastoral means proper to our charism"; and art. 43, speaking of "communication" recalls the great possibilities it offers for the education of the young.

Thirdly, particularly striking is the absolute nature of Don Bosco's declaration: "that you are young is enough to make me love you very much" (C 14). There is no need to seek further reasons for our commitment to youth.

These and other similar compelling indications have their origin and foundation in the conviction expressed in art. 14, where it is said that "our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young", and that "this love is an expression of pastoral charity and gives meaning to our whole life. Without the young therefore there can be no specifically salesian presence, and every new decision made in respect of activities or works should be directed to making us ever more effectively "youth specialists".

Since this article is fundamental for our identity, the editorial nuances should not be allowed to pass unnoticed.

It speaks of "*the young*", i.e. those who are at an age when they are maturing biologically and psychologically, and who by the assimilation of culture and the gaining of professional qualifications are preparing to take their full place in society.

The age limits for this period have been extended, especially (but not only) in developed societies. Salesian works and institutes were formerly found predominantly among adolescents and pre-adolescents. This is certainly a category that needs attention in terms of human formation, evangelization and decisions about their future calling; but at the present day, given the greater time needed for professional preparation, young adults are still in a period of "education and preparation for life". This period too is one of religious and cultural phenomena which affect the formation of young people, and often manifests various forms of deviation which need to be forestalled.

It will be up to each Province to decide, in the light of the social and cultural conditions of its own context, to which age-group the Salesians should give more attention: the adolescent group (11-17 years) or that of young adults (18-25 years).

We speak of "young people" or the "*young*". The term in its collective meaning (= "*youth*")³ implies that we are attentive not only to individual youngsters, but to their

² Cf. commentary on C 14 with its many quotations from Don Bosco concerning his conviction concerning the priority of his mission for youth (p. 188-194)

condition as a group. Youth as a group is at the present day an object of concern and action by governments, the mass media, and international institutions. Action in favour of individuals is of little avail if the youth condition itself in a social, cultural and educational sense is not given attention. The GC21, in fact, recommended insistently that salesians should become "specialists" in youth conditions.⁴

But together with the term "young people", a choice is also emphasized: Our pastoral service is directed to *boys and young men* (R 3). This means that our initiatives are intended to meet the specific needs that appear among this particular group; and this implies in turn that if for pastoral reasons we work in environments where both boys and girls are encountered, our preferential attention and our initiatives which go beyond a general service, will be thought out and programmed in terms of the boys, leaving to others a more detailed care of the girls.

This means also that we feel able to manage big establishments and large numbers of boys, but when it comes to girls and pastoral reasons make their presence convenient or necessary, we establish certain limits: group participation, for formational, cultural, religious or social purposes, in numbers proportionate to the need.

This option is connected with our origins, with the pedagogy of shared life that we apply, and with the kinds of educational themes in which we specialize: vocation, work, games etc.

Finally, an element that must not be overlooked is found in the motivations of our commitment in favour of the young, as proposed in the text of the Rule.

The first concerns their own life: they are at an age when fundamental options are being made, as a result of which life will take a turn towards fulfilment or towards frustration; our love for the young prompts us to help them in this difficult time of growth.

The second concerns society and the Church. "Young people are preparing the future of society and of the Church". This motivation opens up a topic which will be developed in the course of the whole section — the social perspective of our pastoral and educational work.

In the formulation of this article echoes can be detected not only of our own tradition but also of the words of the Council: "The sacred Ecumenical Council has given careful consideration to the paramount *importance of education* in the life of men and its ever-growing influence on the social progress of the age".⁵

Young people who are poor

³ Don Bosco himself uses the term "*giovani*" in a collective sense, e.g. in art. 1 of the Constitutions he wrote (1875). Several times in his writings is found also the term "*gioventu*"

⁴ Cf. GC 21, "Salesian evangelizers of the young"; especially Part 1: "Youth and its condition" (GC21, 20-30)

⁵ GE, Introduction

But among the young there are preferences. The first is for those *who are poorer*: “With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the ‘*young who are poor, abandoned and in danger*’, those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty”.

Poverty has no limits. In our own neighbourhood there is always someone poorer than the last one we heard about. And on a larger scale there is always a situation more wretched than the worst we imagined in our smaller area. The “poverty” evident in certain cities does not seem so bad when compared with the conditions in some of the world's slum areas, and these in turn are far exceeded by the tragedies of drought and famine suffered by whole peoples who have become refugees.

Furthermore, when Don Bosco formulated his preference no one had any idea of what we now call “structural poverty”, i.e. a poverty born of a particular social and economic situation, which produces it, and from which it is possible to free individuals only at a rate far below that at which they are being produced. In fact what is being said and written at the present day reveals the hope that education may prove to be the only remedy for such poverty.

These fleeting reflections may help us to understand the sense of our option, which is not to solve the problem of poverty but to reveal, through a “human” sign, the fatherly countenance of God.

The threefold reference to young people who are “poor”, “abandoned”, and “in danger”, indicates three kinds of poverty which are frequently interconnected.

— *“Poor”*: means lacking material resources and the means for self-development.

— *“Abandoned”*: implies the absence of supportive relationships: parents, family, educational institutions. This lack is often found in association with the preceding one, but can exist independently of it.

— *“In danger”*: describes the situation of those youngsters exposed to hazards which make it impossible for them to attain a happy maturity as human beings. They are “at risk”, in the sense that they display weaknesses which make them an easy prey to the evils that assail them, such as drugs, inducement to crime, vagrancy and unemployment.

To which of these three kinds of poverty should we give preference? The decision must be made against the background of the social context in which we are working, and in the light of other criteria which the Constitutions speak of later (cf. C 40, 41); but the first article of the General Regulations puts them in the following order:

— youngsters who because of economic, social and cultural poverty, sometimes of an extreme nature, have no possibility of success in life: the typical aspect of this condition is that it often renders impossible a normal human existence;

— youngsters who are poor at an affective, moral and spiritual level: this is a kind of poverty which has repercussions on the deepest dimensions of an individual, because of the lack of fundamental affection true values, and openness to God;

— youngsters who live on the fringe of society and of the Church.⁶

These options are not mutually exclusive. There are in fact pastoral initiatives which tackle all three at once.

We emphasize the motivation expressed in the article: we prefer the young who are poor because they have "*greater need of love and evangelization*". More than just the specific aspect of the teaching of catechism, evangelization means the announcement and proclamation of the possibility for the young of salvation in Jesus Christ, and the experience of love that can open them to the presence of God in their lives.

From preference for the poor two practical consequences follow: care for them individually, and the geographical and social installation of our works and activities "in areas of greatest poverty".

All this is far from easy. But there are two forces, one internal and the other external, which give us encouragement and support: first the love of Christ the Saviour ("*caritas Christi urget nos*", in the words of St Paul), and secondly fidelity to Don Bosco, who so often declared that the Salesian Society is meant, primarily for the young who are poorest.⁷

*Lord our God,
you showed our Father by unmistakable signs
that our mission is first and foremost to the young;
grant that we too
who are called to the same work of salvation
may reaffirm the same predilection by heart and deed,
and so become ready and attentive educators of youth,
helping them to discover in their own existence
your saving presence.*

*May young people
who are "poor, abandoned and in danger" hear in
our voice your own proclamation of salvation, and
by accepting it and adhering to it with faith,
cooperate in realizing the hopes and expectations,
which the Church and humanity
repose in the new generations.*

⁶Cf. SGC, 39-44; 47-48; 181-182

⁷SGC, 48

ART. 27 YOUNG WORKERS

Young people from poor areas who are looking for work, and young workers in general, often encounter difficulties and easily become victims of injustice.

Making the concern of Don Bosco our own, we go to them to prepare them to take their place with dignity in society and in the Church and to alert them to the role they must play in the Christian transformation of social life.

Don Bosco's solicitude

The historical antecedents of this article go back as far as the first Rule written by Don Bosco, and there are uninterrupted references to the matter in every constitutional text down to the present day. Young apprentices and works for their benefit have always been listed in second place, immediately after the young in need of catechetical instruction who were provided for through festive oratories.

In the historical preamble to the very first text of the Constitutions Don Bosco wrote: "Many of them were poor and abandoned, and were received into a house so as to remove them from danger, instruct them in their religion, and *prepare them for employment*".¹

The Constitutional expression stems from some facts in the life of our Father which are recorded in the Memoirs of the Oratory: "In general", wrote Don Bosco, "the Oratory was made up of stonemasons, bricklayers, plasterers, road makers, and others doing similar kinds of work, the majority coming from long distances away".² So characteristic were these occupations at the Oratory that in 1842 one of the feasts celebrated was that of the bricklayers.³ "The young lad who constituted the lust step in the building up of the moral and religious work of the Oratory would have had this identity card: Bartholomew Garelli, orphan, illiterate, migrant labourer".⁴

This was the seed or beginning from which sprang an enterprise that underwent significant stages of development in Don Fiasco's Own lifetime: individual work contracts, hostels for young workers who had to learn a trade outside the house, Internal workshops, schools of arts and trades with a complete and organized programme.

Don Bosco's solicitude for young workers, first sighted in its intuitions and tenacious in application, was responsible for a series of initiatives which made one of the original features of the Congregation its natural linkage with the world of work.

¹ Cf. *Costituzioni della Societa di San Francesco di Sales*, 1858-1875, ed. F MOTTO, p. 66

² Cf. MO, 129

³ *ibid.* 130

⁴ E. VIGANO, *The salesian mission and the workers' world*, ASCU 307 (1983), p.11

In the first place we remember the trade schools, educational institutions which, like the festive oratories, seem like a characteristic work of Salesian Congregation. Long practice in these schools led eventually to the drawing up of a "*pedagogy of work*" which the Salesians pioneered in more than a few regions. With this kind of work and pedagogy the Congregation became decisively inserted in working class neighbourhoods and entered into the dynamics of society for the advancement of the individual and the environment. For this reason it took on a strong "secular" complexion, which enabled it to intervene from a cultural and technical standpoint in social themes of concern in poor areas. From this there developed in the Congregation the figure of a member strongly characterized by his professional preparation in the work sector, even though not limited to it the salesian coadjutor brother.

Work too was an essential characteristic of the Congregation's ascetics ("work and temperance"). And if it is true that by work Don Bosco meant every apostolic occupation, it is also true that because of the large proportion of Craftsmen in the Congregation the term "work" took on a 'practical' and 'manual' meaning which together with its ascetical aspect led naturally to a close linkage with the world of work and the style of life associated with its

The expression "making the concern of Don Bosco our own" is therefore very significant: the choice of a field of pastoral work involves spiritual aspects of our identity.

Our concern at the present day

The words which follow: "we go to them to prepare them to take their place with dignity in society and in the Church and to alert them to the role they must play in the Christian transformation of social life", bring us to the modern phenomenon of work and to its collective implications, to the complexes of norms and circumstances, models and life relationships, which are included in the phrase "the 'world' or 'culture' of work".⁵

It is not primarily a case of providing the youngsters with a means of earning a living, or of providing skilled workers for industry, but to save the individual by helping him to play "with dignity", i.e. with human and cultural maturity and in the light of faith, his role in the "transformation of social life". The Salesians have a propensity for choosing the workers' world as a field for evangelization,⁶ and in it they give effect to their preference for the young.

In the second paragraph of the article our preference is motivated and defined in terms that fully express its collective and cultural overtones.

The first paragraph had already expressed the form in which the Congregation takes up at the present day the same commitment as Don Bosco's. The young apprentices of

⁵ Cf. ASC 307 (1983), pp. 8-9; v. also John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, 1981

⁶ ASC 307 (1983), pp. 14-20

the last century have become "young people looking for work, and young workers in general". The range has been extended. Many youthful phenomena of the present day belong, in fact, to the period that follows school, and a cultural and christian mentality is formed in the conflicts that are part and parcel of the organization of work, rather than in the earlier years of preparation.

The phrase "to enable them to earn an honest livelihood" of earlier texts has given place today to another reason: young people "often encounter difficulties and easily become victims of injustice". Behind this expression lie the phenomena of gross exploitation found in the third world (illegal and concealed child labour, job allocation in accordance with "ideologies", dismissal of superfluous workers and the exploitation of others taken on, etc.) and the typical phenomena of the industrial society. One thing is certain: the Salesians do not consider work only in terms of the individual and what he can do: the article is permeated by a pastoral charity which is aware of the collective and cultural dimension which envelops the educational and promotional theme of "work", and of the effect it has on the overall salvation of youth.

*Lord Jesus,
in the years of your hidden life at Nazareth
you willed to be known as a carpenter,
and experience in your own person the
hardships of a workman's life.*

*Teach us to understand and to love young
people of the world of work, so as to guide
them in their preparation for life, that they
may become among their companions
faithful witnesses of your Gospel.*

ART. 28 YOUNG PEOPLE CALLED TO SERVE THE CHURCH

To meet the needs of his people the Lord continually calls some to follow him, and enriches them with a variety of gifts in the service of the Kingdom.

We are convinced that many young people are rich in spiritual potential and give indications of an apostolic vocation.

We help them to discover, accept and develop the gift of a lay, consecrated or priestly vocation, for the benefit of the whole Church and of the Salesian Family.

With equal zeal we nurture adult vocations.

This is not the only article of the Constitutions which speaks of vocations. One may compare and contrast it with articles 37 and 109. What is specific to this article, placed in the chapter dealing with those for whom we work, is that it indicates those who show signs of a vocation as being a special field of work for the Congregation. It recalls what was said in art.6 which gave a synthesis of our principal commitments in the Church: "We pay special attention to apostolic vocations".

The expression in the text has its roots in the beginnings of our charism. It appears, in fact, for the first time in the edition of 1860, at n. 5 of chapter I, under the heading: "Purpose of this Society": "In view of the great dangers faced by young people who wish to embrace the ecclesiastical state, this Congregation will take care to cultivate the piety and vocation of those who show a special aptitude for study and are eminently disposed towards piety".¹ The text of 1875 said that "when considering the admission of those who wish to study, preference shall be given to those who are poorer..., provided they give some hope of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state".²

From that time there has always been some reference to this group in every subsequent edition of the Constitutions. The article expresses one of Don Bosco's most constant preoccupations, a manifestation of the depth of his priesthood and of his practical Church sense: to make possible the realization of their vocation to those show signs of having one and the will to follow it. Well known are the sayings of our Father: "Every care and concern of the Salesians and the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians must be directed to the fostering of ecclesiastical and religious vocations".³ "Let us remember that we give the Church a great treasure when we cultivate a good vocation".⁴

The Lord calls

¹ Costituzioni 1860, 1, 5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 76)

² Costituzioni 1875, 1, 5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 76)

³ MB XVII, 305

⁴ MB XVII, 262

The article opens with a declaration of faith: “The Lord continually calls some to follow him. Before its ministerial significance, attention is directed to the radical sense of vocation as it appears from the Gospel: “He called them and appointed them to be his companions” (Mk 3, 14).

To the many different needs of his people the Lord responds with an outpouring of grace and a multiplicity of gifts which he lavishes on the faithful, all of them converging on the same objective—the Kingdom.

The statement reflects and almost repeats the words of St Paul: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good; ... there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12, 7.4)

This phenomenon is abundantly clear in the youth sector. Young people are making “basic life-choices” (C 26). We are convinced that many of them are rich in availability and spiritual resources. Our conviction stems from experience and from the recollection of a judgement often expressed by the Father: a high percentage of the youngsters sent to us by the Lord are favourably disposed to take up a vocation to some particular commitment, if suitably motivated and followed up.⁵ Don Bosco's conviction was recalled by John Paul II when he visited the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in 1980.⁶

We collaborate with the Lord

This portion of youth, endowed with signs and dispositions of a vocation, is for us a field in which to intervene with well thought out initiatives aimed at helping those concerned to recognize, accept and develop the Lord's call. The GC21 reminded us that this is one of our characteristic areas of activity, and proposed that we “revitalize concretely (in our attitudes and apostolic initiatives) one of the components of our salesian vocation: to offer our active service to the Church in cultivating the vocation of those young people whom the Lord calls to a priestly or religious vocation, to the various ecclesial ministries and to a commitment as lay leaders”.⁷

Practical expressions made by Don Bosco of this commitment were his offer to the Bishops to look after seminaries, and the taking on of the specific care of vocations in several places, especially in poor dioceses. He was able to write to the Archbishop of Turin: “I rather think that from 1848 to the present day this Congregation has been responsible for at least two thirds of the diocesan clergy”.⁸

We may note that the text speaks of different forms of vocation in the Church, which correspond to the variety of gifts poured out by the Lord (lay, consecrated, and priestly). In all these different forms the emphasis is on “*apostolic vocation*”; this implies a particular need for discernment and formation. It is not a question of an

⁵ Cf. BM XI, 248

⁶ Cf. “*Torino vivi in pace*”, 1 DC Turin 1980, p.113

⁷ GC 21, 110

⁸ MB XVI, 91

apostolate.

The article concludes with a reference to the care of adult vocations. This draws attention to the fact that the fundamental reason for the choice of this field is neither poverty nor youth but the vocational call itself. It is true that through our method of integral education, because of the presence of the greater number of confreres among young people, we have a special regard for the youth sector also in the matter of vocations, but the vocational question as such leads us to a wider outlook and greater concern. In this connection it is well to remember Don Bosco's concern for "late vocations", as they were once called, and the contribution these have made to the Congregation, especially in the missions.

Finally, the *expression "for the benefit of the whole Church and of the Salesian Family"* indicates a scale of motivations.

The first and principal reason why, with Don Bosco, we choose this field is love for the Church and the sense of the need of her mission in history. The three vocations — lay, priestly, and religious — form the woof and warp of her fabric and enable her to undertake all good works. They represent her possibility of presence and witness in secular realities, of service to the Christian community and of evangelical testimony. We turn our eyes first to the Church, and to her we direct our principal concern.

But the Church is made up of different charisms. The salesian vocation can be discovered and cultivated especially by us who have already received this grace of the Spirit, and we can therefore discern its signs and have an idea of its development. But everything comes under the sign of the personal response. Our activity is not a recruiting drive aimed at increasing our own "strength", but a help to those who have received from God the grace of the salesian spirit so that they may be followed up and encouraged in corresponding with it.

The significance of this choice of field for salesian pedagogy and pastoral work should not be forgotten. The ability to guide and bring to realization a vocation of commitment in its spiritual and practical aspects is the apex of religious pedagogy. If the theme of work embrace the contents and horizons of the purely human aspect of education (the formation of an upright citizen), the discovery of the christian vocation and its cultivation to the point of its full realization represents the synthesis and summit of education to the faith: the formation of the good Christian (cf. C 37).

*Lord our God,
you sow the seed of your Word in men's hearts
and lavishly distribute the gifts of your Spirit.
Make us sensitive, in the same Spirit,
to the presence of these gifts
in the young you entrust to our care,
so that we may be able to discern in them
the germ of your call,
and collaborate with you in forming
for your Church and our Salesian Family
new apostles,
who will help their brothers to grow
as members of your Mystical Body.*

ART. 29 IN WORKING-CLASS AREAS

Our priority commitment to young people who are poor fits in well with pastoral involvement among poor people in general.

We recognize the gospel values which they stand for, and the need they have of support in their efforts at human advancement and growth in the faith. Hence we support them by "all the means that Christian charity suggests".¹

We also give our attention to the lay people responsible for evangelization of their local area, and to the family where different generations come together² and build the future of mankind.

¹ C 1875, I, 7

² cf. GS 52

Evident in the text of the Rule as it came from the pen of Don Bosco is his concern for "adults of the lower classes and especially in rural areas" (text of 1858).¹ Don Bosco addressed himself to them through the channels then available and with a precise aim in view: "and so the members will dedicate themselves to the preaching of spiritual exercises, the spreading of good books, and in general will use all the means suggested by zealous charity as a barrier to irreligion and heresy".²

The working classes

It is of interest, first of all, to understand the social, cultural and religious implications of this sector of the salesian mission. The working classes are the ensemble of people who live a very ordinary life and who, because of their financial, social and political state, without privileges and without reaching the public eye, represent the common people. Don Bosco turned his attention to the "rural" areas in what was predominantly an agricultural era, but he was concerned too about the problems emerging in the new urban society. The 'working class' therefore meant those who were not well off and who enjoyed no privileges; they had fewer opportunities for education and advancement.

Light is thrown on the meaning of the term by General Chapter texts which speak of the location of our works. Referring to parishes the GC21 says: "The salesian parish is for the common people and this because of its location (preferably in populous urban areas) ..., because of its openness to its neighbourhood, ... sharing the ordinary people's concerns, their joys and sorrows, their disappointments and hopes".³ The same GC21 declares that the salesian school "caters to the common

¹ Costituzioni 1858, I, 5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 78)

² *ibid.*

³ GC21, 141

people, as regards locality, the way it deals with people, its tone and style, its special concerns, and especially for its loving care for the most backward".⁴

Activity for the benefit of the working classes is not something that is carried out alongside our priority work for the young, and still less is it detached from it; indeed it harmonizes with it very well. In what does this harmony consist? It means that in our encounter with the working class, our characteristic and specialized area of interest is still the youth sector. The working class neighbourhood is the environment in which we give expression to our priority for youth, the social circumstances in which we prefer to meet them. We are at the side of the common people in the development of one of their most characteristic qualities: the family, the sense of life, children.⁵

The attitude of the salesian

After thus setting out the field of work and the need to harmonize it with the first and principal category to which our mission is directed, the article turns to the attitude of the pastor.

Working-class people have cultural values linked with their condition: work, the family, solidarity, hope for a better future, constancy in suffering.

These are already gospel values. To them must be added the typical regard for popular devotions in an environment where the presence of the Lord in history is felt and expressed in a culture pervaded by a sense of the transcendent. "The piety of the people", said the Bishops of Latin America at Puebla, "is a heritage of values which provide a wise Christian response to the great questions concerning existence. Popular Catholic wisdom is able to make a vital synthesis: it brings together divine and human elements, body and spirit, communion and institution, individual and community, faith and fatherland, intelligence and sentiment; it is a christian humanism which asserts in radical form the dignity of the individual person as a child of God, it sanctions the fundamental brotherhood of men... and assigns due reasons for joy and love even in the context of a very hard life".⁶

This double aspect of the common people, with their human and christian values, determines the basic attitude of the salesian, who comes himself from the same group: he recognizes the human and evangelical riches of the people, he reads in the light of salvation history their situation and the better things they are capable of, he supports their common efforts "by all the means that charity suggests". The salesian therefore does not work for the common people as though coming to them from outside, bringing them ways of life and benefits from other sectors, but rather finds first of all what those people already possess as their patrimony which he has to make his own, and then tries to purify and develop it.

⁴GC21, 131

⁵Cf. SGC, 54, which refers to the *internal unity* between our mission to the young and to the common people

⁶ *Puebla: concluding document*, n. 448

Other forms of intervention

After emphasizing the fundamental attitude of the salesian engaged in activities for working-class people, the Constitutions mention some very significant forms of intervention. Don Bosco's phrase already quoted, "*all the means that Christian charity suggests*", emphasizes both the breadth of possible interventions (which like charity is boundless), and the animating spirit which moves him, and which is always the pastoral zeal characteristic of our spirit.

But the text suggests certain specific fields of activity, to which salesians are particularly sensitive, since the common people form a collective reality and their formation is influenced by the environment and by family, social and political structures.

Two forms of intervention are pointed out -which have a major influence on the religious and cultural formation of the -working class, and which respond in fact to the concerns shown by Don Bosco.

— *the care of those who are responsible for education and evangelization in their local area*: if it is true that the environment is of great importance for the formation of the individual, one can easily understand the importance of joining forces and taking an interest in those who have local educational responsibility: parents, teachers, social workers etc.; such people are linked with our own mission and expect the support of the animation we can give them;

— *attention to the family*, "where different generations come together and build the future of mankind . The importance of the family for the growth of the new generations has been affirmed both by the Council and by the 1980 Synod of Bishops.⁷ For us Salesians family is an essential part of the educative community (cf. C 47), and in this light we have to think out and plan our pastoral work.⁸

We must add also our commitment in the field of *social communication* (cf. C 6): we cannot forget Don Bosco's attention to press and the circulating of good books for the education and evangelization of the common people; at the present day we also have more efficacious means available, as will be said later in connection with art. 43.

*Jesus, meek and humble of heart,
make us compassionate as you were
in the face of your people's needs.*

⁷ Cf. GS, Part II, chap. I; cf. also Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (John Paul II, 1981)

⁸ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The challenge of Synod-80*, ASC, 299 (1981), p. 8

*That we may be able to detect in your poor ones
the gospel values of which you make them
bearers, Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may sustain the poor and
disadvantaged in their attempts at human
advancement and in their efforts to grow in the
faith, Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may give special attention to the family
and to the different generations
who meet and grow in it,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may always provide our generous support
to all who are involved
in the evangelization and advancement of your people,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 30 PEOPLE NOT YET EVANGELIZED

People still awaiting the gospel message were the special object of Don Bosco's concern and apostolic effort. They continue to stimulate our zeal and keep it alive. We look upon missionary work as an essential feature of our Congregation.

Through our missionary activity we carry out a patient work of evangelization by founding the Church within a group of people.¹ This work mobilizes all the educational and pastoral means proper to our charism.

Following the example of the Son of God, who made himself in all things like his fellow men, the salesian missionary makes his own the values of these people and shares their hopes and anxieties.²

¹ cf. AG 6

² cf. AG 3, 12,26

The solicitude of Don Bosco

The article begins from Don Bosco, as did articles 26 and 27. Missionary sensitivity has its roots in our origins.

Many elements and facts in the life of our Founder link the missionary field to others in which the Congregation deploys its forces, and this without any break in continuity. We shall dwell on just three of these facts.

The first was Don Bosco's constant desire to leave for the missions, a desire which his confessor did not approve.¹

The second was the completely missionary character of his style of pastoral activity, even where the "christian society" was thought to hold away. This missionary style was evident especially in his desire to go to those who as yet found no place in ecclesial structures: he wanted to be the "parish priest of boys who had no parish".² His purpose was evident also in his efforts to bring the light of faith into secular themes; the desire to link evangelization with every form of human advancement took him to institutions and environments outside the limits usually observed by religious. Even if he did not move away from Turin he was a missionary in mind and style. He felt himself to be 'sent' by God.

The missionary element can be rightly joined to our preference for the poor, because those who have not yet had the Gospel proclaimed to them are in a more grievous state of want than those who lack bread.

The third fact was Don Bosco's immediate response to the opening of missionary possibilities for his Congregation. With the first expedition (1875), which was lived at the Oratory by both Salesians and boys alike as an epoch-making event,

¹ Cf. BM II, 160-161; cf. also SGC, 470

² Cf. BM HI, 135

began a story which was quite extraordinarily fruitful. There were the missionary dreams, the looks he cast on other continents,³ his friendships with great missionaries (Lavigerie, Comboni, Allamano), the uninterrupted further missionary departures of Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; and finally there was the fact that at Don Bosco's death, 20% of the confreres were missionaries".⁴

The concern of our Father for peoples not yet evangelized is abundantly documented by letters, projects, enterprises, trials and dreams which would take too long to enumerate.

An essential feature of the Congregation

The missionary trait belongs not only to Don Bosco as an individual, but to his charism as Founder. From him it has passed to the Congregation as a feature of its spiritual and pastoral physiognomy. From a negative point of view we can say that without missionary work the Congregation would not merely be impoverished, but would be distorted and alienated from its true nature. In it one could no longer recognize the Salesian Society as its Founder had visualized and wanted it.

This statement, the result of long reflection, has been repeated by General Chapters. The GC19, for instance, expressed it as follows: "The Salesian Congregation ... revives the ideal of Don Bosco who wanted the work of the missions to be a permanent preoccupation of the Congregation to the extent of being part of its nature and purpose. ... It therefore reaffirms the missionary vocation of the Salesian Society... and intends that it be known as such in the Church as well as to its own members and cooperators".⁵

The practical consequences of this characteristic are many and varied. It means that a significant proportion of personnel, means and initiatives must be dedicated to the spreading of the Gospel among peoples it has not yet reached. It means too that the Congregation accepts and fosters the development of the vocation of those who feel called to this eminent service. But it also means that the salesian vocation as such has missionary horizons. In this sense every member of the Salesian Society is a missionary in his own way. All foster in their heart a thirst for the expansion of the Kingdom to the very ends of the earth. All are "missionaries" in the specific sense of this article,⁶ in Don Bosco's style, in the place where they happen to be working; and even those who are not engaged directly in missionary work offer their collaboration according to the possibilities of each one, by prayer, interest, words and deeds.⁷

³ Cf. ASC 297 (1980), pp. 19-23

⁴ Cf. SGC, 471

⁵ Acts GC19, pp. 178-179

⁶ "Missionary" is used here in the specific sense of an apostle dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel in the missions "ad gentes", and not in the wider sense used when it is said that salesians are "missionaries of the young"

⁷ In the text of the *Constitutions*, 1972 we read: "All salesians, even those not specifically involved in missionary work, collaborate according to their possibilities in the coming of the universal Kingdom of Christ" (art.15)

The salesian missions

The second part of the article (second and third paragraphs) correlates the reality of the Missions, as presented in the Council documents, with the salesian pastoral identity. Do the salesian Missions have some particular and valuable element arising from our charism?

"The special purpose of this missionary activity", says the decree 'Ad Gentes',⁸ "is evangelization and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups in which it has not yet taken root. Thus from the seed which is the Word of God, particular native Churches can be adequately established and flourish the world over". This is typical of all the Missions.

In the case of the Salesians this objective activates and reveals the educational capacity and youth characteristics of their charisma. The charismatic originality is not lost in the overall purpose but gives to the latter its own particular complexion. In other words a "salesian" Mission, in the course of its efforts to form the first nucleus of the people of God will leave in the newly born Church the stamp of the sensitivity of Don Bosco's charism, especially as regards the education of the new generations and concern for problems in the youth sector. It will enable the growing Church to become a place of meeting and of dialogue on the faith and vital concerns between different generations. In this way the Missions are for us not just one work among many others, but the spearhead of Don Bosco's whole charism which, together with the Gospel message, presents the spirit, mission, educational method and preferred options of the Congregation.

But a salesian Mission has also two other characteristics: the effort at inculturation and determination to lay down roots among the local people. The salesian missionary does not give the impression of being one who has brought a religious "message" from elsewhere, but of one who bears witness to Christ's Gospel by making his own the values of the people and sharing their hopes and anxieties.⁹ The Mission is not finished once the Church has been planted. The salesian mission means also the inserting of a particular charisma in a Church for its enrichment. When the original work of foundation is concluded, the charism remains to offer its original contribution within the community now formed.

The example kept always in mind is once again the Son of God, who through the Incarnation makes himself like man in everything. He is the criterion and ascetical model for every missionary who is called "to make himself like his brothers whom he evangelizes". And this is an indication too for the Congregation whose missionary complexion requires that it become truly European, Asian, African, American or Polynesian according to the place where the Lord has called it to work and flourish.

⁸Cf. AG 6

⁹Cf. AG 11 - 12; cf. also SGC, 468

*That salesian missionaries,
inserted with love and humility
among the people to whom they are sent,
may work with faith and courage for the
patient evangelization of these people, we
pray to the Lord.*

*That they may display
a delicate salesian charity,
by taking care of the poor and suffering,
of the young and of vocations,
we pray to the Lord.*

*That following the example of the Son of God
who made himself in everything like his
brothers, salesian missionaries may make
their own the values of the people they
evangelize and share their hopes and
anxieties, we pray to the Lord.*

*Grant, O Lord,
that our Congregation may never lose
the missionary trend of our beginnings,
and bestow on all Salesians,
and especially those who are missionaries
the ability to make themselves all things to all men,
so that all may hear the Good News of your Kingdom.*

OUR PASTORAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind: to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the accepted year of the Lord" (Lk 4,18.19).

The context of the gospel quotation is well known. In the liturgy on a feast-day, when the Word of God (in this case Is 61,1-2) with its message of messianic liberation, was ringing in the ears of his hearers, Jesus peremptorily declared, not without giving rise to some scandal (Lk 4,23), that this promise was realized in his mission (4,21). Every service offered by a Christian to man follows in the wake of a service performed by Christ, and will inevitably meet with the same kind of obstacles.

What Jesus said in this passage has been called his 'manifesto'; it brought together the cause and deep force of his being and activity (the Spirit of the Lord), the authenticity and fertility of his mission (consecrated by anointing), and the contents of that same mission which are the innovations introduced in life by the Kingdom of God. As in the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5,2-12; Lk 6,20-26), to which these words are equivalent, the central point is the Gospel to the poor which implies liberation from every humanly impossible situation. Briefly, with Jesus, the year of grace dawns, the jubilee of the redemption, the restoration of freedom to man, the son of God (cf. Lev 25,8-55).

We know that Christ's 'manifesto' became his constant mode of action, which he continues at the present day through the incomparable example of his life (cf. Acts 10,38). Everything that is for man's good from the standpoint of Christ, under the aspect of total development as it would be called nowadays, is willed by God and therefore by Christ's disciples, with the purity of his aims, the tender nature of his interventions, and his practical actions. There is an analogy with what Don Bosco said and did, and with what the Constitutions reformulate (in the section of chapter IV which begins with art. 31) as an educational and pastoral manifestation for us.

* * *

ART. 31 TOTAL DEVELOPMENT

Our mission is a sharing in that of the Church, which brings about the saving design of God, the coming of his Kingdom, by bringing to men the message of the Gospel, which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order.¹

We educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total well-being of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man.² Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form "upright citizens and good christians".³

¹ cf. EN 31

² cf. GS 41

³ *Plan of the Regulations of the Oratory*, 1854 (MB II, 46; BM II, 36)

As well as being simple, the structure of this article is very clear. There are two 'nuclei' to be given further analysis: our mission is a sharing in that of the Church, and it carries with it the pastoral originality of our charismatic contribution.

Participation in the Church's mission

'Mission' is a term which is inexhaustible from a theological point of view. It is used to indicate the redemptive work of the Son of God carried out in loving and obedient union with the Father. Thus in the conciliar decree "Ad gentes" we read: "In order to establish peace or communion between sinful human beings and himself, as well as to fashion them into a fraternal community, God determined to intervene in human history in a way both new and definitive. He sent his Son... For Jesus Christ was sent into the world as a real Mediator between God and men".¹

The Holy Spirit too is said to be 'sent', and this serves to emphasize both his union with the Father and the Son and also his nature of a gift from God to men. "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin".²

These references highlight the divine origin of the Church's mission. It is presented as being clearly directed to the salvation of mankind, which involves many different aspects and activities. Among the principal ones, which in a certain sense also include the others, we may list: the stirring up of faith in individuals and helping them to mature in it, so that "by believing in Jesus Christ they may attain salvation"; the formation of the Church, the community of believers, which is the sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God, already begun in this world; and the transformation by the power of the Gospel of the temporal order, because of the historical and all-embracing nature of salvation: it begins in this world and takes in the whole of man, nature and history: "The Church, at once 'a visible organization and

¹ AG 3

² AG 2; cf. LG 3-4

a spiritual community', travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world; it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God".³

To this engrossing and complex objective is directed the threefold ministry of the Church, which is a participation in the redeeming power of Christ: proclamation of the Word (prophecy), sanctification, and service of government.

All members of the Church share in this mission in different ways, according to the charismata with which the Spirit constantly enriches the faithful.

Religious share in it by the quite exceptional nature of their life: between religious life and the Church, the mystery of communion of men with God and with each other, there is an eminent relationship of sign and witness. As the Constitution "Lumen gentium" expresses it: "By the charity to which they lead, the evangelical counsels join their followers to the Church and her mystery in a special way. Since this is so, the spiritual life of these followers should be devoted to the welfare of the whole Church. Thence arises their duty of working to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that Kingdom to every land".⁴

It should be noticed that the sharing of religious in the mission of the Church takes on various forms according to the different individual charismata.

The Church is not an ensemble of perfectly equal cells with identical functions, but an organic communion with a diversity of components and a variety of ministries. It is not possible to assign limits to the variety of such components. Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all ages and all men, has limitless possibilities for manifesting himself, and the Spirit is infinite in his capacity for creativity and saving initiatives.

The Church needs many forms and channels for dialogue with all of man and men, and to reveal the overall plan of salvation. The decree "Perfectae caritatis" points out the origin and purpose of this variety: "In keeping with the divine purpose, a wonderful variety of religious communities came into existence. This has contributed considerably towards enabling the Church not merely to be equipped for every good work and to be prepared for the work of the ministry unto the building up of the Body of Christ, but also to appear adorned with the manifold gifts of her children like a

³ GS 40

⁴ LG 44. This general principle is confirmed in other conciliar documents which deal with specific pastoral areas and which make some particular reference to the religious. In the decree 'Ad gentes' the intervention and participation of religious is asked for in the first evangelization process and the formation of young Churches (cf. AG 40). In the decree "Inter mirifica" their collaboration is asked for in the apostolate by means of social communication. In the declaration "Gravissimum educationis" prominence is given to their work for the education of youth. Reference could also be made to points in "Evangelii nuntiandi" and "Catechesi tradendae", in which the participation of religious in the Church's action is invoked. "Who does not see the immense contribution that these religious have brought and continue to bring to evangelization? Thanks to their consecration they are eminently willing and free to leave everything and to go and proclaim the Gospel even to the ends of the earth. They are enterprising... They are often found at the outposts of the mission and they take the greatest of risks for their health and their very lives. Truly the Church owes them much" (EN 69)

God".⁵

Our charismatic contribution

In expressing the mission of the Church, in which we share, it is interesting to note that after an all-embracing statement that it "brings about the saving design of God, the coming of His Kingdom", the article specifies "by bringing to men the message of the Gospel which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order". The force of the statement lies not in the two classical and undeniable pillars of the declaration but rather in the expression "*closely tied in*", which serves as the link with the pastoral option of the Salesians.

The text is evidently inspired by several passages from the documents of Vatican II, of which we quote just one: "The work of Christ's redemption concerns essentially the salvation of men; it takes in also, however, the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring to men the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel".⁶ Although the spiritual and temporal orders are distinct, "they are nevertheless so closely linked that God's plan is, in Christ, to take the whole world up again and make of it a new creation, in an initial way here on earth, in full realization at the end of time".⁷

It is precisely from this statement that the description of the contribution made by the Salesians to the Church's mission stems, a contribution expressed by three parallel sets of ideas: *we educate and evangelize*, according to a plan for the *total well-being of man directed to Christ*; i.e. our purpose is to form *upright citizens and good christians*.

It is a question of a single objective with two aspects to it, constantly emphasized by Don Bosco and found throughout salesian history: one directed to human advancement and the other to education of the faith. These are part and parcel of the Church's whole missionary tradition, and belong moreover to the spiritual current of religious humanism of St Francis de Sales, translated into pedagogical terms. Don Bosco's words in which he expressed the purpose of his mission are well known: "To win souls for Jesus the Saviour, to do good to young people in danger, to prepare good christians for the Church and upright citizens for civil society, so that in this way all may one day succeed in reaching their home in heaven"⁸

⁵PC I

⁶AA 5

⁷ibid.; cf. also GS 40, 42

⁸This formula, excellent in its simplicity, occurs at the end of the first *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators*, 12 July 1876 (To the Reader). Leo XIII in a memorable audience of 9 May 1884 said to Don Bosco: "It is your mission to make the world see that one can be a good Catholic and at the same time a good and upright citizen..." (MB XVII, 100)

But it should be noted that between these two aspects there is a real *distinction*. There are in fact people dedicated to education and human advancement, but without having in view the proclamation of Jesus Christ; and vice versa.

For the Salesians, however, the two aspects effectively compenetrates, which means that we cannot see how one can proclaim the Gospel without the latter throwing light on the problems of man's existence and providing encouragement and hope for their effective solution; nor how one can conceive of real "human advancement or development" without opening man to God and without proclaiming Christ.

Between the two aspects there is nevertheless an order of priority even though both are Christian. The first and most important aspect, which throws light on everything, is the Gospel. Ours is a religious mission. Don Bosco used to say of his Oratory that the playground and games were like "the acrobat's drum" which served to attract the boys, but the heart of the Oratory was catechism.

It is interesting to compare the binary expression of the single objective with other dual expressions of a similar kind scattered here and there in the Rule: we may recall, for instance, the double insertion which the communities try to promote, in the Church and in the world (environments, institutes, areas, etc.: cf. C 6-7); the double qualification for which Salesians are prepared: pastors and educators; the double figure of the member in the community: priest and layman (cf. C 45); the double basic kind of work: that in which the "educational" character predominates, and that which is formally and institutionally "pastoral" (cf. C 42).

The articles which follow will develop this assertion. The fundamental point here is to give prominence to the figure which dominates the whole of the Christian humanistic project: Christ, the perfect Man. This is the fundamental thesis of "Gaudium et spes": Christ is the revelation of God, but also the revelation of man, who discovers in Him the true sense of his own existence and his own history. Of the wealth of conciliar texts which refer to this point, it is worth quoting at least one: "*Whoever follows Christ the perfect man becomes himself more a man*".⁹

The process of education and temporal development we propose draws its inspiration already from the event of Christ, understood in all its anthropological force: the Incarnation shows us the paths and content of our pastoral work. But the vertex is the proclamation of Christ which brings with it all the consequences of dignity and development which we do not think should be allowed to remain merely "implicit" or a secondary element, but intimately linked with man's growth.

This is true of every religious institute which shows an original quality in its interventions in the pastoral field. But organically planned pastoral work calls on

⁹GS 41. Worth recalling is the passage from *Gravissimum educationis* which sums up the task of education as follows: "(Christian education) not only develops the maturity of the human person... but is especially directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized... should be trained to live their own lives in the new self, justified and sanctified through the truth. Thus they should come to true manhood, which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ" (GE 2)

religious not to do anything and everything of which there is need, but to be and to do precisely what they were raised up for by the Holy Spirit.

This is a criterion for efficacious results, a norm for participation, and a requirement for fidelity to the Institute or Congregation, which is called to contribute to the building of the Church according to its own charisma.

It is true for our own Society, which shares the mission of the Church with a specific task, in fidelity to Don Bosco. This is something which shapes the whole life of the salesian and his path to holiness. Here is applicable what was said in article 3 of the Rule and at n. 8 of the decree "Perfectae caritatis".

*Let us pray to God our Father,
who in the Risen Christ
gave the Church its foundation
to build it as the sign and instrument of salvation,
and who in the Holy Spirit
enriches it with ever new charismata.*

*You have made us depositaries of a specific mission,
which in communion of spirit and action with your people
reaches and gives life to the very roots
of people and cultures.
Make us docile to the indications of time and place
in detachment from ourselves
and unqualified adherence to the Gospel.*

*In Christ you have revealed to us your countenance,
and the image of the perfect man,
corresponding to your loving designs.
Make us able to cooperate with you
through our work of education and evangelization,
in human advancement according to your plan.*

*Through the example of the Don Bosco
you have taught us to seek the overall good
of the young entrusted to our care.
Keep us faithful to his teachings
in forming them as good christians
and upright citizens.*

ART. 32 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

As educators we work together with our young people to bring all their talents and aptitudes to full maturity.

According to circumstances we share our food with them and further their trade skills and cultural advancement.

Always and in every case we help them to be open to truth and to develop in themselves a responsible freedom. To this end we commit ourselves to inculcating in them a convinced appreciation of true values which will lead them to a life of dialogue and service.

Educators

The first thing to note in this article is the opening expression: "*As educators*". Education, educators, educative, educational: these are terms which constantly occur and they indicate a real service option that we make, and one that is characteristic of the Congregation. They define an area of work, that of individual personal development; but also, and more especially, they indicate a style of guiding presence, a method which shapes the whole of our pastoral activity, including the proclamation of the Gospel.

"Don Bosco stands before the world and the Church as an "*Educator-Saint*", a man who achieved holiness through educating".¹ His pastoral concern "was characterized by the choice of education as his special field of action and mode of apostolic activity".²

It must be said of today's salesian too that he is not only an apostle and shepherd of young people, but an educator as well — an educator who is at the same time an apostle, prophet and witness to the Gospel. His distinguishing characteristic is that he offers his educating message in learning conditions known by experience to be suited to the recipients, he accompanies the individual in his laborious process of assimilating the values of what he is taught, and helps him to grow by enabling him to take advantage of all his potentialities.

The Rector Major writes: "Don Bosco's pastoral activity was never limited to mere catechesis or liturgy; it ranged over all the educational and cultural areas according to the needs of the youth situation. The setting he chose for his apostolate was the field of human development... convinced that this was the soil for the gospel seed that would help the young take their proper place in the world".³ None of the interior qualities which contribute to the make-up of an individual is a matter of indifference to the educator. If education is to be a help to the development of personal

¹ E. VIGANO The salesian educational project, ASC 290 (1978), p. 30

² *ibid.* p. 29

³ *ibid.* p. 30

resources so that they may all flourish and the individual may reach maturity, the educator must not select in the subject only those features which interest him personally, either to develop them or leave them aside. Education does not consist in getting the individual used to certain circumstances, nor is it only a matter of socialization or inculturation. The central point of interest in the educational process is the individual person.

The article adopts a personalized definition of education: *We work together with our young people to bring all their talents and aptitudes to full maturity*". It is a definition inspired by the declaration "Gravissimum educationis" which says: "True education is directed towards the formation of the human person... Children and young people should be helped to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities. They should be trained to acquire gradually a more perfect sense of responsibility in the proper development of their own lives by constant effort and in the pursuit of liberty".⁴ It is clear that a concept of like this, which has as its principal subject the young person himself, with the educator as a help and his personal resources as the driving force, is far from the idea of education as recruitment for some ideology, and even from the intention by the educator to mould the person according to his own personal view of life.

An educational process

For this development of the individual to maturity the Salesians follow a certain process. The first step is to help the youngsters to shake off negative conditioning elements like compelling needs for food, lodging and family. One speaks delicately of the "wretched state" of others and defines help as a "*sharing*" of bread rather than just giving it. The expression brings us back to those we work for by preference, the young who are poor, and to the threefold aspect of Don Bosco's work: relief, educational and pastoral activity all joined together in the supremely charitable intention and desire of the individual's salvation.⁵

To this first step is added a second constructive stage of *training in some kind of work*, by which the youngsters must be able to enter society, earn an honest living, and develop their own capabilities.

But the aim of education is not only to provide the young person with a means of livelihood or to prepare working man-power for society's needs. There is a third and important step to be taken, that of *cultural formation*, which enables the individual to develop all his own possibilities, to make contact with various communities and the whole of humanity, and to freely assess the significance, merits and manner of realization which constitute their true wealth and real riches. Culture means *savoir faire*, relationships with others, convictions, implicit and explicit norms of conduct, personal awareness, a sense of belonging, a commitment under various forms to the

⁴ GE 1

⁵ In the text of the Constitutions Don Bosco expressed the triple aspect of activity carried out for the benefit of needy youth as follows: "They will be given clothing, food and lodging: and while they are being instructed in the truths of the Catholic faith, they also be teaming some art or trade" (cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, I, 4; F. MOTTO p.75)

dignity of man. Rightly does the document of the Latin-American Bishops at Puebla declare: "The word 'culture' indicates the particular way in which in a given people the members conceive and develop their relationships with nature, with each other, and with God".⁶ "Culture embraces everything in the life of a people"⁷

The educational process which begins in the liberation from conditioning elements, is extended in the preparation for some profession, is deepened in the acquisition of a cultural outlook, and leads eventually to an "openness to truth and the building of a responsible freedom". These are not strictly successive steps, though they have a certain hierarchical order between them. In "cultural formation", in fact, we have the vertex of the development of the individual.

It is clear that education does not consist in simply acquiring ideas, assimilating norms, or conforming to accepted forms of behaviour: it is directed at the main nucleus of the person. The words have been carefully chosen. Truth is something to which one can only "open" oneself; it is not something ready-made and handed out, but is offered to a youngster who can attentively seek it and accept it. Freedom is something that has to be built: it is a conquest, which becomes consolidated little by little, despite numerous setbacks, by control of one's life and actions and through a generous response to the calls of truth and love. Full maturity is reached when the subject adopts and sets in harmonious order a frame of values which enlarge his life. The GC21 expressed this ensemble of values as follows: "In terms of personal growth we want to help the boy to build a sound and balanced humanity, by fostering and promoting:

— a gradual maturing in freedom, in the assuming of his own personal and social responsibilities, in the clear perception of values;

— a carefree and positive relationship with persons and things that will nurture and stimulate his creativity and reduce conflict and tension;

— the capacity to maintain a dynamic and critical attitude in the face of events, to be faithful to the values of tradition and be open to the needs of history, so as to become capable of making consistent personal decisions;

— a prudently given education in sex and in love that will help him to understand the dynamics of growth, of giving and of encounter, within a plan of life;

— the quest and planning of his future in order to liberate and direct towards a precise vocational choice the immense potential hidden in the destiny of every boy, even in one less endowed as a human being".⁸

This lengthy quotation will serve to show how much analytical reflection lies beneath the selection of the few words of the constitutional text.

⁶ Puebla, final document; n. 386

⁷ *ibid.* n. 387

⁸ GC21, 90

The manner of putting all this process into practice belongs to the educational theme, as also do others that will be described in later articles. Education is not characterized by the enunciation of values that a young person or adult must assimilate (this is a fundamental contribution of faith and also of philosophy and theology which underlie it), but by their translation into structures of learning, proportioned to the learning ability of the subjects concerned. The art of education implies also a pedagogy.

The article emphasizes some aspects of great importance.

— *The young person is himself the chief agent* in his own development and in the processes which concern him. The educator "collaborates" or "helps". This attitude is dictated not only by educational expediency, but is rooted in faith in the face of a mystery which every individual carries within him, and in the conviction that between the individual and God there takes place a mysterious dialogue of salvation which cannot be interfered with from outside, a dialogue which covers not only "religious" themes but all life's decisions.

— Hence *the action of the educator*: it develops through motivations, the responsible growth of freedom, the attractive presentation of values and principles. This last expression recalls Don Bosco's maxim: "Let the beauty, grandeur and holiness of the Catholic religion be dwelt on".⁹ No conviction or principle takes root in a man unless it is seen in the perspective of a response to profound needs. To inculcate a taste for these things means raising questions, helping to formulate them, accompanying the search for a response, and starting valid experiences.

— But for education it is not enough to just say or repeat things. There is a current utopian idea in circulation that seems convinced that a good proposition repeated often enough with captivating phrases will automatically produce stable attitudes leading to deep-rooted convictions. But education knows very well that values and principles which are expounded or presented have got to be translated into learning processes. And so to the interior mobilization caused by the presentation must be added the patient work of building "convictions", and directing towards practical action. Education therefore is not only a case of accompaniment or following up, but is also the putting forward, on the basis of the adult experience of the educator, of the authoritative framework of values which he himself lives and which gives quality to the guidance he offers.

What sort of configuration must we give to this educative ministry? Are we merely concerned onlookers, or do we share with the youngsters a growth experience? Just professional educators or signs of the proximity of God? The educator is a communicator: he shares his own experience of humanity, which develops in the search for and adherence to values which he proposes to others: he is like a father who communicates life-giving energy.

⁹D. BOSCO, short treatise on preventive system, chap. II, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 249-250

*Let us ask God's help
That we may be able to correspond fully
with our mission as educators.*

*That in the awareness of our educational task
we may be able to offer to young people
with competence and generosity
the bread of body and spirit,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to help young people
to open themselves to all truth and build
within themselves true freedom, Lord,
hear our prayer.*

*That by cultivating in ourselves a deep taste
for authentic human and christian values,
we may be able to pass them on to others,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That with our help
young people may come to understand
that freedom is realized
in the love and service of others,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 33 SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

Don Bosco saw clearly the social implications of his work.

We labour in economically distressed areas and for poor youth. We collaborate with them, educating them to a sense of moral, professional and social responsibility. In this way we contribute to the development of both people and environment.

We share in a way appropriate to religious in the witness and commitment of the Church to justice and peace. While not getting involved in ideologies or party politics, we reject everything that encourages deprivation, injustice and violence. We cooperate with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity.

The advancement to which we dedicate ourselves in the spirit of the Gospel makes tangible the love of Christ which makes men free, and is a sign that the Kingdom of God is among us.

An immediate consideration of the social significance of our service is inevitable. This is not only because every pastoral intervention, even of a purely religious nature, has reference to the human community in which it takes place, necessarily taking on a social aspect, but also for quite special reasons related to our charism. In fact one cannot speak of a "sign and presence in the area of poverty" without considering its social and collective implications. We cannot work effectively for the young who are poor and for people of the working classes without coming to realize that their individual development is inevitably linked to their collective development. What has changed with regard to certain situations of the last century is the fact that at the present day we are faced not only with poor people, but with a poverty which has become a structural phenomenon of worldwide proportions.

Furthermore our place in the field of education means that we cannot fail to take into account the function of education as regards the social system and its preservation or transformation.

The article gives us four points to think about.

- The reference to Don Bosco (first paragraph).
- The principal aspects of our participation in the transformation of society (second and third paragraphs).
- The fundamental sources from which our interventions take their inspiration (second and third paragraphs).
- The sense of the interventions in the unity of the mission.

Don Bosco

The reference to Don Bosco is both rich and opportune. About his social sense a great deal has been written.¹ One the ability to place his own intervention in the wider vision of the transformation of society we read: "The society Don Bosco had in mind and of which his boys would be active citizens was to be an ideal christian society, built on the new ideals of relative equality, of peace and justice, ensured by sound morality and religion. Just as the individual should be a good christian and upright citizen, so the society constructed by his efforts should be an environment of peace and well-being, and at the same time a stimulus to faith and salvation".²

An indication of Don Bosco's determination to intervene in the "public" area were the numerous visits he made to government ministers in support of the education of youth, and his appraisal of the prevailing social phenomena in conformity with the mentality of the time. He wanted all his work to be a process of social reformation through the education of the young, whom he considered to be the real "secret" and key for the improvement of the whole of society.

On the other hand he always let it be known that he kept out of politics, in the sense that being fully occupied in working for the good of poor people, he took sides neither with those in power nor against them. The "politics of the Our Father", which he advocated, meant giving people through the Word of God, education and places where they could come together, as well as reasons, means and motives for living and for pursuing their aspirations by peaceful means.

Aspects of our social commitment

The second and third paragraphs of the article highlight two aspects of the part we play in the transformation of society.

The first is linked with our task as educators: in an unequal society we have care of environments in need of development, overcoming the concept of education as a personal advantage and favouring movements of change: "*we educate to a sense of moral, professional and social responsibility*".

This statement contains an implicit reference to Don Bosco, who was always so concerned to make "upright citizens" of his boys. But the expression in the article does not immediately reveal all its content; it could be interpreted in an individualistic sense, particularly as regards its reference to moral and professional aspects. One has to ask what meaning attaches at the present day to "upright citizens", in societies where they are often subjected to injustice, or in others beset by moral problems, or still others where human rights are publicly set at nought with impunity. It means taking sides in a peaceful and courageous struggle for justice, for the creation of a real

1 Cf. G. SPALLA, *Don Bosco e il suo ambiente socio-politico*, LDC Turin 1975; F. DESRAMAUT, *Lazione sociale dei cattolici nel sec. XIX e quella di Don Bosco in "L'impegno della Famiglia salesiana per la giustizia"*. Colloqui di vita salesiana, LDC Turin 1976, p. 21-87; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, LAS Rome 1980

2 "*Progetto educativo pastorale*", ed. J. VECCHI and J.M. PRELLEZO, LAS Rome 1974, p. 81; cf. also *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, ed. P. BRAIDO, LAS Rome 1981, p. 344-350; P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della societa cristiana*, LAS Rome 1982, p. 10. 21. 22-24

spirit of brotherhood, to draw attention to those in greatest need, and to raise the level of public morality. The need becomes evident to look into the general perspective of the education we provide (which is never individualistic), and to revise the particular section of social formation, so much recommended by the Church's magisterium.

The second aspect is connected with our status as religious: we are called to *bear radical witness to justice and peace*. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "Our educative work for justice in the world becomes credible to the extent that the individual salesian and the community at all levels are authentic witnesses to justice".³ We must emphasize the particular perspective of this task of ours: our witness is a sharing in the mission of the Church herself in favour of justice and peace. In this connection we may recall the extent to which Papal Encyclicals and documents of the Magisterium have repeatedly urged Christians to play an active and convinced part in the social sector.⁴

Certainly on our part we must avoid all equivocation and accept the hard demands of this task: we must offer the world concrete proofs. We shall find some indications in this regard in the articles concerning our works, their collocation, and the services they provide.

To our pastoral educational task and the witness we have to give is added the action expressed in two verbs: we "reject" everything that encourages deprivation, and we "cooperate" with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity. The second is more direct. In art. 7 it was said that by our pastoral activity we want to "bring about a more just world and one of greater brotherhood in Christ". With this the SGC links the first aspect — education: "One educates more through what one is than through what one says. Our mission for young people, and above all for the poorest of them, requires from our communities a type of presence and global attitude towards the poor themselves and towards the movement (more or less organized) with which they attempt to achieve their rights to a more human life."⁵

Principles underlying these interventions

Whence arises our social commitment and how is it regulated?

In the first place, as has been said already, it arises from *our status as religious and apostles*.⁶ By working for justice in the world we do not distance ourselves from our religious mission. From the latter come the spirit and intentions which go into our efforts, and also the practical attitudes studied by the SGC. It is required therefore

³ SGC, 70

⁴ V. in detail the doctrine of the Church on social questions in the teaching of recent Popes: JOHN XXIII, Encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* (15.05.1961) and *Pacem in terris* (AAS 55, 1963, 257-304) PAUL VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (AAS 59, 1967, 257-299) and Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens* (AAS 63, 1971, 401-404); JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens* (MS 73, 1981, 577-647). Cf. also the Synod of Bishops (1977) on commitment for justice and peace, and the two Instructions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Instructions on certain aspects of the "Theology of liberation"* (AAS 76, 1984, 876-877) and *Instruction on Christian freedom and liberation* (1986)

⁵ SGC, 70

⁶ On the social obligations of religious, cf. in particular *Religious profession and human development*, CRIS 1980

that our words and interventions shall have as their living source and soul the love of Christ the Saviour, and as their *motivation* the demands of the Gospel and the will to come to the aid of Christ himself in those who suffer injustice; as their *purpose* there must be our cooperation in affirming the Kingdom by animating the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel, and as their *style* that of Don Bosco, an easy approachability through kindly dialogue based on love.⁷ Our text speaks of the "spirit of the Gospel": this is an indication which must make us very demanding in our love for justice and for the poor, and at the same time rules out any attitude not inspired by Christ's teaching. We need to keep in mind the strong words of St Paul: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 13,3).

Secondly, our commitment is based on ecclesial communion. In this field, as indeed in others, we cannot act only in accordance with our own ideas nor only when the spirit of generosity spontaneously moves us; we are inserted in the local Church, and we take part in its activity in a timely and consistent manner. From this derive certain practical indications which we can do no more than enumerate: move with the local Church without lagging behind or sniping at it; compare our own criteria for intervention with those put forward by the Church; agree on our interventions with those who guide the Church, especially in extraordinary circumstances or in a society where there is a high level of conflict. This is important because social and political situations vary considerably with time and place; it is up to the local Church, and especially its Pastors, to decide on the most opportune mode of action.⁸

From these principles a third criterion derives: *our independence from party politics and current ideologies*. The Church's experience has enabled her to distinguish between the possibilities open to a layman, a religious or a pastor as regards interventions in the political sector.

This experience has in fact been expressed in canon law: Clerics and religious "are not to play an active role in political parties or in directing trade unions...".⁹ A clear distinction between what is pre-political, political in a wide sense, and political in its specific sense can be of great use in defining the particular field of intervention of each one.

The indication of art. 33 goes beyond the minimum laid down by the Code, and calls on us Salesians to be aware that the values of the Kingdom contain and express in universal and efficacious form the energy and strength required for the building of a society much more than does any political structure, and therefore to be faithful to our profession as witnesses to the love and power of Christ.

⁷ Cf. SGC, 77

⁸ On the importance of ecclesial communion in the commitment for justice and peace, cf. the Instruction on *Christian Freedom and Liberation*: "The Church's social teaching is born of the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society... As an 'expert in humanity', the Church offers by her social doctrine a set of principles for reflection and criteria for judgement and also directives for action so that the profound changes demanded by situations of poverty and injustice may be brought about, and this in a way which serves the true good of humanity" (n. 72)

⁹ CIC, can 287 §2

criterion, an expression of the particular character of our charism. Don Bosco would have liked to formulate this in an article which he tried three times to insert in the Constitutions, as he tells us himself: "Convinced as I was of the importance (of this argument), I once more inserted it in 1874 when the Constitutions had to be approved article by article by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. They struck it out a third time".¹⁰ But times have changed; the present day consultants of the Apostolic See gave particular praise to art. 33 of our text!

The salesian overall criterion comprises the three aspects already indicated ("religious" mission, ecclesial "communion", political and ideological independence), and brings them harmoniously together in an *approach so deeply pastoral in tone* as to avoid everything that could distance us from young people and their integral education, and at the same time lead to constructive dialogue with all those responsible for the common good, without regard to their religious faith.

The Rector Major, Fr Luigi Ricceri, in the letter he wrote on "The Salesian and political responsibility", recalls that "our activity must always start out from the perspective of the salesian vocation... We cannot lose our identity, we cannot take on a type of activity that, even though it be Christian, is characteristic of other vocations... There may even be among the confreres a distinct mentality, a different way of looking at events; but the criterion that guides our pastoral decisions and our particular attitudes, community ones above all, will be the pastoral perspectives of Don Bosco's apostolic plan: 'to be in a salesian way the signs and bearers of God's love for young people, especially the poorest of them' ".¹¹

The sense of our interventions

The last paragraph of the article takes up once again the theme of the unity of our mission and shows how all this task, which might seem profane in nature, is in fact closely linked with the work of education of the faith. Unity is ensured by the conscience of the salesian, guided and enlighten by fundamental reference to the liberating love of Christ, effected through a variety of activities. In whatever the salesian does therefore, even through human elements, he intends to be a "sign and bearer of the love of God for the young". There are two further elucidations which are interesting: the first declares in discreet fashion that for those in situations of unjust dependence or want, the work of "development" necessarily takes on the form of liberation willed by Christ the Saviour; the second says that such work, from a human point of view, is "tangible", i.e. is a sign through which the Kingdom can be shown and expressed. The service of development is a "preparation for the faith" for those who do not yet have it, and a stimulus and support of the faith for those who already possess it: both are able to recognize in the dedication of which they are the beneficiaries, a sign of Christ's truth, made known to them through good works.

¹⁰ BM XIII, 195

¹¹ L. RICCERI, *Salesians and political responsibility*, ASC 284 (1976), p. 53

*Let us pray to the Lord
that he may broaden our intelligence and
remove all limits from our love and charity.*

*That we may work with complete dedication
for the good of those entrusted to our care,
inculcate in them a sense of the common good,
and form them for their personal and social responsibilities,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That in our mission as religious
we may commit ourselves with constant fidelity
to collaborate with the Church
in working for justice and peace,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That at the basis of every plan and effort
we may always place our faith in Christ's resurrection,
the source of life and energy
for its full development,
and may not give way to the lure
of ideologies or party divisions,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That in the spirit of Gospel,
and in the strength of the liberating love of Christ,
we may reject all injustice and violence
and be able to collaborate
with all who work, for justice and peace,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 34 EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS

"This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson".¹ For us too evangelization and catechizing are the fundamental characteristics of our mission.

Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.²

We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his Gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new men.

The Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. We make her known and loved as the one who believed,³ who helps and who infuses hope.

¹ MB IX, 61; BM IX, 35

² cf. Eph 3, 8-19

³ cf. Lk 1,45

The fundamental dimension of the salesian mission

In the salesian educational project there is a central aspect which sheds light on and gives colour to the whole plan; existentially we have it much at heart: it is the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the introduction to his mystery. As the various aspects presented in this chapter follow one another, we find that there is a hierarchy among them, and the dimension we call "fundamental" is that of evangelization and catechesis.

Evangelization is understood as the announcement or proclamation of Jesus and comprises every method from a simple silent witness which gives rise to questions, to insertion in the Christian community and active involvement in its mission.¹ In it, as the word itself indicates, is included the intention to arouse faith and the way in which Christ is made known as offering salvation.

Catechesis on the other hand means an organic presentation of the christian mystery to those who have given a positive response to the proclamation and have reached the stage of making a first choice of faith. Catechesis provides a complete and systematic introduction to the christian community. It represents an aspect or particular phase of the overall process of evangelization.²

The fact that the term "evangelization" has come to be used at the present day not only for the first proclamation but for the whole process of the vital acceptance of the message of Christ and the conversion of mind and heart, reveals a certain spirit: that of the apostle, aware that he is proclaiming something new It also indicates a method and style for all the other phases: the proclamation of Christ is to be made and renewed in christian initiation and at every moment in life.

¹ Cf. EN 41-47

² Cf. CT 18

The expressions used in this article to stress the evangelizing and catechetical dimension indicate our role both of "missionaries" to those who have never known Christ, those to whom he has not been sufficiently presented or who have forgotten him, and of "catechists" among those who are growing in the faith.

By calling this dimension "fundamental" the text is not emphasizing only the quantitative aspect of the commitment, but rather the inspiration underlying the whole process of education: a process positively directed to Christ, in whose Gospel it finds its motivation and inspiration.³ The same human formation described in the previous article is inspired by motives stemming from faith, on account of which the sense of duty is "religious" and social relationships have their roots in the charity that comes from God; morality is based on the natural order which is a manifestation of the divine law, but to a much greater extent on the teachings of faith. The educational synthesis of Don Bosco is characterized by religious and Christian animation. In the whole ensemble therefore, there is something which comes "first" in importance, a fundamental dimension: the religious heart of the youngster that awaits the good news of Jesus, which the educator should not delay in providing.

This is confirmed in the article by a phrase of Don Bosco culled from a brief history of the Society sent by our Founder to the Bishop of Casale, from whom he was seeking commendatory letters in favour of his Congregation. In connection with the purpose which had led to the foundation Don Bosco wrote: "*This Society's origins* are found in the simple catechetical instructions conducted by Fr John Bosco in a hall adjacent to the Church of St Francis of Assisi".⁴ The statement is amply borne out in the Constitutions themselves and in other writings and declarations of our Father.⁵

Educators to the faith

What does it imply for us that we make evangelization and catechesis the fundamental dimension of our mission? The expression which defines us, "*educators to the faith*", gives the right slant to what is said in the first paragraph.

Negatively it means that we are not only "preachers", nor are we only "catechists" in the strict sense. Positively it emphasizes the ability to open up youngsters to the faith by various ways and means. Education means using objective means to make the subject's latent possibilities flourish, to open him to a world of values and salvation events from which he can make his own choice because motives and the desire of the faith have been made active in him.

³ E. VIGANO, *The salesian educational project*, ASC 290 (1978), p. 35

⁴ BM IX, 35

⁵ In art. 3 of the Constitutions of 1875 we read: "The first exercise of charity shall be to gather together poor and neglected boys, in order to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, and this more especially on Festivals" (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 75). The following expression of Don Bosco's biographer is significant: "*With Don Bosco the study of religion always ranked first*" (BM III, 146; cf. BM XIV, 362). Don Bosco's concern about catechism is also clearly evident from the books he wrote for the catechesis of the young and the masses; they number more than thirty (cf. G.C. ISOARDI), *L'azione catechetica di san Giovanni Bosco nella pastonik giovanile*, LDC Turin 1974; P. BRAIDO, *L'inedito "Breve catechismo pei finciulli ad use della Diocesi di Torino" di Don Bosco*, LAS Rome 1979; N. CERRATO, *La catechesi di Don Bosco nella sua Storia Sacra*, LAS Rome 1979)

it is also said that this is a task in which we are all involved without exception, whatever kind of activity we may be assigned to.

"We are all called ... at every opportunity" is a very expressive phrase. There is no difference of purpose between the task of those who are directly teaching catechism, and those who teach other subjects of a non-religious nature, or who are engaged in other work. Our life is not divided up between profane occupations without directly Christian links, and pastoral work. By means of every relationship, every activity, be it cultural, recreational or specifically religious, we try to centre life on faith.

Education to faith implies a vital communication process. We look first, therefore, not to content or methodology but to the Person of Jesus Christ, the Communicator par excellence; the text expresses this in a manner which clearly recalls St Paul's words: *"our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal the unfathomable riches of his mystery"* (cf. Eph 3,8-19)

What precisely is this knowledge of Christ? It means the features of a deep personal daily relationship with Christ; frequent attention to his word and mystery; seeing problems of personal and social life through his eyes; the careful study of all that is needed to be able to communicate him to "little ones". It is a combination of personal experience with pastoral concern! Knowledge and science! Evangelization and catechesis means revealing his "unsearchable riches"; educating to the faith means introducing others to the mystery of Christ, man's salvation. Rather than a simple task to be performed, it is a joy; rather than an obligation imposed by the Constitutions, it is an attraction we cannot resist.

The text reflects a wonderful page from the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi": "Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us - as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other Apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history — an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be *the great joy of our consecrated lives*. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world".⁶

Walking side by side with the young towards the Lord, accompanied by Mary

After looking at the person of the educator to the faith, the article goes on to describe his ministry in educative terms.

⁶EN-80

Walking side by side with the young does not mean inculcating a belief. It implies at least two things. In the first place it requires that the educator himself

must advance in his faith, urged on by the challenges and stimulus he receives from the youth situation in the face of the Good News: by communicating the faith, he develops his own.

On the other hand the phrase means accepting the youngsters' point of departure, their rate of progress, and being open to the fact that not everyone's path will be the same. It is not at all the same thing as following a previously defined programme. St Paul likens the communication of faith to the process of generation.⁷ Anyone who does not accept this can go on repeating formulas, but it is doubtful whether he will kindle faith in the midst of life's dynamism.

The objective of evangelization is the *personal encounter with the Lord*. At the centre of faith there is the relationship with the Person of Jesus. Through this encounter the youngster should discover the unifying sense of his existence, establish a constant coalescence between faith and life, and build a new personality modelled on Christ.

There are three expressions that call for meditation: "to lead them to the risen Lord", "to discover the meaning of their own existence", to grow as new men". The declaration "Gravissimum educationis" expresses the purpose of Catholic education in a similar way: "It enables young people, while developing their own personality, to grow at the same time in that new life which has been given them in baptism".⁸

In our presentation of the faith, at the side of Jesus and forming part of his mystery there is always *his Mother*. The youthful holiness which flourished in the first Oratory has provided us with a formula which illustrates the union of these two figures: "My friends will be Jesus and Mary".⁹ From the many aspects of Mary that could have been referred to, the article chooses three which have a particular relationship with the young: *motherly presence, model of faith, source of hope*.

The motherhood of Mary is recalled in the general sense of the Constitution "Lumen gentium": "By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth; ... in the birth and development of the brethren of her Son she cooperates with a Mother's love".¹⁰ For young people this reference to Mary as Mother has a unique touch about it. In the first place it suggests that she is alongside them in their far from easy growth in grace; secondly it gives the sense of a feeling presence in a phase of life prone to loneliness, discouragement and trials; and finally it offers a model of life open to God on which they can model their own existence.

In this way Mary is seen to be the Helper of the young in their pilgrimage towards the Lord: She *"who believed, who helps and who infuses hope"*.

⁷Cf. Gal 4,19

⁸GE 8

⁹D. BOSCO, *Life of Dominic Savio* (cf. OE XI, p. 170)

¹⁰LG 62-63

*God the Father sent his Son
to evangelize the poor
Let us ask him to keep us faithful
in continuing Christ's work.*

*That we may always consider
evangelization and catechesis as
the central aspect of our mission,
Lord hear our prayer.*

*That our members, always and in every circumstance,
may be able
to open the minds of young people to the faith
and lead them to the person of the Risen Lord,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our highest knowledge may be
to know Jesus Christ, and our
deepest joy to communicate to all the
unsearchable riches of his mystery
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to help the young
to discover in Christ and in the Gospel
the true sense of their existence and to
grow as new men,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may point out to our young people
the Mother of God
as the first believer and support of the Church,
the model of faith and service,
and that we may be able to lead them
to know and love her,
Lord, hear our prayer*

ART. 35 INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIAL LIFE

We introduce the young to the experience of ecclesial life by bringing them into a faith community and helping them to take part in it.

To this end we promote and animate groups and movements for formation and apostolic and social action. In these the young people grow in the awareness of their own responsibilities and learn to give their irreplaceable contribution to the transformation of the world and to the life of the Church, and so become themselves the 'first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them'.¹

AA 12

Introduction to ecclesial experience: groups and movements

The life of the Church is a life of deep communion in faith, hope and charity. It is also the life of a visible community, in love and brotherly communication, in celebrations and in activity, under the direction of those who have been called to preside over it. It is primarily a spiritual (communion with God in Christ), personal and community fact: a sharing in the building of the Kingdom. But it is also an *experience* which one gets and learns from by personally living it while knowledge and awareness of it is developed through communication and deeper analysis.

This is why the text of the Rule emphasizes that among the objectives the Salesians have in mind is that of *introducing the young to an experience of Church*. This means that they must be gradually introduced into the christian community so that eventually they become involved in it and share its life in what belongs to it more specifically, i.e. witnessing to the gospel spirit of love. It has already been said (cf. C 6, 13, 31) and will be explained later at greater length (cf. C 44, 48), that our mission, and therefore the educational and pastoral plan which sustains it, is an ecclesial mission and tends to the building of an authentic christian community.

The proposal offered by the Salesians to the young as an educational process for gaining a personal experience of Church consists in groups and movements. These are one of the characterizing elements of salesian education and evangelization, and are indispensable to the salesian plan.¹ Their history goes all the way back to Don Bosco and his Oratory. In a circular on "Youth Groups, Movements and Communities" the Rector Major wrote: "The tendency to live and work in groups and the desire for community life was almost a spontaneous experience in the life of our Founder Don Bosco. He had a natural inclination to be sociable and to make friends... He was industrious and creative in his dealings with the boys from the hamlet of the Becchi and the nearby villages; the *Society dell'Allegria* which he organized at the school in Chieri, the experience of community life and friendship at the seminary, indicate already in embryo his high opinion and concern for group activity which would later

¹E. VIGANO, *Youth groups, movements and communities*, ASC 294 (1979), p. 10-11

find concrete expression in the salesian sodalities".² Don Bosco the educator clearly expressed his ideas in a circular letter to the confreres on 12 January 1876: "In each house let everyone take a great interest in fostering youth associations... Do not be afraid to talk about them, to encourage them, and to explain their purpose... *It is my firm belief that these groups can be called the key to prayer life, the safeguard of morality, and the support of religious and priestly vocations*".³

Don Bosco's intuitive idea has been followed up in the Congregation's practice, which has kept pace with the evolution of the same theme in the Church and which has been referred to in every one of the recent General Chapters.⁴

At the level of ecclesial communion it is not difficult to understand the significance of these groups, given that the universal Church is made concrete and rendered visible in the particular Churches, and that these in turn are visible in smaller communities. In this way the communion of life and love which has its source in Christ flows in a double sense under the guidance of the Spirit: from the universal Church to the particular Churches, and from these to the smaller communities; and in the other direction from the minor communities to the particular Churches and from these to the universal Church. Communion too at the present day is not expressed only in local structures, but overcomes territorial boundaries and becomes concrete in associations united by christian ideals which are shared and celebrated together.

For young people entry into the larger ecclesial communities would give rise to the risk of losing one's individual personality, of ritualism, of a clash between external aspects and constitutive elements. The experience of group life provides an important intermediate stage between the individual (with his risk of loneliness and self-interest) and the large mass (with its risk of anonymity), and little by little helps to develop the sense of belonging.

For this reason recent General Chapters have opted for groups, "so that communities may become truly apostolic and each individual can be integrated into the christian community".⁵ A glance through Chapter documents and the subsequent indications of Superiors reveals some significant observations on the role of the group in educational environments.

- For a youngster the group is the best environment for efficacious self-development: the place where he can grow at a personal, affective and relational level and find solutions to his problems.
- The group provides the most immediate space for responding to questions on the sense and meaning of life, which among youth are the things most sought after.
- The group offers room for creativity, and makes possible an opening to the neighbourhood and society and the first opportunity for a commitment to service, sharing and participation.

² Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 7

³ *Collected letters*, III, p. 7-8

⁴ For a deeper analysis of this theme cf. *"The salesian plan for group activity"*, Department for Youth Pastoral Work, Rome 1985

⁵ SGC, 321

- The group is fundamentally the best environment for providing the young person with an experience of Church and community where the gospel values of "come and see" (cf. Jn 1,39) can be tried out.
- On this account the group becomes the best place for seeking and developing vocations (cf. C 37).

Part of our general plan therefore is the intention to animate and foster youth groups and movements, and offer this experience to the greatest possible number of youngsters. The Rector Major spoke of this in the circular already quoted:⁶ the reactivation of the preventive system today is linked in practice with the fostering of group initiatives among the young. Today this can be one of the best expressions of our "new presence" in harmony with the "Oratory" concept, which is at the very foundation of our charisma (cf. C 40).

It is encouraging to recall what Pope John Paul II said on 5 May 1979 to a big crowd of young people who had come to Rome to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the canonization of St Dominic Savio, founder of the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception: "You are expecting from the Pope a word of guidance and encouragement... My suggestion for you and for all those in charge of your human and christian education concerns the urgent need felt nearly everywhere of the revival of sound models of Catholic youth associations.

"It is not a question of creating militant expressions deprived of the impetus of ideals and based on the force of numbers, but of animating real communities, instilled with the spirit of kindness, mutual respect and service, and above all made compact by the same faith and the one unique hope.

"In belonging to a group, in the spontaneity of a homogeneous circle of friends, in constructive comparison of ideas and initiatives, in mutual support, the vitality of that social renewal to which you all aspire can be established and preserved...

"This is *a pressing invitation that I address to all those responsible for the christian education of youth*".⁷

What kind of youth groups and movements?

In the constitutional text there are two implications which must not be overlooked: the educational character of our groups, and in consequence the multiplicity of expressions to which they give rise, with objectives ranging from those of a general educational nature to those specifically ecclesial.

Because of their educational character and the fact that they are composed for the most part of youngsters in the maturing period of their lives, the groups which we

⁶Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 4-5

⁷Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 10 ff.

animate take advantage of their wide-ranging interests. Starting from an interest in a particular sector, they try to reach the overall objective which is characteristic of our plan, aiming especially at personal formation. The SGC gave the following indication: "Our service should be offered to the young in the context of their natural groupings in life and work. We should seek to develop all their potentialities from the inside, starting from their own interests".⁸

In every case salesian groups are logically organized from an educational point of view: they give first place to the person of the youngster; everything else (organization, structures, instruments and programmes, causes or aims of interest to the educator for a personal choice of life) are proportioned and directed to his personal growth. Groups make the youngster responsible for his own development, flanking him in his efforts and his search. Our own activity is fully expressed in the phrase "*we animate*", which means that we follow closely the progress of the youngsters, making suggestions, providing motivations, helping them to grow and picking up from them incentives for a common process.

From the whole context it is clear that the central hub of all the experience is the group, in which it is possible to live its life, pick up questions, and suggest programmes and plans adapted to the situation of the members. But the article of the Constitutions speaks also of "*movements*". These represent a mobilization of members on a bigger scale, the union of several groups with common interests as regards values or persons, certain assemblages or combinations for mutual support and unity. It is certainly easier to gain an experience of Church in the warmer atmosphere of a smaller group, but the result would be too restricted and inward looking were it not capable of comparison with something on a much wider scale. In our environments in recent years we have come to see more clearly the need for a "*salesian youth movement*", which can bring together the many groups inspired by the same "youth spirituality".⁹

Finally, as a continuation of the preceding topic, the text of the Constitutions hints at the *multiplicity of groups* present in the salesian environments with gradually increasing objectives. Among them can be distinguished three main categories: formation groups, groups for social activity, and groups for apostolic action.

For us every group is important in which interests can be developed, and entry to social life learned. Greater commitment is shown in those in which the members grow in the awareness of their personal responsibilities and learn to give their irreplaceable contribution to the transformation of the world. At the vertex are the apostolic movements where the members become "the first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them": in these we are once again directly linked with the living insertion of each youngster into the christian community and the development of his own individual vocation.

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⁹ Cf. "*The salesian plan for group activity*", p. 32, 33, 42 ff.

*Let us ask of God our Father
to grant us in the Holy Spirit
a profound esteem for Christ's Church,
the column and foundation of truth,
and to pour out in us the same
love that Christ himself had for his Church,
sacrificing himself for her.*

*That we may be able to lead young people to
a knowledge and love of holy Church, and to
offer them the exhilarating experience of
participating in her life,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That following the example of Don Bosco, we
may be able to lead our young people through
groups, associations and movements, to give to
the Church their irreplaceable contribution for
the transformation of the world and history,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That freely accepting Christ's invitation
our young people may become
the first and direct apostles
among other youngsters,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 36 INTRODUCTION TO LITURGICAL LIFE

We introduce the young to a conscious and active participation in the Church's liturgy, the summit and source of all christian life.¹

With them we celebrate the encounter with Christ in word, prayer and sacraments.

The Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, celebrated with care, are means of exceptional value for education to christian liberty, to conversion of heart and to a spirit of sharing and service in the ecclesial community.

¹ cf. SC 10

Another aspect of education to the faith is the introduction of the young to liturgical life. Ordinary doctrinal and pastoral logic would have led us to expect the usual order of the three ecclesial tasks: to teach, to sanctify, to govern; catechesis, celebration, common life. The reasons for the change are not explicitly stated in the text, but it is not difficult to discern them in a particular sensitivity to the process of maturing in faith which is much emphasized at the present day. Liturgical action is considered the vertex of the Church's activity and demands that access to the sacraments, as a sign of faith, be prepared by a process of conversion and understanding to avoid the danger of formalism: "Before reaching the sacraments it is essential to have first undergone conversion and accepted the faith", said the SGC.¹

The article displays a gradual development which passes from liturgical life in general to its heart, which is the Eucharist.

Introduction to liturgical life

Liturgical life is considered here in all its amplitude: listening to the Word, celebrations, prayer and sacraments. Its importance in an authentic Christian experience is explained at length in the Constitution "Sacrosanctum Concilium". The liturgy makes active the mystery of Christ, priest and mediator; "it involves the presentation of man's sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In its full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, i.e. by the Head and his members"² Consequently the liturgy continues the work of salvation: "It is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavour is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper".³

¹ Cf. SGC, 308

² SC 7

³ SC 10

The liturgy is a pedagogical world of spiritual reality expressed in sacred 'signs'; one must therefore go into the structure of a sign to understand its language; especially is it necessary to go into what the sign signifies and brings about so as to approach it with "faith", according to the words of "Sacrosanctum Concilium": In order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain".⁴

The Rule calls upon us to "*introduce*" young people to participation in the Church's liturgy. It is not therefore a matter of an institutionalized ritualistic practice which calls for the fulfilment of certain obligations, nor of simply creating an habitual response to "psychological needs", but rather a conscious introduction to the world of the signs and realities which the celebrations offer. To "introduce" or initiate means to show and explain to young people, to bring them in as active subjects, to teach them to celebrate, to take an active part in a celebrating community, to live the reality of which the signs are a reminder. "Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and lawful celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, and are actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it".⁵

For this reason n. 19 of the same conciliar Constitution gives pastors precise indications as to how to ensure a proper initiation, "their active participation, both internal and external, taking into account their age, condition, way of life and standard of religious culture".⁶ It would indeed be harmful if those who are both pastors and educators should trivialize the delicate part played by the signs (and among the latter one should not forget the liturgical garments themselves) thus depriving the signs of their dignity and replacing them with a banality incapable of recalling anything transcendent.

The GC2 1 indicated a practical way by which salesians could provide for this initiation of young people: "An aspect which it is important to recall is the educational value of the liturgical year. The full and conscious sharing in the work of redemption is organized, in Don Bosco's thought, around the celebration of the liturgical year; this sets the pace for the life of the youthful community, showing the road to spiritual growth and the gradual commitment which one assumes in answering God's call. It is a concrete way of structuring an educational plan on the mystery of Christ".⁷ The initiation of Don Bosco involved, in addition to catechetical aspects, the complex experience of a "feast" lived in the spontaneous expression of a youthful community against a devotional background.

The Eucharist and Reconciliation

⁴ SC 11

⁵ SC 11

⁶ SC 19

⁷ GC21, 93

The sacraments are the heart of liturgical life, and the Eucharist is the heart of sacramental life. The Constitutions bring well together not only the mind of the Church but also the spirit of all our tradition, in which the Eucharist and Penance have a "special" place in the education to the faith of both young people and adults: "Frequent confession and communion... are the *pillars which must support the edifice of education*".⁸ in the sacraments is realized in an altogether exceptional way the encounter with Christ which art. 34 presented as being "fundamental" to the educational process.

It is of interest in the first place to draw attention to the phrase "*celebrated with care*". We know that proper dispositions and growth in awareness are required, and that Don Bosco never favoured mere ritualism or formalism but attached more value to the personal effects of the reception of the sacraments on daily life, but nevertheless this phrase is an invitation to be generous in approaching the sacraments, and always with proper motivations.

Secondly, it should be noticed that the expressions used in the article reflect salesian tradition which has always considered these two sacraments as "mysteries" of salvation, but also as first-class educational resources, in so far as they stir up the deepest parts of the conscience and bring it into contact with grace, which builds a youngster's personality. The article stresses three fruits or aims of the sacraments:

- The "*building of christian liberty*": in Christianity freedom is simply the ability to love: to encounter Christ in the supreme act of his freedom, expressed in the gift of his Body and Blood, means in very truth of find the model and motives of liberty;
- "conversion of heart": this does not mean a short-lived act of good will but a serious effort to persevere. Frequent contact with the grace of the risen Christ and his patient mercy is evidently a guarantee of perseverance because it wipes out passing falls and weaknesses and sustains efforts to rise again;
- the "*spirit of sharing and service in the ecclesial community*": rightly is the community dimension of the two sacraments emphasized at the present day: To communicate with Christ's eucharistic Body is to communicate also with his mystical Body, to eat the Bread which has been broken at the fraternal table. Christ's pardon is received, and at the same time the forgiveness of the Church, which has been rounded by our sins. In this way a double reconciliation is brought about —with the Father, and consequently with our brothers.

The close relationship between the two above-mentioned aspects, i.e. the signs of salvation and educational resources, makes evident the continuity between the celebration of the sacraments and the educational relationship and environment.

Speaking of the sacrament of Reconciliation, the GC2 I expressed itself as follows: "For the pedagogy of Penance the continuity between the style of bringing the boy closer to the educational process and that which succeeds in establishing at the sacramental moment is characteristic of Don Bosco. It is the same fatherliness,

⁸ D. Bosco, *Short treatise on preventive system*, chap. II; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 249

friendship and trust which awaken in the youth an awareness of the movements of grace and a commitment to overcome sin”.

“The sacramental encounter usually requires a prior educational understanding. Don Bosco tightly used to say that confession was the `key to education, because by personally involving the boy it invited him to surpass himself. The regular frequency of the penitential encounter, the frank and serene dialogue, the resolution which promotes constancy; provide an opportunity of exceptional educational value'.⁹

And then as regards the importance Don Bosco attributed to the Eucharist in the education of -youngsters and their progress to sanctity, the thought of the Saint is well known. In his biography of Francis Besucco he wrote: "the second support of young people (following on confession) is holy communion. Blessed are those boys who begin early in life to approach this sacrament with the proper dispositions!"¹⁰ Don Bosco never tired of encouraging his boys to receive Jesus in communion and to visit him in churches: the holy table and the tabernacle are the best places for a real, living and vital encounter with the risen Saviour, the perfect Friend and Model.

*The Church's liturgy
is the most efficacious manifestation of the
life-giving power of Christ's grace. Let us
pray that we may bring to share in it all
those the Lord has confided to us.*

*That together with our young people
we may celebrate with joy and gratitude
the encounter with Jesus
in listening to his Word,
in fervent prayer
and in sacramental life,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our youngsters may learn from us
the indispensable importance
of a living and committed participation
in the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That like Don Bosco
we too may always be consistent
in placing the sacramental life
at the foundation of all educational activity,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

⁹ GC21, 93

¹⁰ Cf. D. BOSCO, *Vita di Besucco Francesco*, OE XV, p. 347

ART. 37 VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation b a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel.

The family atmosphere of welcome and of faith, created by the witness of a community which gives of itself with joy, is the most efficacious setting for the discovery and guidance of vocations.

This work of collaboration with God's design, the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity, is sustained by prayer and personal contact, above all in spiritual direction.

The succession of aspects which make up the totality of our educational service for the young (human development, the proclamation of Christ, insertion in the Church, group experience, liturgical and sacramental life) ends with the summit of vocational guidance.

There are in the article three nuclei around which the commentary can be developed: the commitment of salesians in this regard, the two levels at which our vocational guidance is provided, and the factors involved in vocational maturing and guidance.

The crown of educational pastoral work

Vocational guidance is inseparable from youth pastoral work properly understood, and this to such an extent that pastoral work for the young is inconceivable without progressively developing their ability to make life options which conform to the Gospel; and on the other hand pastoral work for vocations cannot be thought of in separation from a more general maturing of the youngster in faith and his more intensive participation in ecclesial communion, on which such work is built as on an essential solid foundation. Confirmation of this is provided by the Second International Congress on Vocations, held at Rome: "Pastoral work for youth and for vocations are complementary to each other. Work that is specifically vocational finds its vital working space in the wider youth work, while the latter becomes efficacious and complete when the vocational dimension is included".¹

The same conclusion was confirmed by our GC21: "In the salesian perspective all educational and pastoral activity contains, as an essential objective, a vocational dimension. As a matter of fact, the discovery of one's callings, the well thought out free choice of a programme of life, constitutes the crowning goal of any process of human and Christian growth".² Preparation for life choices, with appropriate advice and encouragement, is intrinsic to the processes of education and evangelization.

¹ *2nd International Congress for Vocations*, concluding document, Rome 1981. n. 42

² GC21, 106

But it is interesting to note how this idea, which is so clearly expressed in modern pastoral work, forms part of the patrimony left by Don Bosco to the Congregation. For a fuller treatment of this point we must refer the reader to other sources,³ but here we can at least recall the following traits of our Father: his confidence in young people's ability to respond to God's call; the place occupied by the theme of vocation in his educational plan, in which he always presented the choice of a state in life as a fundamental point and the principal task of the period of youth; his skill in guidance through personal interviews and involvement of youngsters in an attractive life; his preoccupation for priestly and religious vocations; his suggestions concerning attitudes, factors and experiences which favour the birth and development of vocations; and the results with which the Lord rewarded his trust, prayers and dedication to the cause of vocations.

Salesian activity in this field, therefore, in addition to motives forming part and parcel of the very concept of education and of pastoral work, is influenced by an example and tradition which make of this point not merely an aspect but the "crown" of all salesian work. For a better understanding of this assertion it is well to link this article with what was said in art. 6 about the general commitment of salesians in the Church: "We pay special attention to apostolic vocations". But it is of still greater interest to read the article in the light of art. 22 which speaks of the salesian's personal experience of the Lord's call.

Vocational guidance

How are we to put into practice this characteristic of our educational activity? We do so by attending to the guidance of the young in a double direction: towards the maturing of their human and christian vocation, and more specifically towards the realization of the particular vocation of each one. They are two levels which develop together, but there is nevertheless a progression between them as regards objectives and experiences.

The first objective is expressed in the constitutional article in the words: "*We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel*". Hence we help youngsters to understand that each one's existence is a vocation, because he is called to live according to the image and likeness of God. Life understood as a vocation clarifies the relationship between man and the world, the common destiny he has with other men, and especially God's invitation to an ever more explicit dialogue with Him and to a free and conscious response of collaboration, so as eventually to live in communion with Him.

³ Cf. for example: *Le vocazioni nella Famiglia salesiana*, 7th Spirituality Week, LDC Turin 1982; *La vocazione salesiana*, Colloqui di vita salesiana, LDC Turin 1982; P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, PAS Turin 1955, pp.371-385

the divine presence, is the first and most important decision for an individual to make, and the starting point for any further process of self-definition.

This human vocation acquires a new sense when man becomes aware that he has been called to become a son of God and a member of his people by following Jesus Christ.

It is within this baptismal vocation that *specific ecclesial vocations* find their place.

"All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church".⁴ The Church is presented as the people of God and the Body of Christ with a variety of charisms and ministries. Through these charisms the faithful participate in various ways in the mission of Christ which is also that of the Church: to proclaim the Gospel, worship God and transform humanity into man's true image.

Specific vocations therefore do not add to the baptismal vocation, but are particular ways of living it. One of the first tasks of pastoral work for vocations is that of making people aware of the interior and exterior following of Christ as the principal feature of being a Christian, awakening a knowledge of the function of 'ministry' through which the whole Church is at the service of man and every vocation is a sharing in the mission of the Church.⁵ It will be noticed that when referring to the human and baptismal vocation, the article does not present them as two separate periods or realities, but in line with the twin characteristics of salesian activity (education and evangelization) emphasizes a point without which vocational guidance would be impossible: the close union between faith and life.

If pastoral work is given this general tone, the presentation of the various kinds of vocation (lay, priestly, religious and missionary) will find the ground already prepared and the youngsters can be steered towards the discovery of their own vocation. The educators will be able to help them to develop it through appropriate experiences.

It will be well to note that the word "*guidance*" (Italian "*orientamento*") as a specific form of accompaniment and encouragement is not just fortuitous: it is a precise term used in the pastoral context, which supposes in the guide a certain criteria and attitude, and a clear knowledge of the vocational development of the individual.

This, in fact, was one of the educational options made by the GC21: "All young people, whom the Lord in one way or another places in our path, have the right to our help in forming their personality and life 'according to the Gospel'. We must help them at every age in their efforts to discover and develop their vocation: in boyhood, preadolescence, adolescence and beyond, because each of these stages of life has its

⁴LG 9

⁵ *Outlines for Provincial Vocation Plan*, Youth Pastoral Department, Rome 1981

own phase of growth and entails proportionate decisions which every young man must learn and carry out in a responsible manner".⁶

The guidance, as a criterion and method of help towards the maturing of a vocation and life-plan, is to be understood in two senses:

- in the boy it is the interior process by which he progressively discovers his own identity and gets his bearings in life; its fundamental aspects are interior reflection, freedom and responsibility;
- on the part of the educator it consists in the help and assistance given to the youngster as the latter seeks his personal identity.

The guidance itself:

- more than a certain period or phase, even though specific and intensive, is a 'process' which accompanies the unified and harmonious development of personality;
- depends on the chief part being played by the boy who takes a serious look at what he can do, according to the possibilities at his age and in accordance with the signs given him by God;
- helps the boy to formulate his plan of life and structure his personality through:
 - an adequate and realistic relationship with himself;
 - a serene and generous rapport with others and with reality;
 - a deeply felt relationship with God.

In the guidance process the educator or vocations promoter has a facilitating role to play, which he carries out through personal encounter and formative dialogue.

The factors involved in vocational guidance

Help in the maturing process, vocational guidance and discovery all come under the heading of the *"work of collaboration with God's design"*. Our interventions are mediations between God's action on the one hand and on the other the freedom with which the individual is able to become aware of God's presence and accept his call. They are however necessary mediations in the concrete situation of youth and of the christian community at the present day.

Not every suggestion or proposal will be a meaningful mediation for the youngster. The springing up and development of the vocation, in the more specifically christian sense, is linked to kinds of mediation which can provide introductions to valid human and ecclesial experiences, develop personalities with a sense of generous self-giving, reveal the providential signs which indicate God's plans, inculcate correspondence with the movements of grace felt as the presence of love in the individual's life, and transmit God's call to those who show the right dispositions and attitudes.

⁶GC21 , 111; cf. also ibid. 113, 117

Some mediations will be personal, others will be of a community nature. The constitutional article takes into account the double aspect, and also the educational and pastoral nature of our action.

As a first element, which embraces many others, the importance is affirmed of the propitious environment created by the family atmosphere of welcome and of faith, in which a determining factor is the "witness of a community that gives of itself with joy". This atmosphere was already fully presented in art. 16 of the Constitutions which ended with the words: "This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation".

Among the more personal mediations referred to are personal contact and *spiritual direction*. The list is very much condensed and does no more than provide examples, but they indicate a synthesis (education and pastoral work, the person and the environment, faith and active intervention) and some preferences. Others could be added, linked to the same synthesis and the same preferences.

The whole is inspired, sustained and we might say enveloped in the essential mediation of *prayer* according to Christ's precept: "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9,38). "The prayer of the community leads to the community's action... Prayer is not just means for receiving the gift of the divine call, but is (the' essential means commanded by Lord".⁷

*Don Bosco has taught us
that God sows in the heart of many young people
the germ of a vocation to an apostolic life.
Let us pray that we may be delicate
but efficacious instruments
for the discovery and development
of these gifts of the Spirit.*

*That by fostering the family atmosphere of welcome,
in, faith and love,
we may help young people
to discover in themselves the divine call,
and that they may be drawn to follow it with generosity,
Lord hear our prayer.*

⁷ 2nd International Congress for Vocations, concluding document, Rome 1981, n. 23

*That your loving plan for the young you have called
may find confirmation in the witness
of our personal and community life,
in unreserved and joyful self-giving,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may accompany young people
who are groping to discover what they should do in life,
and guide them with delicacy and respect
through our educational commitment
and our personal contact with them,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 38 THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM IN OUR MISSION

Don Bosco has handed on to us his Preventive System as a means for carrying out our educational and pastoral service.

"This system is based entirely on reason, religion and loving kindness".¹ Instead of constraint, it appeals to the resources of intelligences love and the desire for God, which everyone has in the depths of his being.

It brings together educators and youngsters in a family experience of trust and dialogue.

Imitating God's patience, we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom. We then accompany them, so that they may develop solid convictions and gradually assume the responsibility for the delicate process of their growth as human beings and as men of faith.

¹ MB XIII, 919

For a deeper analysis of this article two lines of thought which are present in the Constitutions must be kept in mind. On the one hand the article is in perfect continuity with what has gone before. In fact, after setting out the main points in our plan for youth the text describes the pedagogical and pastoral method in its principles and basic inspirations. On the other hand, since the preventive system is at the same time a spirituality, a pastoral criteriology and a pedagogical methodology,¹ the article is connected with those which describe the salesian spirit. In particular art. 20 referred to the preventive system as a "spiritual and educational experience": it declared that "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".

Taking for granted its spiritual roots, the preventive system is set out in art. 38. As an educational and pastoral method in three stages:

- its fundamental inspiration;
- its characteristic elements;
- the educational relationship it creates.

The fundamental inspiration

The fundamental inspiration of the preventive system is a particular understanding of the individual, the fruit of a long historical process of Christian humanism, translated by Don Bosco into simple practical terms.

The three words which occur in the now famous expression - *reason, religion and loving kindness* — need separate analysis, in their mutual relationship and overall significance. They are a synthetic expression of the educational project. They suggest also for educators the attitudes from which flows the practical application of the method: faith, reason, and educational charity shown by close presence and real

¹ Cf. GC21, 96; cf. also ASC 290 (1978). p. 12-14 (The preventive system, essential element of our charism)

interest. But above all they indicate three internal personal resources which, when aroused, stimulated and developed, not only ensure good results for particular educational experiences but also create a personal structure enabling life to be confronted.

The method appeals to resources of the intelligence, the heart and the desire for God, rather than depending on external conditioning.

- "*Reason*", from the methodological point of view, asks the educator to follow the path of motivations, to take the events of the life and development of youngsters and help them to make a balanced judgement about them, to make good use of what is known about education, to stimulate responsibility, to keep in mind the possibilities of the youngster when making suggestions to him or demands on him. These are just examples.

- "*Religion*" implies believing in the creative and educational force of the proclamation of the Gospel and of contact with the Lords of not neglecting its reminder of conscience and salvation: it means making known the beauty of faith and its manifestations, and promoting in the life of the community religious events and motivations through feasts and other celebrations, and even through the very arrangement of the premises.

- But method requires that reason and religion must converge in "*loving kindness*". This represents the supreme principle of the preventive system.² Its foundation and source must be sought in the charity communicated to us by God, as a result of which the educator loves young people with the same love with which the Lord loves them, not only in the intensity of his self-giving but also with the human warmth shown by Christ in the Incarnation, i.e. supernatural charity, but clothed in flesh. This loving kindness is a love which is shown in a way that a youngster, especially if he is very poor, can come to understand without formal expression; it is a pleasing approach which leads to a familiar relationship, affection shown through gestures which foster confidence and create an educational relationship. It is an attitude which gives rise to an interior security in the boy, which suggests ideals to him and sustains his efforts to overcome his weaknesses. It is a pedagogical charity which "creates" the youngster as an individual and is perceived by him as a providential help to his own growth.

The operative elements

The article presents two of these, of which the first is the creation of an "educational environment" rich in joy, humanity and commitment, which is already in itself a means for expressing values and proposals. Don Bosco discovered the value of the environment very early in his apostolate and it became a first requirement for the rest of his life.

²Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 8-9

individually in a wide variety of places and circumstances, but he was also the animator of a community of youngsters, characterized by certain specific features and with a programme to carry out. Psychological and sociological reasons, as well as those of faith, confirmed his conviction that an educational setting was needed where religion and application could find a natural place, and where roles, relationship and the very atmosphere spoke of love and charity.

And so Don Bosco not only chose a setting which would give stability to his Oratory and drew up a little set of regulations for it, but he also adopted the principle which he explained to his boys as follows: "Your number alone makes your games more joyful, chases melancholy from your hearts, encourages many of you to bear the burden of schoolwork, and arouses competition and spring of knowledge. The good example of many helps us also spiritually without our even being aware of it".³

The setting is not something generic; it has characterizing features. It is not a specific place where one goes in search of personal recreation, but a community, a programme, a process in which the participants mature and develop.

Among the many characteristics of the environment which could be mentioned in connection with the three elements already referred to, the article picks out the union between youngsters and educators, the family atmosphere, trust and dialogue.

The preference is not fortuitous, even though the list is incomplete. These are the aspects which more nearly touch the "heart", which relate more closely to "loving kindness". They reflect Don Bosco's assertion that "education is a thing of the heart", that is where all the work starts, and if the heart is not in it the work becomes difficult and its outcome uncertain.⁴ At the same time such characteristics highlight the eminently affective concept of education which is proper to the preventive system.

But the setting or environment is not sufficient by itself. It might never reach the individual. A second element is required: *personal encounter*. If it is to respond to different needs and interests, the bigger group must be split into smaller units in which are possible participation, recognition of the original nature of the individual, and the best use of the contributions he can make.

"Loving kindness" reaches the individual through the personal relationship which makes possible an enlightened view of the present, past and future of each one.

The importance must not be forgotten of personal contacts, even though brief, in the educational and pastoral experience of Don Bosco.

Some of these short contacts of our Father with his boys have gone down in history as fundamental turning points. The meeting with Bartholomew Garelli in the sacristy of the Church of St Francis of Assisi laid the foundations of the Oratory. In the biographies he wrote of various boys, Don Bosco recalls with pleasure the contacts he had with them, and goes into details about their conversations. In the biography of

³BM VII, 366

⁴Cf. MB XVI, 447; cf. also *Collected letters* IV, p. 209

Dominic Savio he gives a detailed account of their talks at the parish house at Murialdo and in his own office at the Oratory. In his *Life of Michael Magone*, there is even a chapter entitled: 'A curious encounter'.

Don Bosco not only relived these events but he also put them forward as an educational norm: it seems that he wanted to show us his art of getting into the life of a boy. The encounter always began with some sign of esteem, of affection, of understanding, and then he passed on at once to touch in a simple manner on the important factors in the life of his young companion, like his health, whether he had a home to go to or anyone to look after him. The conversations were serious as regards content, even though carried out in a happy and joyful manner; they often became a quite moving experience, because they concerned points of vital concern to the youngsters. Michael Magone was deeply moved; Francis Besucco shed tears of emotion; Dominic Savio "did not know how to express his joy and gratitude: he seized my hand, squeezed it and kissed it several, times".⁵

If these encounters remained so vivid in the mind of the saintly educator, if he dwelt on them at such length in the biographies of his boys to the extent of making them the chief items he narrated, it means the he was convinced that the quality of an educator and pastor is shown in personal contacts, and it was to this that the atmosphere and programme of the house were designed to lead.

When a Cardinal in Rome once challenged his ability as an educator, Don Bosco gave him a spectacular demonstration by means of a personal encounter and conversation with some boys in the Piazza del Popolo. When we read the account of the episode we find the narrative structure typical of all his other contacts: the first friendly approach, the immediate inclination of the boys to run away, followed by the overcoming of their fears and shyness, a cheerful conversation with serious undertones, and the emotional nature of the conclusion.⁶

All of this, and much more as well, can perhaps be read into the expression: "*we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom*".

The educational relationship

But all we have said still fails to give a complete idea of the method. The setting, initiatives and encounters are organized and find expression in an educational relationship with particular characteristics. The same elements could evidently be used to produce a relationship which would create dependence on the educator, tend to moral subjugation on the part of the boys, and to their exploitation for the furtherance of adult interests.

The key is found in the way the relationship between pupils and educator is built up, and how it fits in with the body of educators as a whole and with the educational institution. The text mentions some guiding ideas.

⁵ D. BOSCO, *Life of Dominic Savio* (OE XI, p. 187)

⁶ Cf. BM V, 600-601

growth and development. The task of the educator is not to take this responsibility on himself, but to awaken it, enlighten it and get it functioning, by fostering and making it possible for the individual to make free choices based on motives and values.

The second principle is found in the educator's role of accompaniment or encouragement. It is a question of an influential presence rather than an authoritarian one. The educator plays a valid part to the extent that he is able by his adult presence to offer light and experience, and to be seen by the youngsters as a "model" to whom they can refer.

From these fundamental considerations (the youngster is the one responsible, the educator accompanies him in his efforts) arises an essential characteristic of every educational relationship: the total acceptance of the person just as he is, the greatest sign of affective maturity. Some youngsters have been favoured more than others, but they are all sons of God. The point at which we find them is the point God has chosen from which to invite them to start a pilgrimage. In this connection there come to mind some expressions from the Letter of 1884, in which Don Bosco points out the difference between those who initiate a personal relationship for selfish motives and those who really accept the youngster as a person.

An educational relationship cannot fail to give rise to suggestions and proposals, but these should be proportioned to the possibilities of the boy and to the stage he is at in his maturing process, this precisely as an expression of the fact that he is accepted as a person and of the central role that he himself has to play in his own formation.

The reference should not be overlooked to God's patience, which we want to imitate; this is not the same thing as tolerance or forbearance, but refers to the long and persevering work, in dialogue with the freedom of the individual concerned, through which the Lord, by offering his own love, calls man to communion with Him and opens to him horizons of happiness which reason by itself could never even imagine.

God's patience is more a progressive action than a gloomy forbearance; it savours more of the opening up of new possibilities than the counting up of failures or offences. His patience is an invitation to loftiness of spirit in the relationship with the youngster, because of the freedom from any personal interest that the latter must find in us, because of our need to be tireless in making positive suggestions, and out of consideration for the youngster's ability to respond.

*Let us pray to the God of all patience
that in imitation of the charity of Christ with his disciples,
and following the example of Don Bosco,
we may be able to follow the generous and difficult way
of the "preventive system",
and provide efficacious help to our young people
as they develop in themselves
the seeds of goodness and grace
with which the Creator has endowed them.*

*That we may penetrate
the treasures of Christian wisdom
which inspire the preventive system,
and be faithful in continuing the
educational work of Don Bosco,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That with watchful delicacy we may
be able to awaken the resources of
intelligence, desire for God and
generosity of heart, that young
people carry within them, and help
them to make them bear fruit,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we ourselves,
with inexhaustible patience and adaptability,
may be able to collaborate generously
with the young and with their families
in open and constructive dialogue,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 39 ASSISTANCE AS AN ATTITUDE AND METHOD

The practice of the preventive system demands a fundamental disposition on our part: an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them: "Here in your midst I feel completely at home; for me, living means being here with you".¹

We are actively present among youth in brotherly friendship, helping them in their efforts to grow in what is good, and encouraging them to cast off every form of slavery, so that their weakness may not be overcome by evil.

This presence affords us a true understanding of the world of the young and unites us with them in all the healthy aspects of their restless energy.

¹ MB IV, 654; BM IV, 455

The preventive system, described in its inspiration in art. 20 and presented in its educational and pastoral principles in art. 38, is now clarified as regards its daily practice.

Assistance

The preventive system requires as a fundamental point the daily educational presence among youth: what we call according to our tradition "assistance". This does not mean the charity of a benefactor who provides means and resources from a distance, but the love of one who is willing to accompany young people, to live in their midst, with them and for them, following Don Bosco's example.¹ This implies that one day it should happen that the Salesians possessed many works managed indirectly, but they themselves were cut off from youngsters the preventive system, which was born of direct contact youth, would no longer have any means of expression, and still less of new developments.

What are the characteristics of assistance, which is presented as the preventive system in practice?

In the first place it means physical presence among young people, and hence a real sharing in their life and interests: loving what the youngsters love.

It is a presence of "*brotherly friendship*", not institutional or authoritarian. Some expressions of Don Bosco come to mind: "I need your help... I don't want you to look upon me as your superior but rather as your friend. Trust me fully. That is what I want, what I expect from you as my friends".² And in the Letter from Rome he wrote: "Let the superior be all things to all... all heart to seek the spiritual and temporal good of those Divine Providence has entrusted to him".³ The effect on the minds of the

¹ Cf. SGC, 188

² BM VII, 302

³ *Letter from Rome*, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 260

young should be that they look upon their teachers and superiors as "fathers, brothers and friends".

It is an *active* presence, full of initiatives and plans as regards both individuals environment, but with an activity which is "preventive" in the double sense of protecting from untimely negative experiences, and developing the potentiality of individuals for reaching goals to which they are attracted by their goodness and beauty.

It is an *animating* presence: it tends to awaken and foster the creativity of the young, to give them responsibility for their own growth and development, accompanying them in the process. It develops motivations based on reason and faith, and at the same time strengthens in the youngsters their ability to give an autonomous response to the demands of values and principles. It does not therefore cut out youthful expression in word or action, but rather favours it. Don Bosco wrote: "Every superior should try to get to know them, to show himself their friend; he should let them chatter away, but he should not say much himself..."⁴

It is a *witnessing* presence: the values professed by the educator, which become evident through his actions and behaviour, cannot fail to impress youngsters, making them think and opening new horizons before their minds.⁵

Attitudes of the educator apostle

Assistance implies a basic attitude: *empathy with the young and the desire to be with them*. The expression of Don Bosco quoted in the article to explain this attitude is a very happy one. It takes us back to the example of his own life. The inference is that it is not a matter of a burdensome obligation, even though it may cost sacrifice at times, but of a contact that is desired and sought for. In it we find the joyful sense of our life which we have given to God: "*Here in your midst I feel completely at home!*"

This empathy is described by the GC21 as a "harmonious relationship with the young, liking what they like but without abandoning our adult role of educators".⁶ It means "turning in to their wave-length when discussing their problems, and getting into educative dialogue with them",⁷ being solid with them, utilizing their positive contributions, and at a faith level "recognizing in them the other source of our inspiration in spreading the Gaspar".⁸

This desire for contact and presence introduces us to the realities of the world of youth. To provide efficacious help for the young and the poor one must first know and understand them: the Good Shepherd knows his sheep (cf. Jn 10,14). The study

⁴ *Regulations for the Houses*, General Articles, 7; (OE XXIX, p. 112); cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, PAS Turin 1955, p. 230 ff.

⁵ On the theme of assistance in general. v. SGC, 188, 363; GC21,102; ASC 290 (1978), p. 21-23

⁶ GC21, 13

⁷ GC21, 21

⁸ GC21, 12

important, but in the last analysis nothing less than being immersed in their world through a natural presence and friendly contacts can open us to a deeper knowledge. And such knowledge alone will enable us to find the right sort of language and methods for evangelization.

This sort of sympathetic knowledge leads also to an attitude of solidarity. The world of youth experiences a very rapid succession of changes and is extremely dynamic. In the face of this fact three kinds of reaction are possible:

- A reaction of indifference.
- A negative reaction which emphasizes defects and limitations, or easily attributes to young people as a whole the attitudes and behaviour of some of them; often this is combined with complete ignorance of youth phenomena. Because people of this kind find it impossible to follow the rhythm of youth, they prefer to show no interest in the problem, and still less to do anything about it.
- Finally there is the positive reaction of educational understanding and pastoral love: this is the spontaneous reaction of the salesian. Under this aspect too he stays with the young and especially the poor and "empathizes" with them, even to the extent of himself adopting their simple, sincere and dynamic style of life.

Evidently all this calls for a critical sense, and this is what is referred to in the conclusion of the article. Not everything in the ideas and behaviour of the young and the poor can be approved of; there are errors to be found there, excesses and sometimes disorders.

But the salesian tries to understand the deep underlying aspirations; he too rejects whatever in present-day society is not Christian, nor evangelical, and often not even human. Retaining "all that is good" according to the dictate of St Paul (cf. 1 Thess 5, 21), he adheres to the world of the young and poor "in all the healthy aspects of their restless energy". And he is well aware that this is a choice which may at times lead to painful consequences.

Summing up then, we could use the substance of article 39 to compose an introduction to a salesian "Gaudium et Spes": "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anguish of the youth of our time, especially of those who are poor and of all who are afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anguish of the Salesians as well. Nothing that affects the young and the poor fails to find an echo in their heart".

*Let us beg the Lord to open our hearts
to a true sympathy and understanding
towards those to whom he has sent us,
so as to be cordially at their service.*

*That with Don Bosco
we may be able to say sincerely to the young:
"Here in your midst I feel completely at home",
and for them make a generous offering of our
whole life,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our presence among youth may be
that of brothers and friends, open to an
authentic knowledge of the world of
the young and the poor, and that we
may be able to sustain them in their
growth to freedom from all slavery,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*Lord our God, grant that we may share, in
profound truth and cordial participation,
the life of our young people and all their
lawful interests and aspirations, just as
your Son, in becoming man,
shared with us everything except sin.
Through Christ our Lord.*

CRITERIA FOR SALESIAN ACTIVITY

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more... To the weak became weak, that I might win the weak, I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9, 19.22).

This is another autobiographical extract from Paul, belonging to a context (1 Cor 8-10) which highlights the sense of christian liberty as a condition indispensable to the cause of the Gospel for all, starting from those who are weakest.

The meaning of the two statements of Paul is immediately clear, especially if considered in the light of the example of Jesus. But the concrete situation which forms the context of chap. 9 of the first letter to the Corinthians helps to clarify still further the union between freedom and service. Some people at Corinth were opposed to Paul: he was using his freedom to be independent of the community for his maintenance, they said, because he was not a true apostle (9,1). Paul reacts vehemently through the whole of chap. 9, making clear the real sense of his freedom: it was above all that of an apostle totally possessed by Christ's Gospel (9, 12); that as such he had certain financial rights (9,4-12); but he had given up those rights so that his service of the Gospel should be more transparent, universal, all-embracing, and therefore free (9,12-18).

More than a proud declaration of principle, Paul was giving an example of a freedom so completely at the service of all as to become the gospel choice of being a "slave" of all: Jews, pagans, those of little account or who were weak and fragile from a religious point of view (9,19-22). Was he being just noncommittal, or an opportunist? In reality there was a very firm principle underlying this unlimited self-abandonment: "I do it all for the sake of the Gospel" (9,23). Paul, like Christ, takes on all human conditions so as to make spring up within them a genuine experience of faith.

To make of freedom a service, giving up even lawful rights and therefore working absolutely gratuitously, with unconditional dedication to others, through fidelity to the Gospel understood as an absolute benefit for man, even to the point of exclaiming: "woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!": all this forms an apostolic criterion which Don Bosco (as he appears in his historic "Valdocco experience" C 40) put into practice, and left us a legacy.

* * *

ART: 40 DON BOSCO'S ORATORY A PERMANENT CRITERION

Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.

As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works.

All the constitutional texts, from Don Bosco's first manuscripts onwards, have carried a brief description of our works. The present Constitutions, however, do not do so, or at least not in any great detail. The fact that salesian pastoral practice is carried out in specific lands of work, which still constitute a fundamental presence of the Congregation at the present day, has led to the preservation of a description of than in the General Regulations. But some indication at least was needed in the Constitutions, and the diversity of the contexts in which we work and the continual springing up of new needs suggested that in this section (C 40-43) should be presented the criteria which must inspire the concrete putting of the mission into practice in the various works and activities.

The section, in fact, carries the heading "*Criteria for salesian activity*". In it we find the ideal model for reference, i.e. a characteristic "pastoral experience" of Don Bosco, realized at the Oratory of Valdocco: a model which is presented as a general criterion for discernment and renewal (C 40). Three inspirational criteria are then given for the realization of our works and activities, with their chief consequences (C 41). Finally three main lines of action are indicated for practical salesian activity: education, evangelization, and communication (C 42, 43).

A characteristic pastoral experience

The Oratory quite literally filled Don Bosco's whole existence. It had its first expressions in the games and Sunday gatherings in the meadows of the Becchi and in the "Society dell'allegria". It developed during the early years of his priesthood, from the meeting with Bartholomew Garelli to the growth in size of the youthful community in the poor Pinardi house with the stable organization of its life and activities. At Valdocco the Oratory subsequently developed in many ways: it was the cradle of the newly born Congregation and of other religious Associations and had reached maturity by the time Don Bosco died.

When our Father wanted to put his thoughts into writing, intending to leave in this way "a norm for overcoming future difficulties by lessons from the past",¹ so that his followers would be stimulated to continue his work in creative fidelity, he wrote the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*.²

When one looks back in the light of faith on the pastoral pilgrimage of Don Bosco, it becomes clear that in his encounter with the youngsters of the Oratory the foundations of a project were laid, enterprises grew in perspective, and a style came to maturity (cf. C 20).

For this reason Don Bosco's initiatives were originally called the "Work of the Oratories", and the mother-house still kept the name "Oratory of Valdocco", even after successive transformations.

But what exactly was it that made this pastoral experience a characteristic one?

An elementary knowledge of the history of northern Italy will tell us that the Oratories formed part of the tradition and practice of some of the Lombardy Churches. They were a setting for the main purpose of teaching catechism to the children of the Parish, with games and entertainment offered as an inducement to attend. Don Bosco rethought the idea (and this is what is expressed in the article) to meet the needs of his poor boys. For him the Oratory was "*house, church, school and playground*": a complete programme of material relief, of family support, of evangelization, culture and social behaviour. Don Bosco transformed it from its parochial structure to an open and missionary work designed to reach those who remained untouched by the normal institutions. The Sunday activity became prolonged through the week, because his help and support for his boys was not confined to Sundays; he turned it to a youthful community, with himself at its centre to promote relationships and provide animation: a community "where friends could meet and enjoy themselves".

The GC21, on the basis of the story of Valdocco and recalling Don Bosco's original intuition, traced out the fundamental characteristics of the physiognomy of the oratory setting. They are: "personal rapport of 'friend between salesian and youngster and the brotherly 'presence' of the educator among the boys; the creating of an environment to facilitate such a meeting; varied activities to fill leisure time; a missionary 'open-door' attitude to all lads who want to come in; a welcome for everyone, but with proper attention to individuals and groups; a gradual education of the youth community for festal celebration; a striving for firm group-life and unity — all these elements concur in forming a wholesome human and Christian personality".³

In Don Bosco at the Oratory, rather than the brilliant manager of a structured work, we discover the creative affability which can size up situations and respond to them, moved by pastoral charity. He was tenaciously attached to his mission among

¹ MO, p. 16

² *The Memorie dell' Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* were published in 1946 (Ed. SEI Turin) and later reprinted by offset at the instance of the Direzione Generale Salesiana. In the Introduction (by Fr. E. CERIA), the reason is explained for their publication, despite Don Bosco's prohibition (cf. MO, p. 1-12)

³ GC21, 124

firm and flexible, all at the same time.

Deeply convinced of his divine call to the ministry of pastor of the young,⁴ he felt himself inspired and guided by God. But at the same time he was very sensitive to the passing indications of current history ("We must try to get to know our times and adapt ourselves to them"),⁵ and attentive to the concrete situation of his boys.

This is borne out by the historical evolution of the Oratory of Valdocco in its multiple and diverse vicissitudes.

The permanent criterion

The Valdocco "pastoral experience which serves as a model" is put forward in the article as the fundamental criterion for the discernment and renewal, in dynamic fidelity, of all salesian works and activity. The SGC had indicated this very clearly in the document entitled: "*Don Bosco at the Oratory, the enduring criterion for the renewal of salesian action*".⁶ As is clear, it is not a case of looking at the first Oratory as a single concrete piece of work, but rather of considering it "as the matrix, the synthesis, the sum total of all the genial apostolic creations of our Founder, the mature fruit of all his efforts".⁷

Reference to the Oratory is indispensable, giving the word its full meaning in the fascination and charm of its early days. The Oratory, in fact, represents a pattern or yardstick for every one of our works which aims at being "a home for those who have none, a parish for those who do not know where their parish is, and a school open to all who might find difficulty elsewhere",⁸ a playground where friends can meet and enjoy themselves. These are terms of great salesian import; they evoke images of sensitivity, attitudes, convictions, programmes and style of presence.

It is symptomatic of Don Bosco that in the circular he wrote to the members on the feast of St Joseph 1885, about the spreading of good books, he has recourse to the same pastoral categories, though with reference to a reality materially distinct from the Oratory. He said in fact: "With the 'Catholic Readings' I hoped to *enter houses*. With the 'Companion of Youth' my aim was to bring the young to church (parish!). With the 'History of Italy' I wanted to sit beside them *in school*. With a series of light readings I wanted to be once again their companion *in the time of recreation*. And finally, with the 'Salesian Bulletin' I wanted to keep alive in the boys who had returned

⁴MO, p. 22 ff.

⁵MB XVI, 416

⁶Cf. SGC, Document 2, nn. 192-273.

In this document which is the principal source of art. 40, the SGC insists on "dynamic fidelity" to Don Bosco, which implies flexibility in the face of new requirements and creativity in responding with "new presences", not only by filling 'lacunae' or youth situations not yet reached, but also qualitatively in responding to new problems unknown in Don Bosco's time, through the development of ideas already present in embryo in the personal work of the Founder, with the Valdocco Oratory as the constant point of reference (cf. SGC, 227 ff. 249 ff. 259 ff.)

⁷SGC, 195

⁸SGC, 216

to their families the love of the spirit of St Francis de Sales and his maxims, and to
275 lead them to become the saviours of other youngsters".⁹

"Don Bosco of the Oratory" emerges as the ideal criterion for salesian action, for the realization of our mission in concrete service. More therefore than an invitation to re-edit what Don Bosco started, this criterion is an appeal to act like him in the deep understanding of what he did and achieved in the service of the young and the ordinary people.¹⁰

Every salesian house worthy of the name must aim at reproducing Don Bosco's characteristic pastoral experience, and appear as a present-day realization of the Oratory's emblematic and original reality.

Practical application of all this is needed in two directions: in *discernment* and in *renewal*.

In the light of the oratory criterion, renewal means a *constant verification* of our modern activities and works to see whether and to what extent they are faithful continuation of Don Bosco's mission, in their style of presence and their ability to respond to needs. A readiness for continual renewal must accompany all we do, and calls for a permanent adaptation of our works and activity to the youth condition and cultural changes. We are reminded of this by the first article of the General Regulations: "Keeping in mind its own social milieu, every province should study the situation and condition of youth and the common people, and periodically verify that its works and activities are providing an effective service for young people who are poor" (R 1).

The use of the criterion for discernment means looking at things in the *perspective of development*. The field of action is great, and the young are found everywhere in enormous numbers. New and urgent questions are calling for an answer, and an answer must be given. But rather than to the quantity of our works, the reference here is to the development of a spirit and style of safeguarding them. Certainly our creativity cannot be realized without regard to cost and method. We must be able to appraise situations with intelligence and a courageous heart. What is needed, in fact, is to find concrete methods and practical applications which best correspond to the salesian mission and its apostolic project.¹¹

Renewal and discernment; these are our two watchwords in the spirit of Valdocco!

Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the text, under the heading of oratorian criteria falls also Don Bosco's solicitude for the young, "especially those who are poor, abandoned and in danger", the "predilection" spoken of in art. 14.

⁹ Collected letters, IV, p. 320

¹⁰ Cf. SGC, 197: In the Oratory Don Bosco provides a wonderful example of docility to God's will and of dynamic fidelity to the mission he had received for the education of the young.

¹¹ Cf. SGC, 230

In the salesian the fervour of his initiatives stems from the love that prompts him to seek innovations, and even great ones, in ways of bringing salvation to youth.

The Oratory at Valdocco is the emblem of this earnest research. Indeed we can say that Don Bosco was clearly aware that in the Oratory he was giving a full response to God's call, and realizing in it the purpose of his life.

*We thank you Lord,
for giving us Don Bosco as our Father and Teacher,
and for guiding him, through the experience
of the Oratory at Valdocco,
to be a concrete model
in our apostolic life and activity.*

*Grant that we may bring him to life again in ourselves,
and, with him as our inspiration,
make every one of our works
an authentic salesian "Oratory",
"a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes,
a school that prepares for life
and a playground where friends can meet
and enjoy themselves".*

*We make our prayer through Christ our Shepherd,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

ART. 41 INSPIRATIONAL CRITERIA FOR OUR ACTIVITY AND WORKS

Our apostolic activity is carried out in a variety of ways, which depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working.

We give practical expression to the redeeming love of Christ by organizing activities and works of an educational and pastoral nature designed to meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church. Sensitive to the signs of the times and with initiative and continual flexibility we evaluate these activities, renew them, and create new ones.

The education and evangelization of many young people, especially among the very poor, means that we have to go to them where they are to be found, and provide adequate forms of service in the context of their own life style.

After proposing the fundamental model, the Constitutions go on in this article to enumerate, together and in their mutual interdependence, the criteria for the practical realization of the activities and works which take their inspiration from that model.

Don Bosco, living in dynamic fidelity the mission he had received, created and put into practice after careful appraisal those initiatives which charity called for. But he did not proceed in a haphazard fashion. He had precise points of reference which he followed, as a guide in the concrete realization of his ideas. The list of works in the first Constitutions reveals a well ordered development plan.

Our task today is one of fidelity in the development of the salesian mission. To interpret it as an uncritical repetition of the Founder's initiatives would be a grave mistake. Rather does it call for harmony with his perspective of commitments and agreement with the motivations underlying his actions, carried out in the characteristic style of the preventive system.

But going beyond this perspective. We may ask ourselves what are the fundamental criteria we can deduce from the Rule? Let us look at the text with an analytical eye and see what we can infer.

To give to our works and activity the physiognomy impressed by Don Bosco, art. 41 indicates three basic criteria: our works "depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working"; they must be "of an educational and pastoral nature" in salesian style; and they must be "designed to meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church".

Attention to the needs of those for whom we are working

The first criterion is a strong affirmation of the *priority of people* over structures, and of the attention that must be given to the needs of the human environment.

More than with works we are concerned with people, i.e. with those to whom we have been sent and with their needs. To their fundamental expectations we must provide a response. Our works and activities have to be continually rethought in relation to our beneficiaries and their needs. No work is of absolute value in itself. And every work recognized as suited to the attainment of the purpose and conforming to the spirit of Don Bosco is to be considered as valid and suitable for us. Our activity, in fact, is a service offered to young people of working-class areas: the young are our masters,¹ Don Bosco was fond of repeating, emphasizing by this phrase the great respect due to the person of the youngster, in whose regard he always adopted the attitude of an authentic servant. The vicissitudes and development of the wandering Oratory are a proof of the attention Don Bosco gave to his charges.²

Today the Salesians find themselves in the world in widely differing situations and are called upon to respond to the challenges made to them by the different environments, and to the urgent needs arising from new social and cultural circumstances.

The existing conditions of families, culture, work, social relationships, religious life, and living together are therefore factors which orientate our service.

This calls for great skill in detecting the sensitivity and expectations of the young, for the ability to identify their real needs and respond to the emerging idols which impoverish youngsters by alienating their spirit, and for dedication to the human and Christian advancement of youth, especially those on the margin of society and the Church.

This criterion calls on the Salesians to verify the functioning of their works and activities, to make sure they are really a meaningful presence, providing an adequate response to the demands of the young and creating a space for them in which they can grow and be educated.

Our pastoral identity

The *educational and pastoral purpose* of the work is the second discriminating criterion indicated in the constitutional article.

As Salesians we undertake many activities and different kinds of work (schools, parishes, youth centres, and centres for free-time activities, for cultural animation etc.), with a view to meeting the needs of youth and working-class neighbourhoods. We give great importance to all these activities in so far as they contribute to the overall advancement of the individual. But we have to ask ourselves whether they are set up as Don Bosco would wish, and whether they do in fact attain their desired objective.

Every work and activity finds its justification in "*the education and evangelization of many young people*". Education is our special field and our

¹ Cf. *Collected letters*, II, 361-362

² Cf. SGC, 349

d'être, the radical motivation for our educational art. This basic identity is the most characterizing note of salesian action. Without it, any structure would fail in its purpose. In other words in all our works our qualification of "missionaries of the young" must be verified, hearers of the Gospel to today's youth.

This idea is wonderfully reflected in the availability of Don Bosco, who declared himself ready for anything, even for "raising his hat to the devil", provided that by so doing he could save the souls of his youngsters.³

The terms "educate and evangelize" and the double idea "upright citizen and good Christian" illustrate the richness of this inspirational criterion, without which a salesian work cannot even be imagined.

The SGC expresses this demand of our identity very forcibly when it states that "the main criterion to be followed in deciding whether a work should continue or be closed down is the possibility or otherwise of carrying out real pastoral activity there".⁴

Strictly linked with the educational and pastoral objectives of our work is an indispensable community presence. The action of an educating and evangelizing community is a basic requirement for discerning the validity of our presence among various opportunities offered to us.

Sensitivity to the needs of the Church

The third criterion requires that our works shall "*meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church*". "Sensitive to the signs of the times... we evaluate our activities, renew them and create new ones". Concern for the needs of the Church was rooted in Don Bosco's conscience, and it should be the same in ours too.

The Church is the subject of pastoral work, and hence a particular contribution in this sector will be efficacious to the extent in which it forms part of ecclesial action. In the Church the various charismata and pastoral initiatives come together to form an organic unit. The specific needs of particular Churches vary from one to another, depending on the local social and cultural situation, the level of evangelization in their neighbourhood and the resources of the Church itself. On the other hand the richness of our charism makes it possible for us to offer new and varied contributions.

Some Churches ask of us a specialized catechetical service, others that we take charge of education in schools and provide animation for the young in general, others that we work among emarginated people, and still others that we work in populous working-class areas or lend a hand in founding new communities.

Which and how many of these we should choose must not depend only on our competence or on individual taste, but on the needs of the Church and on an assessment of such needs in the light of the overall commitments of a Province.

³Cf. BM XIII, 325

⁴SGC, 398

The SGC returned frequently to this concern for the universal and particular Churches. To quote one text among many: "In the plan of action of every Province and house, priority should be given to the way we can best take our place with complete generosity in the local Church. Our exemption should be looked on more as an opportunity for service than as a privilege, something to increase our availability as we carry out our mission".⁵ On the other hand the sensitivity of Don Bosco was no different: he was always ready to meet the expectations and requests of the Bishops. The Church, in fact, needs multiple forms and channels for carrying out dialogue with all of man and all men, and to reveal the overall design of salvation.

Certainly it must be noted that the pastoral contribution which the Salesians are called upon to offer must respond to the charism for which the Spirit has raised them up in the Church: in organized pastoral activity they are not asked to do work at random which may happen to be needed, but to bring the original contribution of their own identity (cf. C 48).

And this is a principle for efficacy, a norm for participation and a requirement for fidelity of the Congregation called to contribute to the building of the Church by manifesting "the multiform wisdom of God".⁶ On the other hand its particular nature and pastoral originality must be interpreted according to a criterion of adaptation to the needs of the individual Churches.

Vatican II expressed these criteria in recommendations of two kinds. The first is addressed to religious, who are invited to maintain and develop their own particular characteristics: "There exist within the Church a great number of clerical and lay institutes devoted to various aspects of the apostolate. They have contributions to make which are as varied as the graces given them: some exercise a ministry of service, some teach doctrine, some encourage through exhortation, some give in simplicity or bring cheerfulness to the sorrowful...".⁷ "Since however the active religious life takes many forms, this diversity should be taken into account when its renewal is being undertaken".⁸

The second kind of recommendation is addressed to the Bishops, so that they may help the Institutes to preserve their own identity, not only as regards community life as their internal regime, but also and especially as regards their specific apostolic mission. "The hierarchy, whose task it is to nourish and feed the people of God, ... uses its protective authority to ensure that religious institutes established all over the world for building up the Body of Christ may develop and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their Founders".⁹

If therefore religious are asked to make themselves available to meet pastoral needs, Bishops and Pastors are asked for discernment as regards their different charismata, so as to provide space in local pastoral work for the exercise of the gifts

⁵ SGC, 438

⁶ PC 1

⁷ PC 8

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ LG 45

which the Holy Spirit has provided for the building of the Church. The document "Mutuae relations" explicitly emphasizes this concern: "Bishops should confer on the different institutes a mission that is recognized as specifically theirs...; let specific duties and mandates be assigned to them".¹⁰

This kind of procedure will lead to the spontaneous definition of the physiognomy of the various Provinces, which are situated in specific territories and there have to render the salesian charism incarnate in the local culture and the reality of the particular Church.

Consequences

As well as the inspirational criteria, the article also presents some consequences which it may be well to consider, even if only briefly.

Attention to persons and to the social and environmental context, the dynamics of educational and pastoral action, and the response to ecclesial requirements, inevitably imply the need to accept a *legitimate pluralism* as a natural consequence. The article, in fact, speaks of our work being carried out "in a variety of ways", of "adequate forms of service", of renewing our activities and creating new ones".

Such a perspective is obligatory in the multiplicity of situations we are called upon to meet. Indeed Don Bosco teaches us to be ever alert to find new and previously unknown ways of getting close to youth.

The article also recalls a fundamental attitude which follows from the criteria we have spoken of. The salesian house is characterized by "*initiative and constant flexibility*", which is typical of the salesian spirit (C 19). Burning and courageous zeal finds its expression in this kind of attitude, which prompts us to active intervention in the reality of the situations we find, with persistence and intelligent openness of mind so as to adapt them to the rhythm of life.

Finally it is well to note the reference in the last paragraph to *salesian presence in the places where the young are to be found, and especially the very poor*. This is a kind of service which could be called "unstructured", and arises from the fact that it sometimes happens that the usual educational and pastoral structures fail to reach a certain number of youngsters. In today's world, in fact, as was also the case in Don Bosco's time, there are young people in social and psychological situations which keep them away from ecclesial institutions: we are well aware how many there are, especially in distressed areas, who are completely ignorant or have only a deformed idea of the Church.

It is natural therefore that, besides the salesians working for the education of the young in schools and oratories, there should be some who go after those at a distance in the places "where they are to be found", meeting them "in the context of

¹⁰ MR 8

their own life style" to provide "adequate forms of service" for their "education and evangelization". In many cases we have to find new ways of being present and of evangelizing, in line with the flexibility and creativity which are characteristic of our spirit (cf. C 19).

Salesians called to these forms of missionary service will have to remember the requirement of community life and maintain a deep communion with the other members of their community and Province, and to foster an ever more intense evangelical and salesian spirit, in close union with Christ the Apostle and in the spirit of the "da mihi animas" of our Father Don Bosco.¹¹

*Let us ask of Christ, the Good Shepherd,
that all we do may be inspired and guided
by a genuine charity
made concrete especially
in solicitous concern for other people.*

*That our activities may always provide a response
to the needs of the young for whom we work, Let
us pray to the Lord.*

*That all our works
may always have as their first objective
the service of the young and the poor,
inspired by the teachings of Christ the Saviour,
Let us pray to the Lord.*

*That above every secondary purpose
our primary aim may always be the
evangelizing education
given us by Don Bosco as an ideal,
Let us pray to the Lord.*

*Grant, O Lord,
that our every thought and action
may be always animated by the saving charity
of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

¹¹ On "new presences", v. in particular GC21 154-161: *New modes of salesian presence for evangelization*

ART. 42 ACTIVITIES AND WORKS

We carry out our mission chiefly in such works and activities as make possible the human and christian education of the young, such as oratories and youth centres, schools and technical institutes, boarding establishments and houses for young people in difficulties.

In parishes and mission residences we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people. We collaborate in the pastoral programme of the particular Church out of the riches of our specific vocation.

In specialized centres we make available our pedagogical and catechetical expertise in the service of the young.

In retreat houses we provide for the christian formation of groups, especially of young people.

We dedicate ourselves also to every other kind of work which has as its scope the salvation of the young.

The three areas of activity

Articles 42 and 43 refer to works and activities grouped according to the different sectors of our mission: *education, evangelization and communication*. Within each of these areas some significant examples are given which are described at greater length with their characteristics in the General Regulations.

In this way it has been possible to avoid giving a list, difficult to compile, of everything we do. By presenting the principle existing structures in groups we have been able to give prominence to the similarity in physiognomy between the different works and activities and their characteristic features. The search for possible structures which do not yet exist, or initiatives for the renewal of the present ones, are not ruled out by the text which needs to be read in the context of the whole section.

A further point must also be made to preclude the risk of misunderstanding the content of these two articles which are, moreover, drawn up in very different ways. The main areas of education, evangelization and communication, in which the operational structures are grouped, are not to be understood as watertight compartments. A school, for example, has a characteristic educational structure, but this does not preclude the importance of social communication in it, and still less that of pastoral activity. The parish too, although characteristically a work of evangelization, is not really salesian without dimensions of education and communication. And to complete the example, a publishing house, although primarily a social communications structure, would not achieve its purpose from a salesian stand- point were it not to have also an educational and pastoral aim.

There is indeed a real distinction between the three areas, because every work and activity must maintain the basic physiognomy which characterizes it, but these

should not be considered one by one in a closed and exclusive fashion, but in an open and mutually connected manner as areas of activity which complement each other.

Area of the education of youth

Art. 42 provides a schematic outline of the first two sectors with a reminder in measured terms of some of the characteristic elements of the fields of activity, followed by an enumeration of the main structures.

First are grouped together those works which can be described as *educational and for the young*: the text, in fact, speaks of "the human and Christian education of the young". This essential dimension of our activity finds practical realization in typical works in which the accent is on youth and education. In works of this kind it is possible to follow a programme of overall education following our pastoral plan, and it is indispensable that in all we do we have clearly in mind our preferential concern for the world of youth.

The General Regulations go into more details in describing the different works and their specific characteristics.

— The *Oratory and Youth Centre* (R 11-12) are seen as "an educational environment" with a "strong missionary slant". They are organized as a community service, and aim at evangelization through many different recreational, educative and apostolic activities.

— The characteristic element for the *salesian school* (R 13-14) is the overall development of the individual attained through a religious approach and a balanced openness to culture. The educational process is founded on solid cultural values and takes into account the dynamics of youth. Its social character is in line with the local social milieu, to which its cultural perspective and branches of training are also related.

— *Hostels and boarding schools* (R 15) constitute a service which enable a youngster to gain indispensable experience in a creative life environment. In them reigns a family atmosphere which facilitates relationships, promotes responsibility, and fosters a happy life together.

— The services of *vocation guidance* too reflect the characteristic aspects of our youth settings. They are fundamentally places where young people who feel called to an ecclesial commitment can find welcome, guidance and encouragement.

Although the list may well appear incomplete, the sequence of these and other works confirms our commitment to animation in the youth sector and emphasizes the educative aspect of the Congregation.

Area of evangelization of the poor and working classes

The second group includes works which are strictly *pastoral and for the common people*.

The article says that through these works "we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people". The evangelization of such densely populated and missionary environments is a specific characteristic of such works and gives them their particular aspect and style. Even in these works, preferential concern for the young always remains the expression of our specific vocation and the distinctive contribution we make to the pastoral work of the particular Church.

— In this area special mention is made of our *commitment in the missionary field*, which had already been indicated in articles 6 and 30 as being among the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission. In the light of one of the articles of the Regulations concerning the "Missions" (R 22), we can note a particular aspect of salesian missionary presence. At a time when progressively less attention seems to be given to concrete problems of global development in emerging countries, it is interesting to see the need declared for creating the "conditions favouring a free process of conversion to the Christian faith with respect shown for the cultural and religious values of the neighbourhood". In this way prominence is given to the evangelizing and plebeian dimension of all our missionary work.

— With regard to *parishes*, art. 26 of the Regulations gives a clear outline of their specifically salesian qualities. They should be distinguished by their low-income population and their interest in young people. Their animating centre is the salesian community, which considers the oratory and youth centre as part of its pastoral project, sets great store by catechesis and bringing back those who have lapsed, fosters the linkage between evangelization and human advancement, and favours the vocational development of each individual.

— The constitutional article refers also to a particular task of the Salesians: *pedagogical and catechetical services in specialized centres*. This is a skilled service we are called upon to offer for a more efficacious and deeper formation and animation of youngsters by trained and competent educators.

— Finally the service provided by *retreat houses and spirituality centres* is highlighted. These provide a very valuable contribution to the growth of spirituality among groups, and especially youth groups, following the lines of the sanctity of Don Bosco. The GC21 makes explicit reference to such houses in connection with their importance as "places of vocational guidance".¹

As we have said already, the article provides only examples, though they are not without significance. The field of salesian work and activity always remains open to inventiveness and creativity, provided the aim is to reach young people. In fact, says the article in conclusion, we dedicate ourselves also to every other kind of work which has as its scope the salvation of the young".²

Finally, it may be asked why an article which consists simply and solely of a list of works has found its way into the Constitutions at all. Was it really necessary?

¹Cf. GC21, 118

²Cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, I, 1 (F. Motto, p. 73)

essential, is not something merely secondary in salesian tradition. Don Bosco, in fact, always attached great importance to the institution of "organized" works: they were the salesian "houses". These are better able to respond to the complexities of the salesian educational and pastoral plan, and the need for the community type of management which is characteristic of our educational system. Moreover an organized work does not mean that its structure is so rigid that it can never in any circumstances be changed. The perspective of the "family", which is constantly recalled, is a permanent call for structural flexibility.

The opening of a work is always a matter for planning; it is a question of how we are to place a house and community at the service and disposition of youth.

*God our Father,
in the multiplicity of your works,
you realize your undivided purpose
of bringing men to you.
Grant also to us the ability
to pursue incessantly the final end of salvation
in the multiple variety of our presence
among our fellow men.*

*By the guidance of your Spirit,
may we live in every situation and circumstance
the charisma of our Founder,
for the benefit especially of poor youngsters
and of peoples most in need,
and in the charity of Christ,
your Son and our Lord.*

ART. 43 SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

We work in the social communication sector. This is a significant field of activity¹ which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission.

Our Founder had an instinctive grasp of the value of this means of mass education, which creates culture and spreads patterns of life; he showed great originality in the apostolic undertakings, which he initiated to defend and sustain the faith of the people.

Following his example we utilize as God's gift the great possibilities which social communication offers us for education and evangelization.

¹ Cf. IM 1

The third area of our activity is social communication, "a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission".

Communication should not be understood as the sum total of a collection of "instruments", but as a complex and dynamic reality which enters into all we do. Nor should it be considered merely as a particular activity or a specific sector of apostolic work, but rather as a main road to the full realization of our task as educators and pastors who are also communicators.

Social communication at the present day

In a society in which the reality of communication is invading and involving spheres formerly unexplored and not even thought of, the contents of this article are prophetic. The development perspective is no longer that of the industrial or post-industrial society, but the society of communications which are advancing with giant strides. "The mass media", said the GC21, "become ever more a massive educating influence, shaping and begetting cultures. They elaborate and broadcast accumulated evidence which underlie new life styles and new criteria of judgement".¹

As a result of its incisive action stemming from the combination of highly refined technical instruments and the most sophisticated forms of the language of visual images, social communication has taken on and is playing a decisive role in the cultural dialect and in social life and customs.

The Church has recognized its importance and even its indispensability for communicating the gospel message. "Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means... The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims from the housetops the message of which she is the depositary. In them she finds a modern

¹GC21, 148

and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes".²

The Founder's example

Don Bosco had an intuitive grasp of the important implications of this phenomenon for the young and for people in general: "In his own day Don Bosco considered the press, the publication of good books and magazines, stage plays for youth, music and song not only as means for the service of educational pastoral works, such as oratories, hostels, schools, missions, but also as 'original apostolic endeavours' directed of their very nature to the mission Divine Providence gave him for youth"³

It seems evident that our Founder considered social communication a practical and authentic means of mass education, parallel school of great efficacy and power. At the present day we hear his appeals in this regard with a new interest: "I beg and implore you not to neglect this most important aspect of our mission";⁴ "This was one of the main tasks given to me by Divine Providence".⁵ "I do not hesitate to call this means divine, since God himself made use of it for the regeneration of man.⁶ Moreover Don Bosco has told us in writing that the spreading of good literature is "*one of the principal aims of our Congregation*".⁷

The oldest version of the Constitutions in Italian is very interesting for the space given to this matter, having regard to the undeveloped nature of the means available at the time: "... the members shall strive to preach retreats, spread good books, and use all the means that unflagging charity shall inspire, so that by means of the spoken and printed word a barrier may be raised against the heresy and irreligion which is trying to find its way by so many means among the ignorant and uneducated; that is what we are doing at present through the publication of the Catholic Readings".⁸

Our Father was well aware of the great power of the mass media for reaching people and of their limitless persuasive capabilities, so much so in fact that he urged the use of "every means that Christian charity inspires" for promoting the faith.⁹

He looked to the future, undertaking also "new and original apostolic enterprises for defending and sustaining the faith of the people".

Salesian commitment in the field of communication

² EN 45

³ GC21, 149

⁴ *Collected letters*, vol. IV, p. 321

⁵ *ibid.* p. 319

⁶ *ibid.* p. 318

⁷ *ibid.* p. 320

⁸ *Costituzioni* 1858, I,5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 78)

⁹ *Costituzioni* 1875, I,7 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 79)

The reference made in the article to "his example" is for today's Salesians the strongest motive for continuing along the road Don Bosco has pointed out.

The field is a vast one; new techniques for transmitting messages and news are appearing every day. We must not be found wanting in the courage shown by our Founder, who saw all the great possibilities offered by this phenomenon as so many "gifts of God".

The article invites us to think in renewed terms and to be creative in the use of means of communication. It is a case of developing our commitment to a mature and fruitful use of the mass media, understood as an ensemble of instruments, and to introduce the language of communications into our educational and pastoral work.

The salesian is a *communicator who draws his inspiration from the "perfect communicator"*,¹⁰ the exemplary cause of every expression, every image and every technique. He does not consider the creative expression and use of the media as something merely incidental or subsidiary in educational projects, but is convinced that these possibilities of expression add up to a genuine new method of communication, a real language which must not be undervalued, especially in educational dialogue with the rising generations. And so he employs every means of communication relevant to his particular situation: he makes intelligent and competent use of the cinema, local TV and radio transmissions, together with other items like audiovisuals, the theatre, music, the so-called 'body language' etc.¹¹

It was precisely "to sensitize our various fields of apostolate to this new language and to change the attitudes of those working in them" that the GC21 asked that courses should be promoted for systematic training in critical approach to the mass media's programmes and their use as normal means of educative communication.¹²

We note that the article indicates clearly what our objective must be as qualified communicators: *for education and evangelization*.

The first purpose is education. In this connection the SGC speaks of our threefold task: of liberation, of co-responsibility, and of creativity.¹³ The influence of the mass media on youngsters and on ordinary people is enormous: they read all kinds of printed matter, they listen to all sorts of transmissions, and flock into theatres and cinemas. Often it happens that fundamental principles become distorted and even repudiated beneath the deluge of messages received every day.

From this a specific task derives for us, a work of liberation to free people from the conditioning effects of all these factors and form them to an attitude of critical appraisal in the face of the violence of hidden persuasion.

¹⁰ CP 11

¹¹ Cf. concluding address of Rector Major to GC22 (GC22, 73)

¹² GC21, 152. In the "Ratio" the study of social communication forms part of every phase of initial formation (cf. FSDB, passim)

¹³ SGC, 456-458

But this is not enough. We have to educate to a constructive attitude of share responsibility, to active intervention with positive follow-up. It is a matter of developing in young people a critical aesthetic and moral sense to set them on the road to a "personal and free choice".¹⁴

The youngster must be helped to an understanding of the language, to a critical assessment of the message (which is often the expression of some ideology or mentality), and to dialogue by means of the various forms of comparison and discussion. The educator should also aim at stimulating creative imagination in this field: it is up to him to make the guiding intervention of one who is not only able to discern the underlying reality, but wants to bring his influence to bear in its regard.

The second purpose is *evangelization*.

Every form of social communication represents a value to be cultivated in its own right, because it is the expression of human words which are anchored in the divine Word, the Word of God. But social communication can be put at the specific service of the spreading of the evangelical message, "at the service of the Gospel", to increase "almost infinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard, and to enable the Good News to reach millions of people".¹⁵

Experience shows that the use of the new language proves fruitful and efficacious not only at the strictly educational level but also for purposes of liturgical and catechetical animation, in formation to prayer, and in living the encounter with Christ in the sacraments.

In conclusion we may recall what the Rector Major said in his circular letter "*The challenge of the media*". After discussing the salesian dimension, he wrote: "Social communication is a 'new presence' for us".¹⁶ We should be prompted to accept it by the open and courageous attitude adopted by Don Bosco in the last century.

"Don Bosco, man of vision that he was, was well aware of the ever increasing impact of social communication. Right from the early years of his apostolate he worked with enthusiasm in this particular field. He said of the printed word: 'In these matters Don Bosco wants to be in the vanguard of progress'. He was possessed of a saintly daring".¹⁷

¹⁴ IM 9

¹⁵ EN 45

¹⁶ Cf. ASC 302 (1981), p. 6-8

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 30

*Let us praise the Lord
who far the salvation of men
provides means in every age
for the communication of his Gospel,
and entrusts them to the hands of his disciples.*

*For our Congregation
that it may be able
to communicate the message of salvation
by expressing it in every language
and inserting it in every culture,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For all those who with us and like us are
called to spread the faith in the world, that
they may be able to find in their environments
apt instruments
for the efficacious transmission of your Gospel,
through a harmonious unity of faith and cultures
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*Grant, O Lord, to the sons of Don Bosco,
and to all our collaborators in the work of education
the creativity and courage of our Founder,
with the ability to accept and use for your Kingdom
the riches of the means of communication
which our times provide,
so that we may be
authentic communicators for the masses,
to the praise of your glory
and for the salvation of the world.*

THOSE WHO SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MISSION

"He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor 3, 8-9)

Parties had sprung up in the community of Corinth: "I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollos, I belong to Cephas, I belong to Christ" (1 Cor 1,12). Worldly wisdom, divorced from the logic of the cross, could not recognize in the multiple ministerial expressions the unity of the gift of faith given by God in Jesus Christ. "You are still of the flesh... are you not merely men?" (1 Cor 3, 3-4) asks Paul, and he goes on to specify in vv. 5-9 the sense of the roles of preachers and teachers, or more simply of the different ministries in the one Church.

At the centre stands God in Christ, the absolute protagonist of man's salvation or, to put it in the terms of the Gospel, the coming of the Kingdom. In the parables Jesus uses the image of a field to indicate humanity as the place of the Kingdom (Mt 13, but v. also the connection between people and vineyard in Is 5, or plantation in Ezek 17, 7); the ministers are collaborators ("synergoi"), equally indispensable for the divine choice and for service of that choice. At this level the various interventions in God's field (planting, watering) are secondary and subaltern to the unity of the project; it may be that the difference will appear from the sense of responsibility and purity of intention with which each minister will have done what was given him to do (1 Cor 3, 10-17). Paul is forthright in his admonition: "You are God's field, God's building". And the warning is addressed to the ministers, because he is saying in fact: in your different kinds of service in the one field of God, remember that that is the community in which you have to work, those are the people you have to evangelize, and above all do not forget that God is its *raison d'être* and its principle of belonging.

The pauline text is much more than a statement of principle: it is a strong warning based on concrete facts, on things which happen and bring to mind the final result, a just judgement on the validity of the service rendered. But still more it is a stimulus to grow in stature as spiritual men recognizing their common equality, though in different roles, before the one God who is the Father of all and works in all.

The Constitutions apply this teaching of Paul within the Congregation and the Salesian Family. We can never forget Don Bosco who unified everything in his 'Da mihi animas', and at the same time did so much to bring his collaborators to understand and practise unity in brotherhood as they worked at different tasks for the salvation of the young.

ART. 44 THE MISSION IS GIVEN TO THE COMMUNITY

The apostolic mandate which the church entrusts to us is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the provincial and local communities. The members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important. They are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility.

The provincial and the rector, as promoters of dialogue and team work, guide the community in pastoral discernment, so that it may accomplish its apostolic plan in unity and fidelity.

The community the subject of the mission

The title given to this section reveals at once the perspective of the articles which make it up (C 44-48). We are concerned with defining the *subject of the mission*, or in other words to whom the apostolic mission is confided. And the answer is clear: it is given to the community.

The community takes up and puts into effect the apostolic mandate received from the Church. The salesian mission is not something entrusted to the responsibility of individuals, but is a reality involving a group of people who share responsibility.

Among Salesians, therefore, there is neither room nor justification for individualism in apostolic work. Each member obviously brings his own talents to the mission and plays his part in the responsibility for its fulfilment (cf. C 22). But his indispensable personal task forms part of a community commitment. Here we have a first decisive statement about the community dimension which give the hallmark to our apostolic work and style of education. We are not speaking of a generic kind of community concern, but of being clearly aware that it is the community as a whole that takes up the mission received, and that puts it into practice as a group.

Those therefore to whom the mission is given in a particular place are at a practical level "the provincial and local communities" concerned.

The "*provincial community*" has a particular importance as regards responsibility for apostolic work. It is in fact "the institutional salesian unit which best corresponds to the local Church".¹

As will be said later and more explicitly (cf. C 58 and 157), the province is not to be considered simply as an administrative entity, but as a "communion of local communities" which recognize that they share responsibility for the salesian mission in a particular region.

¹SGC, 84

Church, thus manifesting the life and pluriform mission of the Congregation.

The "*local community*" carries the responsibility at a more restricted level, defined by the neighbourhood in which it is situated and carries out its specific apostolic tasks.

It follows that each member and each local community, while carrying out a particular activity, acts in the awareness of being solid with other members for the fulfilment of a common mission of wider extension.

Unity and joint responsibility

In the community which is responsible for the mission "*the members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important*" like living organs of a single body. This was an image dear to Don Bosco,² and it expresses very well the idea, on the one hand that the fulfilment of the mission depends on many functions which differ one from another, and on the other that these functions cannot be understood in isolation from each other and from the whole organism.

According to the law of enriching diversity and mutual complementarity, we find in the salesian community confreres with different tasks to carry out and with widely differing talents, abilities and qualifications.

Each of them needs the others because the contributions of all of them are important, even though they differ in nature and prominence.

Each one, in line with what was said in art. 22, should feel a correlative relationship with the other members of the community.

But for the achievement of pastoral objectives a mere structural arrangement of tasks and roles is insufficient. It is of much greater importance that the members be conscious of their dependence on each other, and that they accept the implications of this. This is what the text means by the phrase "*through unity and joint brotherly responsibility*".

The word 'unity' here refers particularly to an objective situation of working together and the sense of mutual belonging; and on the other hand the phrase 'joint brotherly responsibility' expresses more particularly the subjective attitude in conscience of the various members, each of whom shares the responsibility of his confreres, and carries out his own task in a responsible manner and with the intention of building unity and working coherently with the others.

The Constitutions take up this concept again in the chapter on the fraternal community (chap. V), when dealing with the community obedient to the will of the Lord, and also in connection with the service of authority (cf. especially C 66 and C 123).

²V. conference of Don Bosco to the salesians, 11.03.1869: BM IX, 267-271

The second part of the article is closely linked with the first.

Action by the community implies the unity of the members in the diversity of their individual tasks. This obviously requires a guide in pastoral discernment so as to ensure union and fidelity in carrying out the apostolic plan.

Who is this guide foreseen by the Rule for these apostles who share responsibility for their community operations? He is the Provincial in the provincial community and the Rector in the local community.

But shared responsibility means more than the members just waiting for or receiving directives; they have to work together in appraising situations and studying possible options. The superiors, therefore, are to be regarded as "promoters of dialogue and teamwork".

We must not look on them simply as works-managers, but be aware that they are called to *guide an apostolic community* so that the latter may proceed in united fidelity to their specific salesian mission, without which it would not be possible to achieve the objective of the apostolic plan conceived by Don Bosco.

The article points to a central trait in the physiognomy of the salesian superior, which will be completed in due course by other aspects in later parts of the Rule (cf. C 55, 121, 161, 176). The one who presides, in his capacity as salesian superior and coordinator of the community's religious life, is essentially the one who gives orientation to its educational and pastoral commitments. In him religious authority implies, and even demands, his role as a pastoral guide and vice versa. In Don Bosco's plan the guide of the salesian community is the apostolic and spiritual educator of a group of other pastors and educators, the coordinator of their individual efforts, the animator of the spirit which prompts missionary activity considered in its totality.

The GC21, in depicting the figure of the rector, says that he is "the pastoral guide of the salesian mission in a threefold function, as teacher of the Word, as sanctifier through the ministry of the sacraments and as a coordinator of apostolic activity. He holds principal responsibility for the mission among the young and the people entrusted to his community; he preserves and renews the fidelity of the confreres in their pastoral commitment to the preventive system; he cooperates with the Bishop and the diocesan clergy in the combined pastoral action of the local Church".³

It is a question of a skilled ecclesial service called for by the very reality of the salesian community, which in the mission received from the Church finds its tenor and specific way of life (cf. C 3).

³ GC21, 52

*God our Father,
awake and develop in us
the awareness of the mission
which through the Church and our Society
you have entrusted to us to be carried out
in our local and provincial communities.*

*May your Spirit help us
to know, understand and love each other
in mutual collaboration.
Make us glad to have so many brothers at our side,
grant that we may be solid in our aims and efforts,
as we try to be truly united around our superiors
for the achievement of your loving designs.*

We make our prayer through Christ our Lord.

ART. 45 COMMON AND COMPLEMENTARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Each of us is responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts and with the lay and priestly characteristics of the one salesian vocation.

The salesian brother brings to every field of education and pastoral activity the specific qualities of his lay status, which make him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life.

The salesian priest or deacon brings to the common work of promoting human development and of educating in the faith the specific quality of his ministry, which makes him a sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, especially by preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments.

The significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up and of its apostolic completeness.

In art. 44 it was stated that the one single mission entrusted to the community is carried out by members who "have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important".

Now art. 45 presents briefly the figures of the members who make up the community and work in it for the same mission. It expresses in synthetic fashion:

- the vocational unity;
- the specific characteristics of the salesian coadjutor brother (or "lay salesian") and of the salesian priest or deacon (or "clerical salesian");
- their essential reciprocal relationship.

The vocational unity

The priest or deacon and the brother are presented in the first place in their fundamental equality. *The salesian vocation, says the Rule, is the same for both.* The two figures are referred to as the "*salesian brother*" and the "*salesian priest*": what is fundamentally common to both is that each is a "salesian" (the term being used not as an adjective but as a noun), thus expressing their fundamental equality. The manner of living the common salesian vocation, on the other hand is spelled out by the specific characteristics which define the particular condition of each of them, priest and brother, and the respective tasks which devolve on them as a result.

The article begins by taking up again the theme of art. 44 and stating that each of us is responsible for the common mission and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts. The expression "each of us" is to be understood in a collective

sense: the brother and the priest. It is another way of emphasizing the fundamental common responsibility, which is followed by the reference to the original contribution provided by each of the two figures. One and the same religious consecration, the identical apostolic mission and participation in community life are at the basis of the equality between brother and priest.

Don Rinaldi put it like this in 1927: "When Don Bosco began to think about founding a religious Society, he wanted all its members, priests, clerics and laymen, to enjoy the same rights and privileges... The brothers... are salesians obliged to strive after the same perfection and carry out the very same apostolate which belongs to the essence of the Salesian Society".¹ Don Rinaldi's words reflect those of Don Bosco himself; when speaking of the Congregation to the young apprentices he said: "It is an association of priests, clerics and laymen, especially artisans, who want to live in unity so as to love each other and do each other good... Between the members of the Congregation there are no divisions: we all look upon ourselves as brothers...".²

And so the Constitutions give prominence to the unity of the salesian vocation, but also to the necessity of two kinds of members for the fulfilment of the original mission of the Congregation.

"The sons of Don Bosco", wrote Fr. Ricaldone, "must stand side by side, complete one another, and go forward in carrying out the aims of their identical mission... they are not separate or divergent elements, but the heirs, instruments and executors of the same divine plan".³

This joint presence of laymen and clerics and their indispensability for the mission is not just something incidental but has its roots in the very identity of the Congregation.

The Rector Major, Fr. E. Viganò, wrote: "We find in the Congregation's single vocation two fundamental aspects: the sacerdotal and the lay. It is not simply a case of this or that confrere preferring the ministry or things temporal; it is a matter involving the salesian community as a vital organism, i.e. the Congregation as such, which has of its essence a peculiar and simultaneous sense of both the sacerdotal consecration and the lay dimension, each imbuing the other and forming together a unique life of communion".⁴

Specific characteristics of the two figures

But vocational unity does not deny or disregard the specific nature of the two figures, and the second and third paragraphs of the article dwell on some characteristic features of each.

¹ACS 40, 24 July 1927, p. 574

²BM XII, 121

³ASC 93 (1939), p. 14

⁴E. VIGANO, *The lay element in the salesian community*, ASC 298 (1980), p. 15

1. The salesian brother.

The Rule presents the salesian brother in the first place in his singular salesian vocation, as a "brilliant creation of the great heart of Don Bosco, inspired by Mary Help of Christians", to use the delicately sensitive expression of the Servant of God, Fr. Philip Rinaldi.⁵ The seventh successor of Don Bosco points out the lofty ecclesial significance of this vocation, comparing it with that of the ministerial priesthood: "Radically the difference is not one marked by any negative quality or lack of ecclesial endowment; it is a case of a different choice: the brother has opted for a positive Christian ideal not determined by the sacrament of Holy Orders but constituted by a number of values which form of themselves a true vocational objective of high quality. The GC21 points out clearly the nature of this choice, calling it a 'vocation' which is in itself 'specific' (with its own special character), 'complete' (it lacks nothing), 'original' (the brilliant creation of the Founder), and 'meaningful' (of particular relevance at the present day)".⁶

As a salesian the brother is first and foremost an "*educator*", dedicated by vow to the overall advancement of the young and the common people. He carries out tasks of a cultural, professional, social and financial kind, in addition to those which are of a catechetical, liturgical, and missionary nature; in other words he is engaged in "*every field of education and pastoral activity*". Because, as a religious, he does not act in his own name but receives his mission from the Church, he shares deeply in the pastoral ministry, giving a particular expression to his baptismal priesthood.

But while the salesian brother is carrying out these tasks, he is also giving his characteristic contribution to the community, a contribution which the Constitutions see as deriving precisely from his lay condition. "There are some things", said Don Bosco, that priests and clerics cannot do, and you will do them...";⁷ they are precisely the things which his condition as a 'lay' religious enables him to do.

Hence, after stressing the authentic and fundamental salesian religious vocation and its community dimension, the text goes on to consider the specifically 'lay' form in which the brother lives it. As the GC21 said very clearly: "The lay dimension is the concrete form in which the brother lives and operates as a salesian religious".⁸ The article of the Constitutions says the same thing in different words: the brother "brings... the specific qualities of his lay status". It should be noted that precisely because of this kind of presence, as well as the traditional name of "salesian brother" the Constitutions and Regulations in certain contexts use the term "lay salesian".

⁵ ACS 40, 24 July 1927, p. 574

⁶ ASC (1980), p.10; cf. GC21, 173 ff.

⁷ MB XVI, 313

⁸ GC21, 178

We may ask: in what precisely do the "specific qualities of his lay status" consist, that distinguish him from the lay qualities of the man living in the world?⁹

The SGC gives the following answer: "With the characteristics proper to religious life, he lives his vocation as a member of the laity, seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to God's plan; he exercises his baptismal priesthood, prophetic witness and kingly service, and in this way truly shares in the life and mission of Christ in the Church; with the intensity that derives from his specific consecration, and by 'mandate of the Church (and not merely as a private individual), he fulfils the mission of spreading the Gospel and of sanctifying in a non-sacramental manner; his works of charity are undertaken with greater dedication within a Congregation devoted to the integral education of youth, especially those in need; finally, as regards the christian renewal of the temporal order, since he has renounced worldliness he exercises this form of apostolate as a religious in a most efficacious manner, educating youth to the christian renewal of work and to other human values".¹⁰

The salesian brother is called to live his lay condition according to the salesian charism and in the context of his community.¹¹ The reality of his lay status is not cancelled by his religious profession, but rather gives a special slant to every aspect of the confrere's life: the salesian mission, life of community, apostolic activity, profession of the counsels, prayer and the spiritual life.

It gives to the salesian community too its characteristic aspect that Don Bosco wanted: enriched by its lay aspect the community is able to approach the world more validly as regards its apostolic objectives.

The text does not refer directly to the different roles of the salesian brother, but stresses that his lay condition and his experience, united with a deeply salesian heart,

⁹ It will be useful to keep in mind the significance of some terms in frequent use. "Laity", according to the accepted usage in ecclesial documents (cf. especially LG chap. IV and AA) refers to those who through Baptism have been incorporated into Christ and constituted members of the People of God; in their own way they share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole christian people in the Church and in the world (cf. LG 31). In the Council documents and in the GIG the layman is considered from the vocation standpoint as a member of the faithful distinct from clerics, who are in sacred Orders (cf. LG 31; CIC, can. 207). The religious state is one with peculiar characteristics in the Church, linked with a charism of the Spirit; the conciliar documents explicitly state that the faithful who are either clerics or lay can become religious (cf. LG 43; CIC, can. 588).

In the documents of the magisterium frequent reference is made to secular tasks as belonging to the laity (cf. LG 31: "Their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity"). The term "secular" (and related terms) refers to tasks connected with the "secular" reality, i.e. all temporal realities which concern the present age (as distinct from the realities which directly concern the last end). In one sense the whole Church, because of its pilgrim nature, has a secular character, and therefore all its members are linked to some extent with secular realities. But the laity are more specifically inserted in such realities and it belongs to the laity to insert in them the gospel ferment through their professional contributions.

A distinction needs to be made between secular laity, who foster secular realities and raise their level in a christian fashion, acting within them in virtue of their own duties and laws, and religious laity (which include the salesian brother) who work in specific sectors of the secular realities in virtue of their consecrated status and according to the spirit of their Founder (cf. A.SC 298, p. 25 if.), and bring to them through their professional competence the charitable activity of the Church, offering a living witness to the fact that "the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes" (cf. LG 31)

¹⁰ SGC, 149

¹¹ Cf. ASC 298 (1980), p. 29-30

300 make him particularly *"close... to the young and to the realities of working life"*.

History bears witness to the fact that in the Oratories, in technical and trade schools, in the missions the brothers have carried out a very rich apostolate and have had a most efficacious influence!

We may well think that in the ever more secularized world in which we are living, the presence of the salesian brother becomes correspondingly more urgent and valuable.¹²

We may note finally that the entire text of the Constitutions reveals the interior attitude which underlies the characteristic vocation of the brother, on account of which his salesian heart is anchored in the transcendence he lives in temporal realities, into which he injects the radical power of the Gospel. This enables him to move in a secular context with a mentality which is at the same time both technical and pastoral, and this is of great value to the community!

2. The salesian priest or deacon.

The "*salesian priest or deacon*" is the sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, the sacrament of his ministry as Head of the Church.

Priests, according to Vatican II, exercise the function of Christ as Pastor and Head in proportion to their share of authority.¹³ In fact, "by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, priests are signed with a special character, and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the Head".¹⁴

Between the ministerial priesthood (deriving from the sacrament of Order) and the common priesthood of the faithful (deriving from the sacrament of Baptism) there is a mutual complementarity: they are ordered one to another.¹⁵ From the standpoint of the final purpose of Christian life, primacy belongs to the common priesthood: "All the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God. They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs."¹⁶

But from the point of view of the sacramental efficacy of their insertion in the sacrifice of Christ, the priestly ministry has an essential role on account of the "sacred power" of which it is the bearer: priests, in fact, "exercise within the limits of their authority the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head".¹⁷

¹²Cf. ASC 298 (1980), p. 47-49; the Rector Major presents two authoritative appeals, quoting Don Albera and Don Rinaldi

¹³PO 6

¹⁴PO 2

¹⁵Cf. LG 10

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷LG 28

What happens is that the service of the priestly ministry renders efficacious in
302 the Church the common priesthood of all the faithful. But if priests exercise their

role of presiding they must also, as St Peter warns in his first letter, avoid acting "as domineering over those in (their) charge but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5,3): they must be able to show that they are at the same time both "leaders and members"; "truly 'fathers', but also 'brothers'; teachers of the faith, but mostly 'fellow-disciples' of Christ; 'masters of perfection' for the faithful, but 'witnesses' also by their personal holiness".¹⁸

On the basis of this doctrine of the Council, the Constitutions ask in the first place that salesian priests be all that they should be.

It is both pleasing and significant to recall what Don Bosco said to the Minister Ricasoli who had invited him to Palazzo Pitti at Florence on 12 December 1866: "Your Excellency, I want you to know that Don Bosco is a priest at the altar, a priest in the confessional, a priest among his boys, a priest in Turin, and a priest in Florence. He is a priest in the house of the poor and a priest in the palace of the king and his ministers".¹⁹

This is a wonderful indication of personal identity and unity of life in Don Bosco. "In this way", declares the Council, speaking of priests, "by adopting the role of the Good Shepherd they will find in the practice of pastoral charity itself the bond of priestly perfection which will reduce to unity their life and activity".²⁰

The salesian priest feeds his heart on pastoral charity which can only come from Christ the Shepherd. This is a basic attitude which prompts him to seek through his every word and gesture to be an *authentic pastor* with the heart of Christ himself. It is his first and chief task!

Recalling the decree "Presbyterorum Ordinis", the SGC had this to say: "The priest is the spiritual man and must always have before his eyes the image of Christ, servant and shepherd. His ministry is an act of service, eschatological in character, the visible signs of which are his preaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments. In virtue of his office he publicly proclaims Christ as Saviour of today's world; he gathers together the Christian community, uniting them in Christ's sacrifice, and as their guide he leads them to the Father through Christ in the Spirit".²¹

But the Constitutions emphasize that the salesian priest is called to exercise his ministry *according to the salesian charism in the context of his community*. His model is Don Bosco, whom Pius XI in his Encyclical on the priesthood cited with John Mary Vianney and Joseph Cottolengo as a "star of the first order" and a "true giant of holiness". The salesian priest is a priest according to the spirit and apostolic guidelines which made of our Father a sign of Christ for the young and the common people.

¹⁸ MR 9

¹⁹ BM VIII, 239

²⁰ PO 14

²¹ SGC, 142

The Council itself recognized that within the one priesthood there could be different roles: "All priests contribute to the same purpose, the building up of the Body of Christ, and this demands many kinds of duties and fresh adaptations, especially in our own times".²²

There are therefore different ways of exercising one and the same priestly ministry.

There are many tasks which may await the salesian priest: responsibility for a youth centre, preacher and catechist, teacher and educator, work in a parish, chaplain, group animator, missionary, superior of a community, etc.

The common denominator is the fulfilment of his task with a priestly heart; that he proclaim the Word, that he sanctify and animate a community. The text expresses these intentions and tasks by the word "especially".

The salesian priestly ministry is not something isolated and practised individually. It enters into the communion of pastoral objectives for the complete Christian education of the young which involves also other equally indispensable contributions.

Nevertheless the text emphasizes a basic orientation. Among all their tasks, salesian priests give priority to those characteristic of their ministry, because "it is the first task of priests to preach the Gospel of God to all men",²³ and they are ministers of the sacraments, particularly of the Eucharist and Penance. And so the Gospel, the altar and the confessional represent the priorities for the ministry of every salesian priest.

Essential reciprocal relationship

The last paragraph of the article emphasizes the *essential mutual relationship* that must exist between the lay salesian and the salesian priest in the community, if the latter is to assume its full apostolic physiognomy. This means that in the salesian priest must be found some of the aspects found in eminent form in the vocation of the brother and vice versa, and this to such an extent that the priesthood has no meaning from a salesian point of view if it is not seen in relationship with the figure and contribution of the lay salesian.

On the other hand the lay religious character of the brother does not find its true meaning without conscious reference to the figure and ministry of his priest confreres; the brother lives and works in spiritual and pastoral communion with them.

The article ends with *the statement that the significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up and of its apostolic completeness*. This is an expression in other words of Don Bosco's explicit desire concerning the "form" of the Salesian Society (cf. C 4): the

²² PO 8

²³ PO 4

Salesian Congregation would no longer be itself if one of its components were missing; in every provincial and local community the presence together of clerics and lay members is needed for its "apostolic completeness".

The priestly and lay dimensions require each other and compenetrates in a specific spirituality of apostolic activity. Each is in so strict an integrational relationship with the other that they become mutually essential. In the salesian community priests and brothers take part in a vital exchange of their different aspects, and forge the bond of an intrinsic inter-relationship for carrying out their common mission.

As the Rector Major said at the end of the GC22: "Every confrere, be he cleric or lay, if he has the true awareness of being a 'member', will feel that he shares the responsibility for everything, bringing to it the gift of himself and his particular vocation. The priestly and lay components do not imply the extrinsic summation of two dimensions each belonging to groups of confreres distinct from each other, running on parallel lines and eventually putting together the efforts of each group, but rather a single community which is the true recipient of the one salesian mission. This requires a particular formation of the personality of each confrere, so that in the heart of each clerical salesian there is an intimate feeling of being linked to and coinvolved with 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 salesian community, in each of its members, which bears witness to these sensitivities and carries out undertakings which are at the same time both 'priestly' and lay)." ²⁴

From all this it is not difficult to understand why the Constitutions indicate the "significant and complementary presence" of clerics and laymen as an "essential element" for the "apostolic completeness" of the salesian community. And one can understand too the importance, in pastoral work for vocations, of presenting and illustrating adequately the two figures of salesians, with the specific and rich contribution that each of them brings to the common mission for the young and the poor.

*God our Father,
you distribute your gifts in a variety of ways,
and direct them all to the common end of salvation.
Grant that in our communities
the common riches and diverse gifts
with which you endow lay and priestly members
may be received by each one with gratitude
and used to good effect
for the harmonious building of your Kingdom,
especially among young people.
Through Christ our Lord.*

²⁴ GC22, 80; cf. also GC21, 194-196

ART. 46 YOUNG SALESIANS

The family spirit and the dynamic drive which is characteristic of our mission among young people make particularly important the contribution of young salesians in the apostolate.

They are closer to the rising generations; they can provide inspiration and enthusiasm; they are ready to try new solutions.

The community, by encouraging and guiding this generosity, helps them to mature as religious and apostles.

This article assigns a particular function to young salesians, clerics and young coadjutor brothers, in the realization of the salesian mission. They are deeply involved in apostolic responsibility, even though still in their period of formation. Don Bosco showed a great capacity "for sharing responsibility, even with the youngest of his helpers...; he could find for everyone the right job, suited to his temperament, ability and formation, so that all felt satisfied".¹

Don Bosco's example brings us to the two main points of the present article: the apostolic contribution of young confreres and the attitude of the community in their regard.

The contribution of young salesians

The tremendous importance which the Church today, and Don Bosco yesterday, attribute to the period of youth is undeniable. It is important to the existence of individuals and to the future of humanity; it is a benefit for all, a benefit for humanity itself. "Youth" in fact "represents a heritage of values for the individual, for society and for the Church. It is a treasure in itself for what it is and for what it gives: the richness of its 'being' and the fruitfulness of its 'sharing'. ... Youth is a time for making discoveries, a time when future prospects are seen, a time for making choices, for planning, a time for making responsible and fruitful personal decisions. All this, it is true, is a possibility that in practice is not always realized; but the possibility is nevertheless an objective one, especially in the light of the additional energy and life enjoyed by the 'new man' risen through baptise."²

These considerations are even more valid in the case of your young confreres and well explain the significance of their presence in our communities. They represent the offering of fresh possibilities, a sowing for the future, a springtime of ideals, a flourishing of life.

¹ SGC, 498

² E. VIGANO, AGC 314 (1985), p. 6-7

It is not a matter of fostering idyllic visions. We know that in their heart is found the true measure of what they are, but their eager desires and their freshness of approach have a significant effect in the community. The article of the Constitutions gives prominence to this, without at the same time getting starry-eyed about it.

The text recalls two characteristic aspects of our spirit and mission to explain what it is that makes the apostolic contribution of young salesians particularly valid.

Every community is committed to the building of a 'family': every member can contribute efficaciously to this objective. But it is evident that young confreres through their joy and enthusiasm their spontaneity and expansive nature, and their generosity, are the most lively element in our communities: they are the ones who help most in maintaining the family spirit which renders the communities attractive.

The other reason which makes the contribution of young confreres so valid concerns apostolic activity. Dynamism is a characteristic trait in salesians: by the very fact that our mission is addressed to youths it must necessarily be carried out with a spirit of initiative and renewed enthusiasm. Moreover, art. 10 of the Constitutions says that the centre and synthesis of the salesian spirit is "pastoral charity characterized by youthful dynamism". Our young confreres are best fitted for maintaining and fostering the "*youthful*" style of our apostolic activity.

The value of their contribution is expressed in three traits which they exhibit.

In the first place the Rule states that the young confreres are "*closer to the rising generations*". We know how difficult it is at the present day, and at the same time how important, for an educator to remain sensitive to young people; and a basic attitude of this kind is obligatory for the salesian; "an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them", so as to be able to understand them and share with them (C 39).

Young confreres achieve this spontaneously and without any difficulty, because of their infectious cordiality and their own youthful tastes and interests. They help the community, therefore, to keep in touch with the young; they provide a natural bridge between youngsters and older educators.

The text adds a second trait: "*they can provide inspiration and enthusiasm*". This is furnished by the novelty of their first pastoral experience, their desire to respond with all their strength to the Lord's call, and the creative freshness natural to their age.

Finally, says the article, "*they are ready to try new solutions*". In apostolic work continuity is a good thing, but not obstinate rigidity. Dialogue between older and younger confreres helps in the finding of adequate solutions which are based on experience but at the same time open to new ideas and initiatives.

We should never forget that our Congregation was founded with young people, and that the daring missionary endeavours of the first generations were the work of young salesians!

Welcome by the community

The community welcomes the young confreres as members sharing the common responsibility. It is in its own interest not to waste but rather to develop this new strength given by God to the Congregation. The community must therefore foster their maturing as religious and their apostolic growth, so that their valuable contribution be not lost.

To attain this end the members encourage the young confreres in their generosity, help them to overcome any misgivings, support their initiatives even in the face of passing frustrations, willingly receive their suggestions and new ideas, and bring them in when plans are being made or programmes drawn up.

It is of interest here and much to the point to quote a famous passage from the Benedictine Rule. "... If we have said that we are all called upon to express our opinion, it is because very often the Lord reveals the best decision to one of the younger members".³

Don Bosco's style was no different. His biographer writes: "Thus Don Bosco trained his clerics to use their talents, contenting himself with laying down guidelines and then letting them pursue the goal. Nevertheless he was always ready to come to their assistance".⁴

As well as encouraging the young confreres in their activity, the community is also called upon to guide the direction in which their youthful energies are expended. Apostolic activity needs care and is accompanied by certain risks: that of individualism which separates the confrere from the community, activism which leads to superficiality, and fragmentation which is an obstacle to growth in internal unity.

The wealth of pastoral experience already gained by the community should help to strengthen the favourable conditions and lessen the risks, by example, by advice, but especially by the full insertion of the young confreres in well planned pastoral activity.

These considerations make very clear the urgent need for a real family spirit between salesians of different ages. A happy formula to keep in mind is: Let the older confreres remember that the Congregation does not end with the, and let them younger ones not forget that with them it does not begin!

³ *Rule of St Benedict*, chap. III, "The calling of the brethren to council"

⁴ BM V, 26

*God our Father,
you sow the seeds and a sign of hope
in those who are young.
Bless our young confreres,
guide them in their choices
and sustain them in their difficulties,
so that in generous self-donation
and in more direct contact with the rising generations,
they may be efficacious mediators of the Gospel,
and give to our communities new enthusiasm
in the spirit and style of Don Bosco.
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 47 THE EDUCATIVE COMMUNITY AND LAY PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH OUR WORK

We bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community which involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us.

In this community lay people associated with our work make a contribution all their own, because of their experience and pattern of life.

We welcome and encourage their collaboration, and we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the salesian spirit and the practice of the preventive system.

We foster the spiritual growth of each of them, and to those who may be so inclined we suggest a closer sharing of our mission in the Salesian Family.

The educative and pastoral community

The article opens with a very simple statement: "*We bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community*". This takes on particular importance in putting our educational plan into effect, by contributing to the attainment of the objectives of our apostolic action.

For this reason the salesian community does not close itself in the religious group, but rather expands its communion in ever-widening concentric circles.

Don Bosco did not use the kind of terminology we use today, but in practice he adopted the idea of the educative community by gathering collaborators around him and involving the youngsters themselves in a deeply educational setting. The educative community, therefore, is a characteristic need of our system, which requires a vigorous environment of participation and constructive relationships, and associates everyone, educators and youngsters alike in a single dynamic experience.¹ All educational and pastoral activity inevitably requires a community structure, not only because of the multiplicity and necessary convergence of the different factors involved, but especially because it implies a tissue of relationships and active involvement on the part of all concerned.

The educative community is also a decisive factor in evangelization. The strength of unity lived in an evangelical spirit is already in itself a living testimony, as well as an efficacious way of announcing the Gospel. An evangelised community is of itself an evangelizing power.²

Finally, as the goal ultimately sought, the educative community is a manifestation of Church, which is a reality of communion. This is why in the concrete

¹ Cf. GC21, 102

² Cf. GC21, 62

true "Church experience".

As the Constitutions point out, the educative community is characterised less by the organisation of its roles and structures (which are necessary nonetheless) than by the spirit that animates it and by its *family atmosphere*. The ability to meet together, cordial collaboration, simplicity and spontaneity of style, all come together in a family atmosphere of kindness and goodwill. But above all it tends naturally to become a community of faith, where God is present and communicates himself, where there is the ability to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel, where is possible an authentic experience of Church as a place of communion and participation, so that the young may feel for themselves the worth and significance of human and christian communion with God and with their fellow men.

And so the community should be seen as a continually growing reality, advancing in form and achievement.

Who are the members of this progressively developing community?

The constitutional text replies: "*young people and adults, parents and educators*", or in other words all those concerned in the educational and pastoral work. These are involved and must allow themselves to be involved, they must share and collaborate in the work.

There would be little point in giving a longer list. The salesians have a great work facing them: many people are required for a work of education and all are called upon to make their contribution, even though at different levels and with different roles. It is a question of uniting all their efforts for the realisation of a common project for the benefit of the young.

To bring this about, clarity must be maintained concerning the plan's inspiration, organic unity and consistency, and its practical influence on the programming of various initiatives.³ The awareness of the common mission must be developed; the shared responsibility must be recognized of all who take part in the planning of the work, and the collaboration of each one must be encouraged according to his abilities and the possibilities for personal fulfilment and the sharing of experiences.

The lay people

In the life of the educative and pastoral community valuable and indispensable strength is provided by the "lay people associated with our work". The article makes special mention of them and gives prominence to their distinctive contribution.

There are many reasons why we should give careful consideration to their presence: their large number in both educational and pastoral structures; the

³Cf. GC21, 68

important contribution they make as professional people; their willingness to collaborate in passing on the educative message.

But above all these stands a reason of an ecclesial nature. Vatican II provides a rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral teaching on the theme of the laity. They are the basic element in the People of God,⁴ called to a prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry which they exercise by giving christian animation to the temporal order. The decree "Apostolicam actuositatem" indicates active and responsible participation in the Church's mission as being proper to them and absolutely necessary;⁵ the decree "Ad genres" points to the importance and even indispensability of the laity in the missionary activity of the Church;⁶ the Constitution "Gaudium et spes" describes the commitment of lay people as significant and decisive in the relationship between the Church and the contemporary world. Without their presence, in fact, the many secular environments would not have the benefit of christian witness and action. In particular the Church's magisterium has made abundantly clear the role of the laity in educational structures.⁷

These authoritative indications have contributed to the profile of the layman and recognition of his specific function.

It is not the intention of our Constitutions to summarise the conciliar doctrine on the laity, but to make clear that their presence in salesian work is not just instrumental.⁸ They are there because of an intrinsic need in our Family: Don Bosco recognized and passed on to us the urgent necessity "of uniting the efforts of good people in helping each other to do good".⁹ Lay people therefore are actively present in the salesian educative and pastoral community, in which they have a specific role because of the "*contribution all their own*" which only they can give. Their experience, professional ability and the model of life they provide represent a great and indispensable element in education and pastoral work. The figure of the layman provides young people with a more complete range of models of christian life, allows for a more wide-ranging dialogue on contemporary problems regarding the family and the professions, and gives greater opportunity to the salesians to dedicate themselves to the specific field of animation; the layman exercises an educational role all his own, different from ours but capable of integration with it.

The Constitutions are referring particularly here to the laity who participate fully in the mission of the Salesian Family, but are addressed too to all those lay people who, even though not belonging to our Family, share with us the responsibility for putting our plan into effect. Lay people can be valid and necessary collaborators

⁴ it should be noted that the term 'lay' (or 'layman', 'lay person', 'laity' etc.) as currently used in some environment can be ambiguous. We use the term in the conciliar meaning of "member of the People of God". Cf. in this connection the Rector Major's letter on *The lay person in the Salesian Family*, in AGC 317 (1986)

⁵ Cf. AA 2-3; cf. also LG 31

⁶ Cf. AG 41

⁷ V. *Lay Catholics in schools: witnesses to faith*, CEC, Rome 1982

⁸ Cf. The Rector Major: "The fact that the laity are in the mission with us, and we with them, is not simply a matter of a quantitative summation of forces, and still less is it an addition forced upon us by our losses and absences"; in AGC 317 (1986) p. 14; cf. also GC21, 66

⁹ D.BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, I

who efficaciously complement our educational, pastoral and evangelizing work. In the common task each one maintains his own identity, because from this stems the educational and pastoral richness. But it is also indispensable to cultivate a mutual communion for reciprocal enrichment. As the Rector Major wrote: "It is evidently necessary to be able to bring about between lay and consecrated persons a true ecclesial communion of complementary vocations, founded on Christ, moved by his Spirit, and nourished by convictions of faith, by mutual witness, and by a concrete and practical choice of tasks. In other words it is a question of a deep communion in the same apostolic spirituality".¹⁰

The animating role of the Salesians

The salesian community has a particular task in respect of the educative community as a whole and of each of its members.

The apostolic plan entrusted to the community requires the salesians to take on the role of animators of all the forces which collaborate. This is said explicitly in art. 5 of the General Regulations which describes the salesian religious community as the "*animating nucleus*" of the educative community.

The constitutional text speaks of three specific tasks in this work of animation: the involvement of all the collaborators, their formation, and the proposal of a salesian vocation.

— The community of salesians undertakes in the first place to *welcome and encourage their collaboration*. With regard to the lay person associated with the community's work, the salesian is called on to adopt a positive attitude of welcome acceptance in a family spirit for the contribution given to the realization of the educational project. But that is not sufficient. The authenticity of the welcome and the sense of belonging to a human group are measured by the degree of participation. This is a need at the present day of all associations, and implies a style of involvement in programming and evaluation. The salesian therefore is asked for a creative and positive attitude, able to promote convinced adherence and to open possibilities and space for active participation.

— But participation means more than a quantitative calculation of convergent elements. It implies a common and constantly developed frame of reference, and aims which are shared by all; otherwise it can end up in harmful conflict. And so the second recommendation comes in: *we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the preventive system and foster the spiritual growth of each one*.

The salesian spirit and the preventive system are the key points in educational and pastoral sharing. No intervention can possibly be efficacious without a frame of reference that is valid for all and a common system of values to put before the youngsters. The preventive system ensures common action and unity of intention; the salesian spirit creates harmony of heart and feeling.

¹⁰AGC 317 (1986), p. 14

— The final paragraph of the article extends the formation aspect to the vocational field. Our lay collaborators are not only our fellow educators, but are also Christians in need of continual spiritual growth and of care in the process of their vocational maturing. As salesians, bearers of a charisma which fosters the growth of individuals to full maturity in Christ, we feel responsible for sharing our charism first of all with those who collaborate with us in educational and pastoral work: lay people have the right to expect from us encouragement and an example of holiness.

In particular the text emphasizes the logical consequence of the path which the salesians and their lay collaborators follow together: *a closer sharing of our mission and of Don Bosco spirit in the Salesian Family*. If lay people find themselves welcome in a family atmosphere and environment, if they are formed to the values of the preventive system and the salesian spirit, if they feel personally involved in the great objectives of the education and evangelization of youth, it is natural that they may wish to join those lay Associations which Don Bosco himself thought up for uniting all those who wanted to share in his mission. It is the responsibility of the salesians to foster the process and suggest to them a salesian vocation.¹¹

*God our Father,
raise up in our communities
able and generous lay Christians.
May your Spirit inspire and guide them
in sharing with us the education of young people,
and the advancement of your Kingdom in their hearts.
Help parents to be fully aware of their responsibility
as the first educators of their children.
May faith and charity inspire our relationships,
so that we may be able to realize with them
a true Church experience.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

¹¹ Concerning the significance of the Association of Salesian Cooperators who are in the mission with us, cf. AGC, 317 (1986), p. 19-21

ART. 48 SOLIDARITY WITH THE PARTICULAR CHURCH

The community lives and expresses its apostolic commitment within the particular Church. We become part of its pastoral action which has the Bishop at its head¹ and the directives of the Bishops' Conference as a springboard for action on a wider scale.

We offer the particular Church the contribution of our work and salesian pedagogy, and we receive from it direction and support.

To forge more systematic links we share initiatives with other groups belonging to the Salesian Family and with other religious institutes.

We are ready to cooperate with civil organizations working in the fields of education and social development.

¹ cf. CIC, can. 678,1

In the Church

Articles 6, 31 and 44 of the Constitutions have already spoken of our participation in the Church's mission. This article gives special prominence to the place of our apostolic service in the local Church.

The opening statement emphasizes the rich theological content of the theme. The Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi" made the forthright statement: "This is how the Lord wanted his Church to be: universal, a great tree whose branches shelter the birds of the air, a net which catches fish of every kind or which Peter drew in with one hundred and fifty-three big fish, a flock which a single shepherd pastures. A universal Church without boundaries or frontiers..."¹ "Nevertheless this universal Church is in practice incarnate in the individual Churches made up of such or such an actual part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of a vision of the world, of an historical past, of a particular human substratum".²

It is in this perspective that the article asserts, as though as a premise to what comes later, that the salesian community lives and expresses its apostolic commitment in the particular Church, echoing in this way what is said in the document "Mutuae relationes": "The particular Church is the frame of history in which a vocation expresses itself in concrete form and fulfils its apostolic responsibility. It is here, within the ambit of a definite culture, that the Gospel is preached and received".³

Our vocation as salesian religious has a universal character. To quote "Evangelii nuntiandi" again: "The individual Church should keep their profound openness towards the universal Church. It is quite remarkable, moreover, that the most simple christians, the ones who are most faithful to the Gospel and most open to

¹ EN 61

² EN 62

³ MR 23

the true meaning of the Church, have a completely spontaneous sensitivity to this universal dimension".⁴

"But, at the same time, a Church 'toto orbe diffusa' would become an abstraction if she did not take body and life precisely through the individual Churches. Only continual attention to these two poles of the Church will enable us to perceive the richness of this relationship between the universal Church and the individual Church".⁵

It is in the light of these considerations that we accept the reference to the Bishop as bearing the first responsibility and the directives of the Bishops' Conference as indispensable guidelines in our apostolic action. In fact, the individual Bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their sown particular Churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal Church".⁶ For this reason the Council recommends religious to collaborate in the various pastoral ministries, due consideration being given to the particular character of each institute.⁷

The article makes these exhortations of the Council concrete for us salesians by means of two guiding statements: to be faithful to our own charism "*we offer the contribution of our work and salesian pedagogy*"; and to be attentive to the Church "*we receive from it direction and support*".

The first point emphasizes the special values we are to bring to the particular Church: the kind of pastoral activity, which is typical of Don Bosco and his preventive system.

The second, on the other hand, urges us to accept the guidance of the Bishops, to enable us to play a consistent part in the combined pastoral work and to have the whole particular Church behind us in our own work.

In communion with the groups belonging to the Salesian Family and with other religious institutes

Within the particular Church our Constitutions emphasize the fact that if our pastoral service is to be coherent it must be organically connected with two realities: the Salesian Family and the religious life as a whole.

— The different groups of the Salesian Family are at the service of the local Churches just as we are. Don Bosco said, for instance, of the Cooperators: "The Association will depend absolutely on the Supreme Pontiff, the Bishops and Parish Priests in everything appertaining to religion".⁸ Don Bosco's charism is a *single unified reality* and must be offered as such in the Church; its visible manifestation is the *Salesian Family*, which must be ever more present in the Church as a united group.

⁴ EN 64

⁵ EN 62

⁶ LG 23

⁷ CD 35

⁸D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, V, 2

important for fostering a better insertion and more efficacious salesian service: this is what was already suggested in art. 5.

— As regards the connection with other *institutes of religious life*, the Church herself has given norms indicating how this is to be done: it consists in sharing, through appropriate organisms, in common initiatives for the increase of religious life in the Church.⁹ In our case this is also a precious heritage left to us by the Lord's Spirit for the good of his Church (cf. C 13).

With this text the Congregation intends explicitly to make its own the doctrine of Vatican II on the mystical greatness of the particular Church and on its pastoral charity, and indicates some practical consequences.

The organization of any pastoral plan takes place at two levels:

- at the diocesan level in so far as the Church finds its centre of unity in the Bishop;
- at national or regional level with a group of dioceses which have social and cultural affinity with each other, and common traditions of a linguistic, theological and spiritual kind: episcopal conferences are the organisms best suited for the expression of common pastoral concern at national level, or at regional level covering more than one diocese.

In the neighbourhood

A fundamental norm of pastoral action is collaboration, based on common sense and humility.

We do not pretend that by ourselves we can solve all the problems of youth, nor are we so ingenuous as to dissociate these problems from the intricate overall picture. We know that around us exist organisms, movements and people who are zealous as we are for the integral development of youth. In the article, the horizons of cooperation become ever wider. Every salesian community considers it an apostolic duty to collaborate with all the active forces present in society.

Art. 57 will say that the salesian community is "attentive to the cultural milieu in which it carries out its apostolic work, at one with those among whom it lives" and that "it cultivates good relations with all". If we put alongside this note the brief practical indication in the present article regarding cooperation with civil organizations working in the fields of education and social development, there emerges the image of an *apostolic community actively inserted into its neighbourhood*, in active interaction with the dynamic factors which contribute to its development. The community is called to be a centre with open doors, ready to deal with the collective repercussions of its activities, committed to participate in the life of the human community in a give and take fashion, and not retreat into its own ivory castle.

⁹V. the Council's observations on "Conferences of Major Superiors" in PC 23; cf. also MR 48. 61

The civil organizations dealing with education and social development would seem to be the most suitable organisms to which we can offer our cooperation in fulfilment of our policy of service to the young and the poor. The Rector Major said in his Report to the GC 22 on the state of the Congregation: "It is not humility to have no weight at national and international level in youth problems".¹⁰

*God our Father,
by virtue of its apostolic mission
you insert each of our communities in a particular Church.
Grant that under the guidance of the Bishop
and in collaboration with other forces in the Church
we may work with dedication and loyalty for its growth.
Give us the grace of faith, ardour of charity,
detachment from ourselves and zeal for your Will.
May we be able to discern what is true and good,
that we may be able to cooperate with human organizations
for the education and promotion of youth.
Above all, make us generous in our communion
with the other groups of our Family,
so that by all means and in every way
we may contribute to the building in unity of your Church,
the mystical Body of your Son,
who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.*

¹⁰ GC22, RRM 1978-1983, 337; on the insertion of the salesian community into the neighbourhood, v. "Comunita salesiana nel territorio" (Department of Youth Pastoral Work, Rome 1986)

CHAPTER V

IN FRATERNAL AND APOSTOLIC COMMUNITIES

“Let love be genuine...: love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour... Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality... Live in harmony with one another” (Rom 12, 9. 10. 13. 16)

The length of the quotation leads us to meditate on the whole of chapter 12 of the Letter to the Romans, which is rich in theological and pastoral motives for a sound and intensive community life. First however let us recall the more general context of Rom 12-15: it is the great pauline exhortation full of imperatives, following on the indications concerning grace contained in the preceding chapters of the Letter. It is the "agape" poured out by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the redeemed (Rom 5) which is the foundation, inspiration and justification for the new life of christians, among themselves, in their various life environments, and in the face of political authorities (chap. 13). They must never forget the very natural reasons, rooted in faith, for living in a worthy manner the ethical responsibilities of this faith.

More specifically, chap. 12 — but also other passages in Rom 13-15, and even elsewhere in the New Testament (C 51 expressly quotes Col 3, 12-13) — begins with a "leitmotiv" of extraordinary importance: the living of relationships of charity and mutual service, with the awareness and desire of making a living sacrificial gift, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12,1-2). From this follows the intention, and with it the strength, not to oppose the various charisms one to another but to put them in common (12, 3-8), to live in mutual love, a love which is genuine and authentic (v. 9), imbued with brotherly affection ("philadelphia") shown in reciprocal esteem (v. 10). The realism of situations often calls for solidarity with one's brothers (i.e. the "saints") in their needs, particularly those making apostolic journeys (missionaries) and who therefore need generous hospitality (v. "I 3); but love means a sharing stemming from deep feelings with an intuition and delicacy coming from the heart, the mutual sharing of joys and sorrows, and at the same time the mortification of impulses to selfishness and conceit (vv.15- 16).

It is truly striking how the great axioms of evangelical love acquire concrete qualities in the light of human needs whenever people live together. The articles of the Salesian Constitutions, following Don Bosco, spell out the realism of this christian love, of which the details are not without significance since in love everything is of value.

“To live and work together is for us salesians... a sure way of fulfilling our vocation”. The salesian apostolic plan is a *community project*: our evangelical life develops in a brotherly community, to which in the first place the apostolic mission is entrusted (cf. C 2.3.24.44). This chapter V of the second part dwells in particular on a description of the community dimension of our life and mission.

1. From Don Bosco to the present day

The treatment of the fraternal and apostolic community in the first Constitutions, written by our Founder, is rather brief and fragmentary, although the experience of community life was deep and enriching,

In the draft of 1858 only the first article of chap. II on the “form of the Congregations” describes the fraternal community in words and expressions graven in the heart of every salesian, which are an emblematic presentation of the spirit desired by the Founder: "The associates all live together in common, bound only by the bond of brotherly love and the simple vows, which so unite them as to make them one in heart and soul in order to love and serve Gods".¹ The spiritual and practical implications of brotherly communion were then illustrated in various parts of the Constitutions (forms of the Society, obedience poverty, practices of piety, etc.).

But that brotherhood lived in common was one of the essential requirements in the mind of Don Bosco in founding his Society is borne out frequently in what he said and wrote. We may recall in particular his conference of 11 March 1869, when he made use of the Pauline image of the-body-made up of many coordinated members all subordinated to the head to exalt the value of brotherhood, and explained what it meant for him to *"live in unum locum, in unum spiritum, in unum agendi finem"*.²

Until the GC19 the treatment in the Constitutions of the fraternal and apostolic community underwent no significant modifications or changes.

The text of the Constitutions as revised by the SGC, with the involvement of the whole Congregation, contained an entire chapter on the "fraternal and apostolic community" (art.50-57).. Behind the drafting of these articles lay the careful work of revision and updating desired by Vatican II, and especially the deeper ecclesial analysis which had matured during the Council and a new understanding of the concept of brotherly community as Don Bosco had meant it for his Salesians.

The GC22, as we know, completed the study of the salesian community, in the light of the Congregation's experience and also of the norms of the new Code of Canon Law, enriching the material and putting it in a different order.

2. The leading ideas expressed in the text

For a full understanding of chapter V as a whole it is well to keep in mind some basic ideas which guided the General Chapters in drafting it.

a. The "communion-community" relationship.

The text gives a clear presentation of the fraternal and apostolic community's life in its profound linkage with the mystery of the “communion” manifested in the community.

¹ *Costituzioni* 1858 II, 1(cf. F. MOTTO, p. 82)

²Cf. BM IX, 267-271

through which man is called to be part of the same communion which exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and is glad to find everywhere, especially among those who believe in Christ, brothers with whom he shares the mystery of his relationship with God. Through the gift of communion the Christian lives in the charity and builds the unity for which Jesus prayed.³

Communion in its deepest aspect is a specific witness which religious must offer to their brothers: "Experts in communion, religious are, therefore, called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and in the world, witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design...Religious are communally a prophetic sign of intimate union of man with God, who is loved above all things. Furthermore... they are a sign of fraternal fellowship".⁴

Communion is lived, manifested and transmitted in the "*community*", a concrete form of aggregation, built on the foundation of stable visible relationships, with mediating structures and instruments which make it possible to share the gift of God and participate in it in charity. The structure and development of the *common life*, therefore, starts from the central nucleus constituted by the "mystery of communion" and, through the visible mediation of the community in various ways, eventually reach concrete ways of life such as, for example, living together in the same house.

The constitutional articles in this chapter aim at illustrating both the communion (the trinitarian, Christological and ecclesiological aspect) and the community, formed by groups of confreres who, at various levels, share the values of the salesian vocation.

b. Specifically salesian communion and community.

The articles of the Rule which deal with the fraternal and apostolic community avoid all generic statements and describe the specifically salesian elements, with constant reference to the thought of Don Bosco and salesian practice; they also endeavour to locate the theme in the general picture of the Congregation's *family spirit*. In this perspective communion is presented as a gift of the Spirit bestowed on every salesian with his vocation; it is a gift which must permeate the structures of living together, information, interpersonal relationships and apostolic activities.

c. Relationship between individual and community.

The constitutional text develops at some length the relationship between the individual and the community. On the one hand the salesian community, trustee of Don Bosco's charism, is of its nature the place where a deep and authentic experience of God according to the salesian spirit can be obtained; on the other hand it is in the community that the experience is communicated and shared by each confrere.

³Cf. "*Comunione e comunita*", Italian Episcopal Conference, Rome 1981, 4. Cf. also the Final Report of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, 1985 (II C,I), which gives a synthesis of the Council's doctrine on the mystery of "communion" in the Church

⁴ Cf. "*Religious and human promotion*", CRIS, Rome 1980, 24

In fact, the desire for this spiritual experience, sustained by the atmosphere of joy and brotherly welcome, is a valid help for the "creation of surroundings favourable to the spiritual progress of each member of the community".⁵

Each confrere who is accepted and inserted in a community will mature fully as a salesian if, under the dynamic urge of pastoral charity, he grows in the love of God and of his brothers, and commits himself to the construction of the brotherly community in which he lives, by the total, coherent and faithful offering of himself. From this standpoint, even aging and sick confreres have an important part to play in the mutual and affective exchange of spiritual and material benefits between the community and the individual members.

d. *Significance of community structures.*

In the overall picture of salesian religious community life the various communal structures of communication, service, government etc., acquire their authentic significance.

Basically the structures have a double purpose, which must be pursued together: they aim in the first place at the complete and harmonious religious maturing of each individual mission entrusted to the community.

If looked at incompletely only under its juridical or functional aspect, the community may seem to be a structure whose sole purpose is a particular work; but if observed from the standpoint of its "mystery", it rises above the purely functional or instrumental level and becomes "a family gathered in the Lord's name".⁶ Such a family, by its very existence, is already a sign of the presence of the risen Lord, the permanent source of communion in the Spirit for the entire People of God.

Every structure in the Congregation finds its justification to the extent in which it is a bearer of saving love. The individual confrere and the community as a whole, using all the structures, become forces of salvation; and so each member and the community as such, filled with the charity of Christ the Shepherd, from being saved become also saviours of others, illustrating Don Bosco's slogan: "*salve, salvando salvati*".

3. Plan of the chapter

An overall glance at the handling of the fraternal community in the text allows us to get a rapid impression of the main ideas developed and the relationship between them

- A. *Significance and bonds of communion:*
art. 49: Importance of life in community
art. 50: The bonds of unity

⁵ ET 39; cf. also "*Religious and human promotion*", 15

⁶ PC 15

- B. Interpersonal relationships between members of the community
 - art. 51: Relationships of fraternal friendship*
 - art. 52: The confrere in the community*
 - art. 53: Sick and aging confreres*
 - art. 54: Death of the confrere*
 - art. 55: The rector in the community*

- C. A solid and open community: *art. 56: A welcoming community art. 57: An open community art. 58: The provincial community art. 59: The world community*

After stating in the first two articles the values and bonds which essentially identify every salesian community (A), the next five articles present at some length the fundamental personal relationships (B) which, starting from the primacy of the person, translate the salesian charisma and spirit into terms of experience, commitment and community style. Only after a consideration of these interpersonal aspects in the community, a further four articles (C) go into details about some more directly structural aspects which concern hospitality, insertion in the neighbourhood and the local Church, and linkage between the communities of the province. The final article presents the world community from the aspect of a fraternal and apostolic community.

Schematically therefore the treatment of the subject begins with a description of the community seen as a *mystery of communion*, passes on to the *interpersonal* relationships through which the mystery becomes a living and practical fact in the *person* of each salesian, and finally deals with the *structures* in which salesian communion is incarnated and made visible.

ART. 49 IMPORTANCE OF LIFE IN COMMUNITY

To live and work together is for us salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation.

This why we come together in communities,¹ where our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit, and so create communion between person and person.

The community is a reflection of the mystery of the Trinity: there we find a response to the deep aspirations of the heart, and we become for the young signs of love and unity.

¹ cf. CIC, can. 608

Living and working together, a fundamental requirement of our vocation

The first paragraph of the article provides a direct linkage with the preceding section dealing with the mission and with the entire salesian apostolic project. The text opens with a fundamental statement: the Salesians form a Congregation whose members feel the intimate need of communion of life and activity: *"To live and work together is for us salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation"*. This is an explicit option which goes with our religious profession.

It means that the salesian vocation is inconceivable without concrete communion in common life among the members. It is precisely the communal bond between the confreres that constitutes their living and working together as Salesians.

The fundamental reasons for this statement are not far to seek: because we are baptized, the requirement of fraternal life is born of the fact that we are members of the Body of Christ and sons of the same Father; as religious we feel obliged to live in meaningful fashion the radical aspects of brotherhood; but here it is especially in our quality as Salesians that we are aware of being called to form a true family, practising charity in a tangible way and making youngsters sharers in it.

Art. 49 is a clear echo of what the constitutions have already said earlier in art. 2 ("We, the Salesians of Don Bosco, form a community of the baptized,...resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan"), and especially in art. 3 ("Our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration"). The communal aspect gives its full meaning to the personal commitment of the salesian who, "as a responsible member, puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks" (C 22; cf. Also C 44-45).

If the mission is entrusted first and foremost to the community (cf. art. 44), the individual salesian must perceive as a "fundamental requirement" of his vocation his openness to the community and his constant intention to put at its disposal for the common mission his gifts of nature and grace. Our complex educational and pastoral

tasks need "teams" of workers whose members are closely united and animated by a living charity.

A dynamic charity of this kind, which makes the individual gravitate towards the community, even overcoming every barrier of selfish individualism so as to put everything in common, is "a sure way of fulfilling our vocation" and a guarantee of success as regards personal holiness and apostolic efficiency.

"We create communion between person and person"

In the second paragraph the article goes on to explain in a more intimate sense the communion which binds us together. Our relationships in apostolic work are not of the purely functional "professional" kind ("You're in charge of sport, I'm in charge of liturgy"), nor even exclusively hierarchical ("You're the rector, I'm a rank and file confrere; you're the parish priest, I'm a curate"). Before all else our relationships are "brotherly": beyond his office and function I see the other person as a brother with his unique vocation, and I am seen in the same way: our love for each other leads us to share all we have".

This brotherly love is at the foundation of our community life: Don Bosco spoke simply of "*family spirit*". just as in a true family, in sharing everything we bring about the meeting and communion of individuals on the basis of a loving exchange: this is what makes a "true" community! Art. 16 already indicated this perspective very clearly, presenting it as one of the characteristic traits of the salesian spirit; art. 51 will specify it still further.

We emphasize the expression "*we create communion between person and person*". In introducing the chapter it was said that communion is the objective to which community life tends. Here the concept is taken up again and, going in a certain sense beyond the idea of "common life" alone (indispensable though it be), it is stated that communion concerns individuals, who feel themselves welcomed, valued and loved. Communion of this kind finds its root in God (we are "one" in the Lord Jesus and in his Spirit), but it needs the collaboration of everyone: it is never realized automatically, even in the most favourable conditions, but is the result of continual effort on the part of all members of the community, each of whom must play his daily part in this unending work of construction.

"The community is a reflection of the mystery of the Trinity"

The last paragraph is a synthetic expression of the greatness of a community which courageously strives for communion in love. This communion is manifested in three directions: in relationship to God, with regard to the members of the community, and in relationship with the beneficiaries of our mission.

The highest quality of fraternal communion is without doubt that of making the community a *reflection of the very mystery of the living God*. What, in fact, is the

325 Trinity, if not a total and infinite communion of love? It is the perfect encounter of

three Persons, absolutely original and essentially related to each other, in sharing the riches of the unique divine nature.

The Church, the fruit of the loving design of the Trinity, is seen to be "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."¹

Like the Church and in the Church, the authentic salesian community shares in the mystery of the Trinity, realizing the supreme prayer of Jesus: "(I pray) that they may all be one: even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee" (On 17, 21). Such is the origin and destiny of our community. Through its reflection in the Trinity, the salesian better understands why to live and work together" is a "fundamental requirement" of his vocation, and why charity is the community's connecting medium.

On the other hand, we know very well that man is made to love and be loved. Love, received and given, is the sun which opens the human heart. One does not enter community to suffer but to be happy. Don Bosco has told us: "When this brotherly love reigns in a community towards one another, and all rejoice in another's good just as though it were their own, then that house becomes like heaven itself, and justifies the words of the prophet David: 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity' ".²

The recent General Chapters have been at pains to emphasize the *human value of the salesian community*;³ it is quite normal for the confreres to seek and find in it a maturing process, balance and happiness.

Finally the text highlights how fraternal communion is directly concerned with the salesian educational and pastoral mission. This communion is the sign and concrete proof of the truth we teach and the charity which animates us. The love of the God who is Charity, diffused in hearts by the Spirit of Jesus, is the very essence of the Gospel and of Christian salvation. The truly united community can proclaim Jesus Christ successfully; its life is a constant and eloquent sermon: "we become for the young signs of love and unity". On the other hand the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi" warns us that "the power of evangelization will find itself considerably diminished if those who proclaim the Gospel are divided among themselves".⁴

In this way we are encouraged to do everything possible to realize a kind of community able to enrich us with so many precious benefits.

¹LG 4; cf. also the Final Report of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, Rome 1985, II. C (The Church as communion)

²D. BOSCO, *introduction to the Constitutions*, Brotherly charity; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 236

³Cl. SGC, 483-488; cf. also GC21, 34-37; E, VIGANO, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 36-37

⁴Cf. EN 77

*Lord, one God and perfect Trinity,
source and end of all our being, infuse
the charity and light of your Spirit into
our communities,
and make them a clear reflection
of your mystery of communion.*

*Grant that we may love each other in a family spirit,
in the total sharing of every good,
so that we may build
a true communion of persons,
to manifest to the eyes of men
the presence and power of your eternal Love,
and direct them to you, the one true good.
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 50 THE BONDS OF UNITY

God calls us to live in community and entrusts us with brothers to love.

Brotherly love, our apostolic mission and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the bonds which form us into one and constantly reinforce our communion.

We thus become one heart and one soul to love and serve God,¹ and to help one another.

¹ cf. C 1875, II, 1

In the face of numerous and repeated obstacles which our frailty raises in the life of communion (selfishness, diffidence, cultural differences, unpleasant temperaments, different views on apostolic projects etc.), we wonder whether brotherly communion can really animate our community¹, and make it the sign of the love of the Trinity spoken of in the preceding article.

In a faith perspective and in harmony with Don Bosco's teaching the present article asserts that communal charity stems from the very gift of the salesian vocation; because of this the bonds of unity and communion originate in the dynamic structural elements of the salesian vocation, which are: love for every confrere, the common apostolic mission, and the practice of the evangelical counsels which we share together.

Salesian vocation and brotherly communion

The first paragraph links love of one's brothers with the intervention of God who has called us all to share the Christian and salesian vocation.

The text takes us back, first of all, to the reality of our baptism, through which we have been introduced into the great family of God and having acquired many brothers in Christ; it then recalls the specific bond which has linked us to the religious family, in which Don Bosco's charism has united us in a true spiritual consanguinity in order to be "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people" (C 2).²

In this way the Rule emphasizes the *supernatural origin of the community*, which is born of the grace of God.

Community life, therefore, an essential element of our vocation (cf. C 3), is a gift of God given at the moment he called us; but it is a gift which must become an explicit and uninterrupted personal commitment. In the light of faith we recognize that we do not choose our own confreres but receive them from God our common Father. He "entrusts" them to us as so many "brothers to love".

¹ Cf. SGC. 493; GC21, 34

² One of the sources from which the text draws its inspiration is also a passage from *Gaudium et spes*: "God desired that all men should form one family and deal with each other in a spirit of brotherhood" (GS 24)

In this context we draw attention to the particular significance of the word "*brothers*": It is a reminder that, beyond differences of origin, age, culture and functions, every salesian is sensitive in the first place to everything that unites us in brotherly equality: we are all equally salesians; the same call of the Father has committed us to a common mission to be fulfilled together; the very superiors are first and foremost brothers who have received particular tasks and responsibilities for the good of all.

The bonds of unity and brotherly communion

The second paragraph states that our brotherly communion is consolidated and continually develops when nourished by the three key elements of our salesian vocation: the practice of brotherly love, the carrying out of the apostolic mission, and the practice of the evangelical counsels. These are the "bonds of unity" indicated also by our Founder in the Rule he wrote himself.³

a. Brotherly love.

The conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis" declares that the daily gestures of brotherly love become a source of unity and communion in the light of the Lord's Passover: "Religious, as members of Christ, should live together as brothers and should give pride of place to one another in esteem (cf. Rom 12,10), carrying one another's burdens (cf. Gal 6, 12). A community gathered together in the Lord's name enjoys his presence (cf. Mt. 18,20), through the love of God which is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5,5)".⁴

Brotherly communion is not something automatic; it requires the daily overcoming of barriers created by personal selfishness, diversity of temperament, jealousy and discord etc.; this subjugation is possible if each religious strives to cultivate in his heart attitudes of forgiveness and reconciliation. As one author writes: "Sharing and generosity in material things make practical a communion of spirits and hearts which has its origin in the presence in all believers of a single Spirit which makes all of them participants in God's feast of love; this interior communion is indicated by Christ's Passover, of its nature it implies forgiveness... This explains why it often happens that the first place is occupied by the need for reconciliation and not by the joy of unity found among people who spontaneously agree with one another: my brother will be first of all the one given to me by God to love as part of my incorporation in Christ".⁵

In his Introduction to the Constitutions Don Bosco, after stating that "the house becomes heaven itself", goes on to say that it becomes changed into hell "as

³ Cf. Costituzioni 1875, II, 1(cf. F. MOTTO, p. 83); cf. also the entire chap. I of the same text, which deals with the object and aim of the Society.

⁴ PC 15

⁵ J.M.R. TILLARD, *Davanti a Dio e per il mondo*, Alba 1975, p. 229-230

328 soon as self-love gains dominion there, and disagreements and dislikes arise

among the members". Our Holy Founder, with the richness of his human and religious experience, continues his reflections on brotherly charity by comparing the joy of the communal relationship lived by those who are "reconciled", with the harm done by grumbling, strife, anger and refusal to forgive. For Don Bosco the good religious becomes an authentic witness when he speaks well of his fellow religious and, when occasion arises, seeks to excuse his failings".⁶

b. *The salesian mission.*

The mission entrusted to the community is a powerful means for creating a deep communion: we cannot forget that the first community of salesians was built up around Don Bosco to carry out a "*practical exercise of charity*".⁷

A glance at our apostolic mission is a constant stimulus to us to overcome every form of selfishness and individualism. We become aware that as a community we cannot limit ourselves to being a "convent", rich in peace and recollection, or simply a well organized and efficient working team; with the strength and light of faith we must cross the threshold of the mystery and recognize that we are living members of the Body of Christ, with a well defined function and mission in God's designs.

The place which God, in his plan of salvation, assigns to the Congregation,, to its individual communities and to each confrere depends entirely on the unity and strength of cohesion intended by the divine saving plan itself. For an integral living of the salesian mission it is necessary, therefore, to live in perfect "koinonia" one's membership of an apostolic community.

The individual apostolic actions of the confreres find their unique significance of communion at various levels in the eternal plan of the Father, in the saving mission of the Church, in the educational and pastoral mission of the Congregation, in the concrete project of each single community, and finally in the charity which inspires and unifies the life and existence of the individual confrere (cf. C 14). At the very moment when the salesian uses his powers of saving love to the maximum to reach the youngster who is poorest and farthest away, he needs to draw in his innermost depths on the most genuine salesian principles. This is possible only if he is in communion with the rich salesian patrimony which has come down to us from Don Bosco, and in close union with the community where he must be able to regenerate every day the charism of the salesian spirit.

When Don Bosco, on 11 March 1869, told the salesians and youngsters of Valdocco of the approval of the Salesian Society, he said that charity is the force of cohesion and unity of spirit and action, and that carrying out the mission together is the source of unity and communion: "If, as members of this body which is our Society, we are willing to perform any task, if we are animated by charity and guided by

⁶D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Brotherly charity; cf. Appendix to t Constitutions 1984, p. 236

⁷Cf. Minutes of meeting of 26.1.1854, BM V, 8

obedience, our Society will prove its worth and will have the energy to perform great
330 deeds for God's glory, for the good of our neighbour, and for the welfare of its

members... We must also keep in mind our Society's purpose, which is the moral and intellectual education of poor destitute boys by the use of such means as Divine Providence shall send us.⁸

c. Practice of the Vows.

We shall see later in great detail (cf. Chap. VI) how the evangelical counsels are lived in the fraternal community, but even at this point the Rule gives prominence to the fact that the evangelical life of the counsels has a special role to play in the building of love.

Obedience is the strength of union, of love and convergence, and of availability for the common mission. It is in fact obedience to the Lord himself for his service. It is expressed in the fidelity of all to the same Rule and in the acceptance of decisions of the community and the superior. Obedience implies "convergence" in the two phases of seeking and fulfilling God's will.

Poverty, in turn, makes a powerful contribution to uniting us with the beneficiaries of our mission, and to making us dependent on each other. Each one contributes his own goods and resources, and in this way helps the community to gain a livelihood. But in return each one also receives according to his needs. Solidarity works in two senses: each one is useful to all and gives to them; each one has need of all and receives from them. A continual movement of giving and receiving circulates among the members and deepens their communion.

True *chastity* is a strong expression of love: it has never dried up the sources of affection; on the contrary it points them in an evangelical direction, it purifies and intensifies them. By renouncing by vow the carnal expression of love, we are made more free to love all our brothers in the strength of the Spirit. Later on art. 83 will say that chastity "encourages true friendships and helps to make the community a family".

One cannot overemphasize the point that the vows are at the service of love and communion. In the salesian spirit obedience, poverty and chastity cannot exist without their fraternal aspect; their authenticity can be judged by the effectiveness of their contribution to a peaceful and unruffled community life.

"One heart and one soul"

The article ends with a paragraph which takes up again a thought which has been expressed in the constitutions from the very first text: "The associates all live together in common, bound only by the chains of brotherly love and the simple vows,

⁸BM IX, 270

which unite them in such a manner as to make them *one in heart and soul, in order to love and serve God*".⁹ This is a clear reference to the life of the first Christian community, described in Acts 4, 32, from which our Founder drew his inspiration,

as also did explicitly the Council.¹⁰

In a passage referring to fraternal charity in his Introduction to the Constitutions, Don Bosco wrote: "Our Lord takes great pleasure in seeing brethren dwelling in his house *in unum*, i.e. united in heart and mind, serving God and *helping one another* in charity. This is the praise given to the early Christians by St Luke, that they so loved one another that it seemed they had but one heart and soul.¹¹ We can understand better these words of Don Bosco in the light of his conference on 11 march 1869 from which we have already quoted: "Oh how good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers! It is beautiful to live united by a bond of brotherly love, strengthening one another in prosperity and hardship, in joy and sorrow, in mutual assistance and counsel by word and deed".¹²

After such insistence by our Founder it would indeed be strange not to find in our Constitutions an appeal for "cor unum et anima una". It is true to say that in these days of tension and easy divergence Don Bosco's teaching is still practical and right up to date.

There is no true salesian community without hearts imbued with mutual goodwill, which does not seek unanimity of spirit, which does not strive to bring about a convergence of wills in a double concern of the members to help each other and serve the Lord with the same enthusiasm. This paragraph should be seen as among the richest in its evangelical and salesian overtones.

*God our father,
you have called us to live in community
and given us brothers to love.
Make efficacious among us the sacred bonds
which bind us together and to you,
so that we may grow every day
in our commitment to live communion,
and so form one heart and one soul
to love and serve you,
to help and sustain each other,
and to bring your Gospel to our fellow men.
Through Christ our Lord.*

⁹ *Costituzioni* 1858, II, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 83)

¹⁰ Cf. PC 15

¹¹ D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Brotherly charity; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 236

¹² BM IX, 268

ART. 51 RELATIONSHIPS OF FRATERNAL FRIENDSHIP

St Paul exhorts us: "Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other".¹

The family spirit is the hallmark of the salesian community and inspires every moment of its life: work and prayer, meals and recreation, meetings and other encounters.

In an atmosphere of brotherly friendship we share our joys and sorrows, and we are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences.

¹ Col 3,12-13

Articles 51-55 describe how brotherhood in the salesian community works in practice: they deal, in fact, with the principal interpersonal relationships which must be instituted between the members of the community. The description opens with an article which presents some fundamental attitudes, in which are incarnated various facets of brotherhood covering every moment of the day, which together create the characteristic "family spirit" which must distinguish Don Bosco's community; also emphasized is the way in which the atmosphere of brotherly friendship becomes participation and shared responsibility.

Virtuous communal attitudes

The quotation from St Paul (Col 3,12-13) is an exhortation to practise the communal virtues which make possible and enrich brotherly friendship in the Christian community. They are virtues which are eminently human, but which nevertheless find their basic reason for the Christian in the fact that he has been chosen by God, has been placed in the orbit of Christ's salvation, and is by definition "loved by God". The new life of the baptized person (chosen, made holy and full to overflowing with divine love) must make evident the love of God which is poured into the heart of the believer; such a manifestation of love in the life of every son of God becomes, according to the nature of the interpersonal relationship, "*compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, mutual forbearance and forgiveness*"

The Constitutions apply all this to the salesian community and, avoiding any contrast between the natural and supernatural, situate the brotherly friendship which must develop in the community in the context of our experience of being "chosen, holy and beloved"; every salesian in fact (like every baptized person) makes love for his fellow men concrete in genuine brotherly friendship. When Christ gathers us together in community—a "little Church" — he invites us to love each other after his own example: "Love one another, even as I have loved you" (On 13, 34).

Our authentic tradition from St Francis de Sales to Don Bosco and on to Dominic Savio shows us that a friendship inspired by God can perfectly integrate "human" aspects; it adds to them its own "grace" and rejects any selfish imitations.

This is what is indicated in the first paragraph of the article which, through the mouth of St Paul, invites us as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, to commit ourselves with a generous heart to those attitudes which are typical of evangelical friendship: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, mutual forbearance and forgiveness: demanding virtues which have always been the mark of true friendship!

Family spirit in the community

The human attitudes of which the Apostle speaks, strengthened by grace, lead therefore to brotherly friendship, that deep friendship which Jesus showed to his disciples ("I have called you friends"-- Jn 15, 15), and which is the ideal for every true evangelical friendship. The article, right from its very title ("Relationships of fraternal friendship"), proposes this same ideal to the salesian community.

It may be useful at this point to recall the path that each one is called upon to follow. Incorporation into the community brings with it the gift of brotherhood: this is something objective, perceptible by the light of faith, through which God gives us to each other as a "brother to love" (cf. C 50). It is a question of behaving in such a way that brotherhood blossoms into friendship, i.e. tends to open up to a deep intercommunication, to a reciprocal relationship in which is felt the giving and exchange of affection, a participation by each one in the life of the other. Evidently this is not a matter of exclusively human friendship, but one which is born of the Lord's gift (cf. also C 83).

The text reminds us that this ideal is realized in our case in that "family spirit" which is characteristic of our community. Already art. 16 has stated that the family spirit is one of the components of the salesian spirit: the salesian community is the primary environment where we experience and share this spirit; "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".

According to salesian tradition the family spirit integrates and completes the relationships of brotherly friendship with those of the father-and-son kind between superiors and confreres and between salesians and youngsters. Enlightening in this regard is a page from the historian who was steeped in the atmosphere of Valdocco at the time of our Founder: "Writing on 9 June 1867 to the salesians at the Oratory, Don Bosco told them of his ideal that they should *form 'a family of brothers around their father'*. Speaking more generally he said in 1873 that every rector is a father who cannot fail to love his sons'. Family life among the confreres is the best way to ensure the same kind of life among the youngsters... Where it exists it is a real panacea for outlawing nostalgia, long faces, conspiracies and other nuisances, and ruinous insidious disorders in schools in which authority is suffered as a punishment or endured as a restraint to be whittled away like a yoke to be shaken off. Where the atmosphere is that of a family, as Don Bosco wanted it to be, you have only to look

into the eyes of the youngsters to realize that peace and harmony make life happy there".¹

Salesian friendship, shared in a family spirit, is a style of living together which pervades all interpersonal relationships and is manifested in every situation of community life; work, prayer, meal times and recreation periods etc. are all occasions when the salesian community show forth its rich content of love. The family spirit enables every confrere to live joyfully every moment of each day, sharing the values associated with work, prayer and other communal manifestations like meeting and community assemblies.

Communication and sharing

The final paragraph of art. 51 points to two items which are characteristic of brotherly friendship lived in a family spirit, two aspects which permeate salesian life in its affective relationship and in apostolic work; they are mutual communication and sharing of responsibility.

Interpersonal communication is something of the greater value for the growth of the individual and of the community. It deeply imbues problems at a personal or communal, ecclesial or civil level, and leads to great communion and joy in seeking true well-being of persons and the coming of Christ's Kingdom. But if it remains at a purely superficial level, it does not create communion but risks leaving individuals in more or less melancholy isolation and beset by problems.

The second value referred to is that of *brotherly sharing*. Art. 491 had already stated the communal principle according to which "our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit, and so create communion between person and person". Religious life does not destroy our affective life, but places it in the existential context of the salesian vocation. Sorrows and joys lose none of their capacity to inflict interior pain or exultant gratification; we live these situations and share them as St Paul teaches us: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another" (Rom 12,15-16).

Sharing takes place also in our apostolic work. Elsewhere in the Constitutions the shared responsibility obtaining in the salesian community is spoken of more specifically (cf. especially C 66 and C123); here it is merely stated that it forms part of the salesian family spirit, and that it is a sign of authentic brotherly friendship. to share with our confreres the plans and experiences of our educational pastoral work by which we extend God's kingdom.

If the community is the first recipient of the apostolic mandate received from the Church (cf. C 44), it must constitute a point of reference for every confrere, not only for official recognition of his work but also to discover the fraternal sharing, the

¹E. CERIA, *Annali della societa salesiana*, vol I. p. 730-731

each day.

An indication of how intensely Don Bosco lived the values of communication and fraternal sharing can be found in his letters. Listen to what our father wrote to Fr. Lasagna, a missionary in Latin America, on 30 September 1885: it is a wonderful page which well illustrates the "family spirit" in action:

"I feel my life is drawing to its close, and so I have thought it well to leave you some thoughts in writing as a testament of one who loves you and has always done so... We want souls and nothing else. Make that message resound in the ears of our confreres. Lord, give us crosses, thorns and persecutions of every kind, provided that we can save souls and among them our own... Study, plan, worry about expense, provided that you can give some priests to the Church, especially for the missions. When you have occasion to speak to our Sisters or our confreres, tell them from me of the great pleasure with which I receive their letters, their greetings, and it gave me joy and great comfort of heart to know that they had all prayed and continue to pray for me... I am here at Valsalice for the spiritual exercises. My health is not too good, but I manage to keep going. May God keep us all in his holy grace.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr John Bosco"²

*Lord our God,
you inspired Don Bosco
to base the life of our communities
on the family spirit.
Send us your spirit of love
so that among us may reign that brotherly friendship,
made up of human warmth and supernatural delicacy,
which fosters communion in joy and sorrow
and sustains us in moments of difficulty.*

*Grant us charity, faith and simplicity,
that we may be able to listen together to your Word,
speak to you together,
and share our apostolic plans and experiences
in real co-responsibility,
guided only by the search for your glory.*

Through Christ our Lord.

²Collected letters, vol. IV, P. 340-341-

ART. 52 THE CONFRERE I N THE COMMUNITY

The community receives each confrere with an open heart. It accepts him as he is and fosters his growth to maturity. It offers him the opportunity to use and develop his gifts of nature and of grace. It provides for his needs and sustains him in moments of doubt and difficulty, weariness and ill health.

Don Bosco used to say to those who asked to remain with him: "Bread, work and heaven: I can offer you these three things in the Lord's name".¹

The confrere pledges himself to build up the community in which he lives. He loves it, despite its imperfections, and knows that in it he finds the presence of Christ.

He accepts fraternal correction, fights whatever he discovers in himself which militates against the community, and gives his own generous contribution to the community life and work. He thanks God that he is among brothers who encourage him and help him.

¹ MB XVIII, 420

After the description in art. 51 of the relationships of brotherly friendship which are at the basis of communion and community life among us, art. 52 analyses the action of the community as regards each confrere and the contribution each salesian must make to his own community, so that the family atmosphere which distinguishes our life may be realized.

Communal unity, in fact, does not aim at uniformity, and still less at anonymity, but rather at the overall expression of the multiplicity of gifts which the Holy Spirit bestows on every member of the community. To use an image from the musical world, one could say that the community is like a large orchestra: while the individual instruments play accurately their own part, the orchestra as a whole reproduces a symphonic masterpiece; or more exactly it reproduces the masterpiece composed by God from all eternity for that particular community. And while he continues to call other musicians to play in this living orchestra, the Lord renews their repertory of musical compositions, adapting them from time to time to the possibilities and characteristics of the conductors.

The community welcomes each confrere

The arrival of a confrere in a community always causes delicate problems of integration and readjustments. It imposes new duties on each member. The community, says the constitutional text, "receives" and "accepts" the confrere: two precise verbs which indicate the steps in integration into the community.

In the Body of Christ, each one has his gift from God "for the common good" (1 Cor 12, 7; cf. C22). On the other hand every confrere needs to be enriched by the gifts possessed by others. Hence the requirement for reciprocal welcome and acceptance, which does not suppress diversities (which are all "gifts of the Spirit") but uses them to advantage for the benefit of all.

"Receives each confrere with an open heart" means internally to immediately give him proper esteem, and externally to let him see that he is a brother and not a stranger, and to put him at ease.

"Accepts him as he is" means recognition of his own individual personality, rejoicing at the qualities he will bring to the community, avoiding the use of his limitations or past weaknesses to justify leaving him on the fringe: he is a brother whom God has given us to love, says art. 50.

The community is called upon to *"foster the growth to maturity"* of each of its members, a task which never ends. The text goes on to explain how this is to be done: It offers him the opportunity to use and develop his gifts of nature and of grace", which does not mean the opportunity to practise his hobbies, but to provide each one with the possibility of using his particular skills in the common work, encouraging his spirit of initiative and sense of personal responsibility.

But above all the community helps each confrere to realize fully his vocation: to this end it not only provides what he needs for his health, studies and work, but supports him especially in times of difficulty, doubt or sickness.

To provide for all this, good community organization is certainly useful but above this there is needed a living and always attentive charity.

"Bread, work and heaven"

Between the description of what the community does for the confrere (first paragraph) and what each confrere does for his community (third paragraph), has been inserted an emblematic phrase of Don Bosco. It expresses all the joy Don Bosco felt in his family, and which he wanted to communicate to his sons: he really felt himself to be in the House where the Lord wanted him, where there was precisely "work, bread and heaven". It is the same promise that at the present day, as a hundred years ago, the salesian can repeat to every youngster who accepts the call to stay with Don Bosco: *"Bread, work and heaven: I can offer you these three things in the Lord's name."*¹

The confrere builds the community

The building of the community is a shared responsibility: the communion of individuals is created through the patient charity of all; the communal commitment is born of the personal effort of each one. And so the first attitude the salesian has to cultivate in himself is the awareness of being in the community as a responsible member; he feels that the construction of genuine salesian brotherhood depends partly on him, and for that reason he is glad to make his contribution. If it is true that

¹ MB XVIII, 420; cf. also MB XVII, 251; BM X11, 443

community.

The sense of responsibility stems from a deep inner feelings: from the *love* which the confrere has for his community. This love is not the result of idealizations or a juridical formality; it is a concrete genuine affection which is not blind to his shortcoming and limitations but nevertheless wishes the community well and, enlightened by faith, "knows that in it he finds the presence of Christ". His practical gestures of love and communal service will be the more generous and continuous the more he fosters within himself the conviction of faith that Christ is living and present in the brothers he finds around him.

In line with this concrete love the constitutions emphasize the importance of "*fraternal correction*"; so as to build community the salesian gratefully accepts the help given him by his confreres and tries to correct "whatever he discovers in himself which militates against the community", remembering that selfishness and individualism have deep and mysterious roots in the heart; he also makes himself a minister of fraternal correction towards his brothers, in the gospel spirit recommended by Christ (cf. Mt I 8,15-17).

The Rule then gives prominence to a very practical sign which manifests the commitment of each one to the building of the fraternal and apostolic community: it is *his own generous and active contribution "to the community life and work"*. We all learned during our Novitiate that "it's not my business" is a "salesian blasphemy", and that the corresponding positive ejaculation is "I'll do it!"² It is wonderful to see so many confreres who, while spending themselves for the benefit of the young, are glad to be able to live in their own community, and humbly and generously make daily sacrifices to make it a welcoming "house" for all. It is a moving experience too to see so many aging and sick confreres who stick to their work in the desire of being useful to the community, even when their strength is waning.

Finally the salesian builds community by his attitude of gratitude to his brothers for the love they show him.

There is a double task therefore, that of the community to the confrere and of the confrere to the community: the reciprocal relationship is necessary for the production of true communion. This alone can form a community which is at the same time a family, avoiding both standardization and individualism, and refraining from anything that might cause clashes or frustration.

²Cf. A. CAVIGLIA, *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano*. Turin 1985, p. 57

*Father, you welcome all who come to you;
pour into the heart of each one of us the
same spirit of welcome.*

*Make us able to accept
and open ourselves in trust to our confreres,
so that in sincere and mutual love
we may form a true family,
united in your service
and in that of our young people.*

*Grant us the strength to act in our community
with a constructive spirit,
and so help to build your Church in charity.
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 53 SICK AND AGING CONFRES

The community surrounds its sick and aged confreres with care and affection.

They in their turn, accepting their condition and serving the community in whatever way they can, are a source of blessing for it; they enrich its family spirit and deepen its unity:

Their life takes on a new apostolic significance: as they offer their limitations and sufferings in a spirit of faith for their brothers and for the young, they are united with the redeeming passion of the Lord, and continue to share in the salesian mission

In dealing with the interpersonal relationships that develop within the salesian community, the Constitutions give special attention to the care and affection given to sick and aging confreres. Art. 53 treats of the duties of the community to these confreres, the communal significance of their presence among their brothers, and the new apostolic import of an existence marked by pain.

The commitment of the community for aged and sick confreres

The relationships of brotherly friendship which should reign in the community become expressed in a quite special way in love and thoughtful care for those who are old or sick. The family spirit becomes almost tangible when the whole community brings to bear the riches of its affection and service on its weaker and suffering members.

Evidently such solicitous manifestations of love and service will be all the more stable and fraternal the more every confrere is convinced that Christ is present, in different ways and with different needs, in all the members living in the house.

Through what is done by individuals, the whole community serves the Lord in its most needy brothers. And the community becomes a clear sign of the Father's love which, through the christian community which is the Body of Christ, reaches out to sustain, save and care for its weakest members.

In Salesian tradition, going back to the time of Don Bosco, the sick are surrounded by special attention. Of Don Bosco himself we read in the "Biographical Memoirs": "'On arriving (at a house) he immediately asked if anyone was sick', declared Fr. Luigi Piscetta, 'and would at once visit him. His was a mother's concern for the sick, and he checked to see they were properly cared for.'"¹ The recommendation to look after the sick is also found in various letters of Don Bosco, as for instance in that of 24 September 1885 to Fr. Allavena in Uruguay: "Take particular care of the children, the sick and the aged".²

¹ BM X, 426

² MB XVII, 616; cf. also MR XII, 200 (Letter to Perino); BM XIII, 667 (Letter to a parish priest at Forlì)

The commitment of the sick and aging for the fraternal community

The Constitutions highlight the deep significance of the presence of the sick and aging in the salesian community. They make a singular contribution of great value to the community by the services they can still render, but especially by their example and suffering. And if they can no longer fill the posts of direct responsibility they once occupied, nevertheless by "accepting their condition", and remaining undisturbed, trusting and open to the community without any sign of bitterness, they place at the service of their brothers their experience, their family spirit and the witness of their abandonment to God.

The Rule tells us that for the community the old and ailing are not a burden but a "*source of blessing*"; they have, in fact, been marked in a special way by Christ's passion and hence live more intimately, for themselves and for others, the mystery of pain which redeems and gives. As writes John Paul II: "Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the Cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weakness of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's cross. In such a concept, to suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ".³

The article adds that the sick and aged confreres "*enrich (the community's) family spirit*"; in fact pain not only purifies the one who suffers and the community who share it, but reawakens in the confreres reserves of sharing, of endurance and of service which are characteristic of the most genuine family spirit. And so the text can rightly assert that these confreres "deepen the unity" of the community: the confreres unite around their suffering brother to offer the redeeming sacrifice of Christ. Let us never forget that Christian suffering is productive of good; redemption, in fact, comes from the cross!

Apostolic significance of sickness and old age in confreres

For a salesian accustomed to exuberant activity, serious illness and the infirmities of old age are particularly painful trials which form an appeal to a more living faith and a new kind of fidelity, and they call for a deepening of vocation itself. The confrere has to convince himself that *his life is still fully apostolic*. In what way? Thanks to the thrust of his salesian spirit, which does not change, and the 'salesian' utilization of his practical possibilities, he accepts his reduced activity (and sometimes the complete lack of it) and offers his sufferings and his prayers in union with his brothers and for the welfare of the young with whom in many cases he likes to preserve a living contract: in this way he continues to live within the "da mihi animas".

³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic. Letter Salvifici doloris, Rome 1983, 23

By the daily renewal of his own existence marked by pain, the sick or aged confrere is "united with the redeeming passion of the Lord": at every moment of the day his suffering or weakened life, united to the Crucifix, acquires a unique redemptive value and is therefore eminently "apostolic". From this intimate attitude of the offering of himself in Christ to the Father for the salvation of the world, springs almost spontaneously the explicit prayer which has a special place in the long hours of his patient suffering; in this way he continues to live in the heart of the community and "continues to share in the salesian mission.

Every province can provide illustrious examples of confreres who have lived and are living to the full the Christian and salesian values described in the Rule. Among many others we may recall Fr. Andrew Beltrami who realized his full fidelity to his salesian vocation in long suffering, leaving an example for our imitation. We remember too the witness of Fr. Joseph Quadric, who, accepting his illness from the hands of God, recognized his life in the following resolutions:

"In the most holy name of Jesus and by his grace I promise while I am in Hospital:

- 1) to live with Him in communion of thought, sentiment and continued oblation;
- 2) to smile and spread tranquillity among the doctors, nurses, sick and Sisters. Each of them must see in me the "benignitas et humanitas Salvatoris nostri Dei";
- 3) to give loving attention to prayer: Mass (when I can), Communion, Breviary, Rosary, Way of the Cross etc. I will fill the day with prayer:
- 4) to occupy every moment of spare time in useful reading;
- 5) to imbue all my conversations with a simple and discreet priestly tone."⁴

*God our Father,
grant that our community
may be able to welcome and understand
our sick and aging brothers,
and sustain them in the family spirit.*

*Give to each of them
the grace of a living faith,
so that in union with the passion of Christ your Son,
they may fulfil in accordance with your will
their salesian vocation,
by perfecting their offering of love
for their brothers and the young.*

⁴ E. VALENTINI, *Don Giuseppe Quadrio, modello di spirito sacerdotale*, LAS Rome 1980, p. 164

The community supports with greater love and prayer the confrere who is gravely ill. When the hour comes for him to bring his consecrated life to its highest fulfilment, his brothers help him to enter fully into Christ's paschal mystery.

Death for the salesian is made bright by the hope of entering into the joy of his Lord,¹ and when it happens that a salesian dies working for souls, the Congregation has won a great triumph.²

The memory of departed confreres unites, "in a love that will not pass away",³ those who are still pilgrims with those who are already resting in Christ.

¹ cf. Mt 25, 21

² cf. MB XVII, 273

³ 1 Cor 13,8

The three paragraphs of art. 54 develop the following ideas:

- the community sustains the confrere in his last days of life;
- hope makes bright the salesian's death;
- after death the confrere remains united with those who are still alive in the "love that will not pass away".

The community surrounds the gravely sick confrere

The approaching death of a confrere is for all the members of the community an appeal for a more impelling charity. It is important that the sick member be helped to give to the supreme moments of his life all their significance.

The Rule incites the community to close ranks around the gravely sick confrere to help him to appreciate the deep sense of the mystery of the death of the consecrated person. The article emphasizes in a particular manner two aspects of this mystery.

The death of a religious is directly linked with his religious consecration. On the basis of his baptismal consecration, he "offers himself totally" to God and to his service on the day of his profession, and commits himself to be faithful to the end. Now, on the last lap of his fidelity, he is asked to give once again to God the last proof of his love and filial abandonment: it is his "*highest fulfilment*", his final "Yes, Father!", his "consummatum est!"

But there is another mystery, which is fulfilled in him. To be baptized, and to commit oneself by religious profession, means to enter into the Lord's Passover, to choose to die to oneself so as to be reborn to the life of the Risen One. As death approaches, this participation reaches its fullness: it is a question of uniting his own sacrifice with that of his crucified Master, so as to live again to the full in the life of Christ the Lord.

That the salesian may have the grace to persevere in these faith perspectives, the Constitutions invite all the members of the community to help him with the most intense charity in these decisive moments of his existence.

The sense of the salesian's death

Don Bosco said a great deal about death to his confreres and boys. He realistically "exercised" them every month for a "happy death" teaching them to die to sin so as to be ready one day to welcome death in the joy of divine friendship. The salesian therefore has a special reason for looking at death without any alarm.

The second paragraph of the article firmly orientates the salesian to look at death in the light of the apostolic reality of his life. He has lived, in fact, "serving" God in his younger brothers, and hopes therefore to hear those words. *"Well done, good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of our master"* (Mt 25, 23). This is the assurance given us by Don Bosco, who spoke to his confreres of the reward reserved for them and pointed to Paradise as the place where he and his sons would meet together, the goal of all their endeavours, the place of rest.¹ To the first missionaries he gave this souvenir: "In time of fatigue and suffering do not forget that we have a great reward prepared for us in heaven".²

The text quotes another well known phrase of Don Bosco, in which our Father equates the happy outcome of the existence of a salesian who has been faithful to his mission, with the success of the Congregation itself: "When it happens that a salesian yields up his life whilst working for souls, you can say that our Congregation has registered a great triumph and that on it will descend in abundance the blessings of heaven".³ The salesian never goes into retirement, even though he may be offered the possibility to do so by some insurance policy. He works "for souls" as long as he has any strength left, and is willing to die doing such work.

This is the supreme application of *"da mihi animas, cetera tolle"*. Lord, take from me even this final period of rest that all men look forward to, if by my work I can still do some good to a soul somewhere! In this sense art. 54 is linked with the very first article of the Rule where was quoted that other phrase of Don Bosco: *"I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys"*. The salesian is an apostle to the end, and dies as an apostle, in line with our Father's exhortation: "We shall rest in heaven".⁴

The Salesian "Communion of saints"

¹ For Don Bosco's many references to Paradise, cf. for example: BM III, 49; VI, 249; VII, 436; VIII, 200; X, 173; MB XVIII, 533, 550 ("Tell the boys I am waiting for them in heaven")

² D. BOSCO, *Souvenir to first missionaries*, BM XI, 365; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 266

³ D. BOSCO, *Spiritual testament*, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 270

⁴ BM XIV, 325

Article 9 made reference to our patrons and heavenly protectors. The present article concludes with a reminder of our "communion" with our dead brother, which is realized not only in prayer, as art. 94 will say, but in a permanent bond of charity. The text takes its inspiration from the Constitution "Lumen Gentium", 49, where it is said: "All of us share in the same charity towards God and our neighbours, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God. All, indeed, who are of Christ and who have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together (Eph 4,16). So it is that the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ is in no way interrupted but, on the contrary, is reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods". The daily reading of the necrology (cf. R 47) should not only remind us of the confreres we have known, but should revive our present communion with them in the risen Christ. Our relationship with the heavenly Jerusalem thus becomes fruitful for our vocation and our very community life.

*God our father,
we recommend to you our confreres
who are close to death.
Sustain them in the hour of their last sacrifice,
that they may be able to bring to fulfilment
in fidelity and love
what they promised on the day of their profession,
and be united in the eternal Passover
with all your Saints.*

*Revive our hope in the face of death,
and help us to work for you to the end.
Keep united in charity which will not pass away
those still in pilgrimage on this earth
with those already enjoying their heavenly response
in Christ your Son our Lord.*

ART. 55 THE RECTOR IN THE COMMUNITY

The rector represents Christ who unites his followers in the service of the Father. He is at the centre of the community, a brother among brothers, who recognize his responsibility and authority.

His first task is to animate the community so that it may live faithful to the Constitutions and grow in unity. He coordinates the efforts of all, bearing in mind the rights, duties and capabilities of every member.

He also has a direct responsibility toward each confrere, he helps him realize his own personal vocation and carry out the work entrusted to him.

He extends his solicitude to the young for whom we work and to our collaborators, so that they may share in the community's mission with increasing responsibility.

In his words, frequent contacts and opportune decisions he is a father, teacher and spiritual guide.

Art. 55, which describes the role of the rector in the community, is the last of the articles which outline the interpersonal relationships which must be created among the confreres. The latter, living in the same local community, share the mystery of communion in the same salesian style and in a brotherhood totally directed to the pastoral mission. In this context the figure of the rector takes on a singular physiognomy which derives from the communion lived in the fraternal and apostolic community. In fact every community in the Church requires a role of animation which renders the cohesion among its members possible and efficient. The special charism of the rector is primarily to provide for the community the brotherly and apostolic service of "koinonia". Even though he may have the task of "director" of some work he must always remain a "brother", and his first concern must be for the persons whom he must unite for the fulfilment of the mission (cf. R 72, 176).

The rich and complex figure of the salesian rector has been the object of deep and wide-ranging study, especially in the GC21, whose guidelines were fully incorporated in the revised constitutional text and in the drafting of the admirable "Rectors' Manual".¹

Art. 55 is not the only article of the Constitutions which speaks of the rector; in fact the various aspects of his figure are described, in different connections, in various parts of the Rule and in particular:

- in Art. 4 his role concerning the "form" of the community is referred to in a general way;
- in art. 44 the rector is presented as the animator and guide of those who share responsibility for the salesian mission;

¹ Cf. GC21, 46-61. In accordance with the decision of the Chapter a "Manual was produced with a title in which is condensed the singular nature of this figure: *"The Salesian Rector. A ministry for the animation and governing of the local community"*

- in this art. 55 he appears mainly as the animator and guide of the fraternal and apostolic community;
- art. 65 and 66, which deal with obedience, will emphasize his role in the communal discernment of God's will;
- the structural aspect of his ministry of government are found in the chapter on the "service of authority in the local community" (art. 176-186);
- art. 121 in particular says that "communities are guided by a member who is a priest".

The text of art. 55, which we are now studying, develops five ideas: the place of the rector in the community; his duties to the community; his duties to the individual confreres; his relationship with the educative community; the salesian manner in which he exercises his authority.

The rector visible centre of the fraternal communion

The Council's decree "Perfectate caritatis" recalls the religious superiors are God's representatives.² The salesian Constitutions make this assertion more precise when they say that the rector "represents Christ" in one of his most important functions, that of *uniting his disciples to make them communicate together with the will of the Father*, making them available for his service and that of their fellow men. Christ has always been the perfect 'Servant of the Father, "obedient unto death". But it was his will to gather disciples around him to associate them with his own service of the Father for the salvation of the world. This is the image and function of Christ to which the superior is referred, "in a spirit of evangelical humility".³

We may note that the authority of the religious superior in a community is not of the hierarchical kind. The latter is at the foundation of ecclesial communion and gives rise to a community in so far as he is the "visible source and foundation of unity"⁴ (as is the Roman Pontiff for the universal Church and each Bishop for a particular Church). Religious authority on the other hand, which is raised up by the Spirit within a community, appears as the point of convergence of the calls received by the individual members, so as to steer their efforts to the realization of the common project indicated by the Rule.

The name "superior" given to the rector must not create a wrong impression: he is not "superior to" his brothers in the sense of being "above" them, but remains on the same level, a "brother among brothers"; nevertheless in their midst he occupies a "central" position, in virtue of his unifying and animating role. But equality of level does not suppress the authority vested in the superior; he has been chosen to be in the midst of his brothers the sign of Christ, the Centre and Head,' and his brothers "recognize in faith his responsibility and authority".

² Cf. PC 14

³ Cf. SGC, 644; GC21, 52-53

⁴ Cf. LG 23

What the Eucharist brings about under a sacramental form when it builds the community in Christ as a brotherly communion (cf. C 88), what is realized in an invisible way by the Spirit when he

The duty of the rector to the community

The GC21, in defining the role of the rector, uses the term "*animator*"; art. 176 will combine this in practice with the other characteristic task of the rector, that of governing.

The present article 55 declares that the principal duty of the rector as animator, concerns the community in all aspects of its salesian life: fraternal communion, the apostolic mission, the practice of the evangelical counsels and the life of prayer.

Such animation, as has already been said, has a fundamental objective which must be fostered continually: the unity of the community in charity; but it also concerns the plan which all the members of the community are called upon to realize in every circumstance, according to the ideal expressed in the Constitutions. And so the salesian rector is on the one hand a man looking forward to the future with dynamic hope and trust, and on the other a man faithful to authentic salesian tradition. In our community of consecrated apostles he is the one who "presides in charity", the one who builds and preserves the union of hearts and ideals in charity.⁵

"He coordinates the efforts of all" in the fulfilment of the mission, because if apostolic work is to be efficacious it must be convergent, and unified action is one of the most powerful elements in fraternal unity. But the rector animates and coordinates the efforts of his brothers, with each of them in mind, so as to prompt their best energies, "bearing in mind the rights, duties and capabilities of every member".

And so his animating role requires of the rector that, while keeping in mind the perennial salesian ideals expressed in the Constitutions, he be able to exploit and unify the gifts of the individual confreres for the life and salesian maturing of the community.⁶

In other words, the rector guides the community in seeking and fulfilling the Father's will. "Lord, what would you have us do, here and now?" He carries the main responsibility, and this not only from a juridical point of view (cf. C 176); but nonetheless he carries out his task in real shared responsibility with his brothers.

⁵ Cf. SGC, 502, 644, 646b; GC21, 46

⁶ Don Rua, addressing provincials and rectors, explained the task of animation like this: "The rector should be the centre of everything, the central driving force; but with the pupils your action should be a *mediate* one: all will go well in the house if each salesian plays his part well, and you must watch, encourage and teach, so that in fact each one does fulfil his own duty" (Letter of 25.04.1901, in *Circular letters*, p. 309-310)

The duty of the rector to each confrere

As well as the foregoing, the rector must help each confrere to respond to the same question in his own personal circumstances: "Lord, what would you have me do, here and now?" Art. 52 laid on the community the obligation to offer to each confrere "the opportunity to use and develop his gifts of nature and of grace"; now the Constitutions are saying that the local superior has a particular responsibility in this connection: he has been given the task of guiding and encouraging his brothers in the realization of their salesian life.⁷ And so the rector is available for meeting the confreres, and must try to make himself ever better equipped as a valid spiritual guide. The confrere, for his part, has recourse to his rector with confidence as regards both his apostolic work and progress in his vocation.

Articles 67-70 on salesian obedience will go into greater detail about the aspects of this mutual relationship, indicating how his meetings with individual confreres can be of great help to the rector in his task of guiding the community.

The duty of the rector to our collaborators and young people

The fourth paragraph of the article recalls that in salesian tradition the rector is not only the director and father of the confreres, but also of the youngsters entrusted to the pastoral care of the community. His ideal model is always Don Bosco at Valdocco, whose fatherliness extended in different ways and different modes of expression to both the confreres and the boys of the oratory. The rector of a work of education who did not make contact with his pupils would seriously damage his fatherly aspect as a salesian!

In an analogous sense the same is true of the collaborators in our works and activities. If the rector is the centre of animation of fraternal and apostolic community of the confreres, the lay people too who are engaged in our educational and pastoral work must relate to him as the main driving force, through the intermediate roles entrusted to other confreres. This is what the GC21 was emphasizing when it said that the rector is the "pastoral guide of the salesian mission" and the guide in "the work of education and of human development required of his community".⁸ The text of the Constitutions rightly indicates that the purpose of this reference to the rector is the growth in both youngsters and non-salesian collaborators of a real shared responsibility in the common mission.

"Father, teacher and spiritual guide"

The final paragraph dwells in particular on the salesian way in which the rector, following the example of Don Bosco, carries out his duties. It recalls that through his words, contacts and decisions he is called to be a "*father, teacher and*

⁷ Don Bosco did not hesitate to say: "Every rector is accountable to God for the soul of each of the confreres entrusted to him" (during the retreat at Lanzo 1871). BM X. 585

⁸ Cf. GC 21, 52

spiritual guide". To match up the individual ideas one might say that by his words he fulfils his task of teaching; by his frequent contacts and sanctifying activity that of
350 father; and by his opportune decisions that of guide.

The title of "father" is linked with a long salesian tradition which sees in the rector the representation and incarnation of the fatherliness of Don Bosco. In the first paragraph it was said that the rector is a "brother among brothers", here it is specified that he is brother who acts as a "father". Can a brother undertake tasks of a fatherly kind? Vatican II, speaking of Bishops and Priests, said that he can.⁹ This in fact is what Christ did in the highest degree. The SGC comes back repeatedly on this point: "(The superior) must be a brother who, in imitation of Jesus, takes his place among his brethren as a revelation and a sign of the fatherhood of God",¹⁰ "(his) model is Christ who mirrors the Father's love for mankind."¹¹

An equally valid reason for this characteristic of the salesian rector, as was mentioned earlier, is the family spirit and the long tradition of fatherliness in the superior, and particularly the example of Don Bosco. We recall the significant testimony of Don Rinaldi: "Our Founder was never anything else but a father, in the most noble sense of the word; and the Church now invokes him in her liturgy as Father and Teacher of youth. His entire life is a complete treatise on the fatherhood which has its source in the heavenly Father, and which Don Bosco lived here below in a full and almost unique way towards youth and towards all... And just as his life was nothing but fatherliness, so his work and his sons cannot subsist without it.. In this sense fatherliness is the business of all of us, and we are all obliged to keep it alive in our hearts and in our works". But, goes on Don Rinaldi, "the external practice of this fatherliness has been passed on in a special way to the rector of the house, not only that he may preserve it but that he may practise it according to the teaching and example of Don Bosco".¹²

The normal thing in every community is for the fatherly presence of Don Bosco to be portrayed in the affable figure of the rector. A presence like that of Don Bosco, so rich in kindness, availability, free from any trace of paternalism, is able to stimulate in his sons a wide sharing of responsibility for apostolic work.¹³ Spiritual fatherliness in salesian style is the most sublime task of the rector, and salesian tradition tells us what an influence on the heart of a rector for increasing his fatherliness is the exercise of his priestly role in the ministry of reconciliation.¹⁴

The terms "teacher" and "guide" acquire their significance in the light of that of "father": the rector is the father of his family, which he "teaches" and "guides". The SGC has given details of these tasks of teaching and authoritative guidance, which devolve upon the superior in view of a constant commitment to renew the common

⁹ Cf. LG 28, 32; PO 9

¹⁰ SGC, 502

¹¹ SGC, 644

¹² ACS 56, 26 April 1931, pp. 939-940

¹³ Cf. SGC, 496-499, 502, 647

¹⁴ cf. ACS 56, 26 April 1931, loc. cit.; cf. also E. VIGANO, *The salesian rector and animation*. ASC 306 (1982), p. 27-28

vocation, deepen its spirit and give new effect to the mission, so as to meet the needs of the times and of young people.¹⁵ Art. 44 of the Constitutions has spoken of the rector as "guide", and art. 175 of the General Regulations will go into some aspects of his task as "teacher".

It should be noted that the article makes no direct reference to individual spiritual direction and to direction of conscience, which are nevertheless among the tasks of the rector (cf. C 70), but to the true and real "communal" spiritual direction, which is given through teaching, persuasion, encouragement and even in the invitation to make an evaluation of the spiritual and apostolic life of the community.

*Let us pray to our Father in heaven
who, by uniting us in Christ
through the work of the Holy Spirit,
has multiplied in our Society the
gift of spiritual fatherhood,*

*That in our communities. our superiors
may be a living image of Christ the Good Shepherd
who offers his life for his flock
and unites them in the service of the Father,
let us pray to the Lord.*

*That we may be able to see in our rector
the presence of the heavenly Father, and
love, honour and collaborate with him in
the common work entrusted to us, let us
pray to the Lord.*

*That our rector may be given
the spirit of true fatherliness,
to enlighten him and make him for every confrere
a skilled guide in the ways of the Lord,
let us pray to the Lord.*

¹⁵ Cf. SGC, 646

ART. 56 A WELCOMING COMMUNITY

With simplicity the confreres lead a life of self-giving and sharing, by welcoming others and offering them hospitality. By their kindness and cheerfulness they are able to draw everyone into the salesian family spirit.

Nevertheless, to foster mutual respect and expressions of brotherly communion every community should reserve for the confreres alone certain parts of the religious house.¹

¹ cf. CIC, can. 667,1

The salesian community is an apostolic community, which the mission inserts to the social and ecclesial reality, thus prescribing a series of relationships "ad extra", particularly with young people: it is an eminently "open" community.

After a more direct consideration of its fraternal aspect, the Constitutions now dwell on the relationships of the community both with other communities and with people involved in its mission. This is the theme of articles 56-59.

Art. 56, in particular, deals in two paragraphs with the topic of welcome and hospitality, and with that of the areas reserved to the confreres.

Welcome and hospitality

These are two evangelical values, based on the teaching and example of the Lord. One has only to recall that Jesus put these two items among those that will be the object of the final judgement: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me... When did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee?... As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25, 35-40). We know that the first christian community saw in hospitality a special manifestation of brotherly charity.¹

The salesian Constitutions tell us that these gospel values are very important elements in our family spirit. Every salesian, after basing his whole existence on self-giving and sharing, has already radically overcome a selfish closing-in on himself, and is ready to make his charity practical "by welcoming others and offering them hospitality". This must happen especially in the community which, precisely because of its fraternal dimension, is called to bear witness to the love which binds the members in concrete fashion to those who come to them in the name of the Lord.

Faithful, therefore, to salesian tradition, the community welcomes its guests and surrounds them with delicate attention and fraternal salesian cheerfulness.

Later on the Rule will speak of special solidarity with the very poor and the 'little ones' (cf. C 79). Don Bosco has taught us to give special attention to the poor:

¹ On the sense of christian hospitality, cf. also Mt 10,40; Mk 9,41; Lk 7,44 ff.; Lk 14, 13-14

that loving hospitality which he had learned from Mamma Margaret he passed on to his sons. In his house the poor had always to be given a place of honour.

Sectors reserved for the confreres

The second paragraph indicates a point which, at first sight, might seem to put limits to the sense of welcome we have just spoken of; in point of fact it is a safeguard for the essentials of living together. As well as helping the community to achieve the objectives of authentic brotherhood, this prescription is of great advantage also for regulating its relationships with persons who come in contact with it. The values particularly emphasized in the Rule are the need for "mutual respect" among the confreres, and the possibility of having space for the expression of special moments of fraternal communion.

For these reasons "every community should reserve for the confreres alone certain parts of the religious house". This is a traditional norm in religious and also salesian life, and is endorsed by the Code of Canon Law.²

The methods for putting this article into practice are presented in art. 45 of the General Regulations.

*Lord Jesus, you once said:
"I was a stranger and you welcomed me".
Help us to see in everyone who has recourse to us
that you yourself are the mysterious guest
knocking at our door,
so that those whom you send to us
may find in our welcome and availability
the path to attain more certainly to you
in the common House of our Father.*

² The SGC and the GC22 had left this norm in the General Regulations. The Apostolic See however, in harmony with canon law, asked for the contents to be transferred to the constitutional text

ART. 57 AN OPEN COMMUNITY

The salesian community works in communion with the particular Church.

It is open to the world's values and attentive to the cultural milieu in which it carries out its apostolic work. At one with those among whom it lives, it cultivates good relations with all.

Thus it comes a sign revealing Christ and his presence among men, and becomes a leaven giving rise to new vocations after the example of the first community of Valdocco.

The article continues the treatment of the relationships of the local community with the ecclesial community and also with the social and cultural environment in which it is situated. The openness of the salesian community, which is an indispensable condition for its insertion into the human neighbourhood group, is a premise for a fruitful apostolate, even to the extent of the communication of the salesian vocation itself.

What is expressed in the article has its foundation not only in the tradition of our Family (love for the Church and active insertion in the neighbourhood, cf. C 48) but also in Vatican II's ecclesiology of communion. According to the Council every ecclesial community or group, without prejudice to its own identity, should be open to intercommunion, in harmony with the life of the local Church and collaborating in its activities;¹ moreover in the area in which it works it should experience "a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history".²

Communion with the particular Church

The Constitutions have already stated in art. 48 the principle of the insertion of the community in the particular Church and of its availability for collaboration in the fulfilment of its apostolic mission. The same principle is now endorsed³ from the standpoint of communion: the openness of the community to the particular Church and its union with it are a testimony based on the very nature of religious life. The text clearly draws its inspiration from the doctrine of Vatican II which is summed up in the document "Mutuae relationes" in the following words: "A religious is totally dedicated to God, his supreme love, and is committed to the honour and service of God under a new and special title. This unites the religious to the Church and her mystery in a special way and urges him to act with undivided dedication for the good of the entire Body (cf. LG 44). It clearly follows that religious life is a special way of sharing in the sacramental nature of the People of God... (Religious) offer to the world a visible witness of the unfathomable mystery of Christ, in so far as in them Christ is shown

¹ Cf. MR 10, 11, 14

² GS I

³ The GC22 voted explicitly to endorse the obligation of communion with the local Church, already expressed in art. 48, to draw attention to the fact that it is not only a question of a commitment to apostolic service, but of an aspect which characterizes the physiognomy of the salesian community and the witness it is called to give

contemplating on the mountain, announcing God's Kingdom to the multitudes, healing the sick and the maimed, converting sinners to a good life, blessing children, doing good to all and always obeying the will of the Father who sent him (LG 46)".⁴

Insertion in the social and cultural environment

The salesian community is not estranged from the surrounding world, but seeks rather to become incarnate in it and to understand its values, needs, problems and power for doing good; only in this way can it enter into an efficacious dialogue for the announcement of the Kingdom and the communication of the salesian charism.

The salesian community, inserted in the life and culture of its own environment, will feel itself to be a living element of the region, the city, the local area in which it is situated and works. Inculturation and acculturation problems of Christianity will be lived by the community in close harmony with the pastoral plan of the particular Churches in which it is working. And if art. 56 stressed the need for a minimum environmental structure to safeguard the intimacy of fraternal life, here it is equally affirmed that the community lives for others.

At the level of conscience the community expresses and fosters solidarity with the human group in which it is inserted, and this can have consequences of no little importance if one thinks, for example, of communities in densely populated and very poor areas. As far as relationships are concerned, the community gives welcome to all in its neighbourhood, even to those who are not the primary groups who form the object of our apostolate.

The Acts of the SGC provide a clear and concise comment on this article: "The community shares in the dynamism of the Church and is intended for (and open to) the service of its fellow men, offering to all the benefit of the graces which the Lord has showered on us. It joyfully cultivates and enlivens with its faith the relations which bind it to other people and back grounds, whether through kinship, inspiration, work or ideals, or on the grounds of duty, suitability, friendship or charity. By these external contacts the community expresses its relationship with the world, but is also enriched by the integration of fresh spiritual values into its mission and is thereby the better able to carry out its apostolic activity".⁵

The same SGC also makes it clear that the commitment thus expressed finds a particularly intensive application in the case of the "small communities" which are called "to insert themselves into special types of life and work, where a witness of charity and Christian enterprise is needed especially among people on the fringe of society".⁶ In these cases we should not forget the reminder made by the GC21, after appraising the situation,⁷ that such experiences be carried out in a salesian apostolic spirit: "a new presence is not to be sought for the purpose of experimenting with new

⁴ MR 10

⁵ SGC, 507

⁶ SGC, 510; cf. also SGC, 515

⁷ Cf. GC21, 159-161, with note 27 to 161

be provided".⁸

Productive testimony of the community

The third paragraph of the article highlights a logical and important effect of the insertion of the community in the surrounding world: the salesian community, a living cell of the particular Church, deeply inserted in the social and cultural environment, becomes a visible and efficacious sign of Christ the incarnate Saviour.

In and through the community Christ is made present among men and offers to all of them, but especially to the young who are poor and abandoned, his salvation, peace and joy.

Just as every living community is the bearer of life, charismata and ministries, so the salesian community, which bears Don Bosco's charism attained through intimate communion with the Valdocco model "*becomes a leaven giving rise to new vocations*", both salesian and of every other kind for the Church' service (cf. C 6, 37).

We are back once again with the dynamism of the grain of wheat. The community is inserted in the Church and the group of humanity, and gives to the utmost of its salesian riches; from such an offering, which has a certain resemblance to death through love, is born new salesian life in the heart of those who have shared this gift in the Spirit.

The salesian community, "a house of the young"

A global consideration of the articles of chap. V of the Constitutions on the "fraternal and apostolic communities" might give rise to the impression that not enough emphasis has been given to the openness of the community to those to whom our mission is primarily directed (C 26). In point of fact there are references in the chapter to the young when speaking of the rector, who must extend to them his fatherly care (cf. C 55), and of the sick confreres who offer their own sufferings for them.

But this chapter must evidently be integrated with the remainder of the Constitutions, and the special relationship between the salesian community and youth then becomes clear. We recall here some of its essential elements:

- The *salesian house* is not only a "parish" that evangelizes the youngsters, and a "school" that prepares them for life; it is also a *home that welcomes them and a playground where friends can meet and enjoy themselves* (C 40).
- The *family spirit* is not reserved to relations between the confreres; the salesian house", says the Rule, "becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all,

both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good" (C 16).

- *The preventive system, our characteristic method of educating and evangelizing, brings together educators and youngsters in a family experience of trust and dialogue" (C 38). The educative community, of which the salesian community is the animator, "involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere... (C47).*
- *Salesian assistance, an important element of the preventive system, which supposes on the one hand the salesian's "willingness to be with them", requires of him on the other "to be actively present among youth", and to show them brotherly friendship (cf. C 39).*
- *Even our very salesian prayer requires that we not only pray "for the young" but also "with the young". Because of this adherence to youth and the youthful style that goes with it, "salesian prayer is joyful and creative, simple and profound" (cf. C 86).*

From all this it is evident that a salesian community without permanent contact with youth would no longer be itself. It can be truly said that the salesian house is the *"the house of the young"!*

*It is God's will that all men should be saved
and come to the knowledge of the truth.
Let us pray that as individuals and communities
we may bear constant witness
to the divine will of salvation.*

*That we may never become closed
in our own particular interests,
but keep open our minds and hearts
to the good of the Church and of the world,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to combine in harmonious unity
fidelity to our charism
with fidelity to the Church in which we are inserted,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our minds may be always ready
to accept the good qualities
of the world that surrounds us,
and develop them for the coming of God's Kingdom,
Lord hear our prayer.*

*That we may generously set aside our own
tastes and inclinations, and make
ourselves all things to all men, after the
example of Christ and Don. Bosco, Lord,
hear our Prayer.*

*God our Father,
make us individually and as communities
a manifestation of the love of your Christ,
so that all men may come to know you, the only God,
and Him whom you sent,
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

ART. 58 THE PROVINCIAL COMMUNITY

Local communities are a living part of the provincial community. The latter fosters fraternal communion among them and supports them in their mission.

It shows a loving concern for new confreres; it is solicitous for the formation of every member, rejoices in their success and the happy occasions in their lives, grieves over their loss and keeps alive their memory.

Attentive to the young situation, it coordinates and evaluates our apostolic work through its various services; it encourages collaboration, stimulates pastoral work for vocations, provides for the continuity of our work, and is open to new Salesian Family.

It cultivates the spirit of brotherhood and expresses it concretely through solidarity with other provinces, with the Congregation and with the Salesian Family.

The brotherly communion present in the local community (referred to particularly in articles 49-57), extends and is realized in the wider salesian community; in the province, as described in this present article, and in the entire Congregation, a family united in Don Bosco, to which art. 59 will be dedicated.

The article we are now studying presents the province, not from a juridical or administrative standpoint (which will be taken up in the fourth part), but as the source and place of manifestation of the fraternal and apostolic community for a certain group of confreres and local communities’.

It should be noted that communion is not the same thing as cohabitation, i.e. living together in the same house; and although living together, with its practical requirements, continually provides numerous occasions for maturing in communion, charity and forgiveness, the members live an authentic “koinonia” with their brother who form the same “province”, to such an extent that one can speak of a true “*provincial community*”. Art.58 describes some aspects of this community in its dimensions of brotherhood and apostolic service.

The local and provincial communities

The first paragraph, after declaring that local communities are not isolated from each other, but a "living part", i.e. living cells of the organism known as the provincial community, recognizes in fraternal communion and in the common mission the two basic values which bind together the different houses in the province.

The SGC laid great emphasis on the province as a *structure of communion*, even to the extent of saying that "the renewal of our religious and salesian life must be based fundamentally on the rediscovery and re-evaluation of the provincial community as the bond of union between the different local communities, the other provinces and the whole Congregation". The SGC goes on to say that "this new outlook allows the

salesian to become more convinced of the spirit of solidarity among all the confreres of the province, and encourages him to carry out his apostolic work in the context of the local Church") The province plays an *essential role in the realization of the Society's apostolic project*, and also in the vocational growth of each confrere. One may say that in the province the salesian finds the reality of the whole Congregation incarnated in a specific territory. And it is certainly true that he sees his membership of the Society as a whole, through the mediation of his incorporation into the provincial community which took place on the day of his profession (cf. C 160).

The Constitutions indicate the two principal objectives of the provincial community with regard to the local communities: the fostering of brotherly communion ("ad intra" and "ad extra") in the individual communities, and its support under various aspects (spiritual, pastoral and economic) for the realization of the mission entrusted to each house. These objectives are described at greater length in the rest of the article.

The provincial community and the confreres

The activities of the provincial and his council, of the provincial chapter, of the various teams and service structures, together with the use of means of information and communication, lead to establishing and development of a strong relationship between the confreres and the provincial community.

The second paragraph explains how the province follows the development of the salesian vocation of each confrere from its beginnings to its maturity:

— *"it shows a loving concern for new confreres"*: the vocation planted by the Lord in the heart of the young salesian needs to be supported and developed: it finds in the members of the provincial community, and especially in the provincial and those in charge of formation, a valuable help. The third part of the Constitutions will make it plain that the provincial has a specific responsibility in the care of the various phases of the initial formation and in the admission to the different stages of salesian life (cf. C 101, 108);

— *"it is solicitous for the formation of every member"*: the provincial community is a formation community which guarantees through its structures, but more especially by the living example of its members, the permanent growth of each confrere in his salesian life programme:

— *"rejoices in their success and the happy occasions in their lives"*: not only in their own local community but in the province as a whole the confreres feel that family affection which rejoices at the success of its members and praises the Lord with them;

— *"grieves over their loss and keeps alive their memory"*: the word 'loss' here has a double significance; it refers to the death of a confrere and also to one who leaves the Society: like any human family the province feels their loss and remembers them especially in prayer. In the case of confreres called to the Father's House it feels deep communion with them and gratitude (cf. C 94).

The provincial community and apostolic work

We have already spoken of the province's role in the carrying out of the salesian apostolic project. The text goes into one or two details in this connection. The frame of reference is still that of the "youth condition" of the environment, which must be studied and kept in mind as a fundamental element which can give full significance to our mission.

The article presents in synthetic form the five main tasks of the provincial community, which constitute the concrete objectives of the animation it has to provide by suitable programming:

a) in the first place the province *"coordinates and evaluates our apostolic work through its various services"*: in this connection the General Regulations recall that the drawing up of the pastoral and educational plan is of the utmost importance (cf. R 4);

b) *"it encourages collaboration"* between the communities, between the confreres who have animating roles to fulfil, between individual confreres, groups of the Salesian Family, lay people working in the communities; this is an important task of the province for the achievement of the unity of the salesian plan required by our vocational identity within the particular Church;

c) *"it stimulates pastoral work for vocations"*: this is done through those appointed for the purpose by vocational guidance structures and planning, but especially by the encouragement and appraisal of the educational plans of the individual communities and the promoting of initiatives and exchanges. In this way the provincial community keeps this essential dimension of the salesian mission very much alive and is concerned for its growth;

d) *"it provides for the continuity of our works"*: both by seeing to the training of the necessary personnel for attaining the specific purpose of each of the works, by revising and redimensioning their activities when necessary, and providing for their financial support;

e) finally, *"it is open to new activities"*: it belongs in fact to the provincial community, especially through the provincial chapter and provincial council, to carry out the work of discernment which will make possible the spreading and re-expression of the charisma of Don Bosco in its territory.

The provincial community and its openness "ad extra"

The final paragraph asserts that the spirit of brotherhood which is expressed "ad intra" in every provincial community will be cultivated and expressed "concretely through solidarity (of ideals, personnel and goods) *with other provinces, with the Congregation and with the Salesian Family*".

Discreetly, but quite clearly, the text refers to various possibilities of inter-provincial and regional collaboration that can be promoted: they can be realized through the provincial conferences, which represent an intense form of solidarity and pastoral sharing in a territory with social affinities and ecclesial links (cf. C 155), or through other 41 initiatives which extend beyond individual provinces and which foster the growth of communion and fidelity.

The following article will deal more completely with the unity of the province with the world community; here the emphasis is on the fact that linkage with other provinces and openness to the Salesian Family enable salesian brotherhood to be developed in real solidarity and in concrete communal projects of salesian presence and activity, which allow Don Bosco's charism to be expressed in all its pastoral, educational and missionary vitality.

*God does not call us to live as so many dispersed units,
but has willed
that we form a living organism in the Church.
Let us pray that we may have a clear awareness
of our membership of the provincial community
so as to be in it, individually and in groups,
elements of cohesion and apostolic efficacy.*

*That no confrere and no community
may erroneously close itself in,
but that in the provincial community we may all learn
to know, understand and help each other
in the fulfilment of our common mission,
let us pray to the Lord.*

*That we may be personally concerned
about vocations in the province,
and be attentive to discern in every youngster
the germ of the divine call,
let us pray to the Lord.*

*That by sharing with all our confreres
and with all the communities of the province
their joys and sorrows, successes and misfortunes,
we may deepen our sense of belonging
and strengthen our family spirit,
let us pray to the Lord.*

*Lord our God, grant that in our provinces
may reign brotherly love and the cooperation of all
in the apostolic work you have entrusted to us,
so that the Church in which we work
may enjoy the fruits of our charism,
especially for the benefit of the young and the poor.*

ART. 59 THE WORLD COMMUNITY

Religious profession incorporates the salesian in the Society, making him a participant in the communion of spirit, witness and service that is its life within the Universal Church.

Union with the Rector Major and his council, solidarity in apostolic initiatives, communication and exchange of information about the work of the confreres, all increase this communion, deepen the sense of belonging and dispose us to give our service to the world community.

In addition to the communion among the members at local and provincial level, that among all the confreres at world level too gives rise to a series of relationships proper to a true salesian world community.

Art. 59 deals in two paragraphs with this world community to which every salesian belongs from the moment of his profession, and with the principal means which foster this particular communion.

The salesian forms part of a "world community"

The text begins with a reminder of the significance of religious profession, and especially of perpetual profession, which brings to an end the process of vocational discernment with a double decision:

- the one making his profession feels that he is now ready to say "yes" to the Lord, who has called him to "stay with Don Bosco" and gives him so many brothers in Christ (his salesian "confreres");
- the Salesian Society, through the Rector Major in whose name the profession is received, recognizes him as a member and gives him joyful welcome (cf. C 24).

In addition to the juridical fact of "enrolment" (or "incardination") the professed confrere becomes a member of a religious family with a *universal dimension*: to become a salesian is to enter a big community which the Founder himself foresaw and desired to be without geographical limitations. This openness, this worldwide aspect is one of the finest features of our salesian spirit.

The article points out that this fact puts us at the direct service of the universal Church: the Congregation as such lives in the Church an original "communion of spirit, witness and service", which evidently presupposes that all salesians, in fact, live one and the same spirit and converge in the same kind of activity which gives rise to the same kind of witness. Each member, therefore, should feel that he shares in this spiritual wealth and apostolic work in their world dimensions.

In short, as the GC21 put it, the Congregation as a world community "shines forth in the universal Church as a distinct community of brothers".¹

Means for fostering the world community

The article's second paragraph describes the values and elements which increase communion among salesians at world level.

— The first factor is "*union with the Rector Major and his council*". We are speaking here of union not simply as a juridical fact but as a spiritual and loving bond with the Successor of Don Bosco and his more direct collaborators in the animation of the whole Congregation. To accept his directives and meditate on his guidelines is one of the most practical ways of cultivating fidelity to the Founder and strengthening unity in the Congregation.

— "*Solidarity in apostolic initiatives*" which the Congregation undertakes on a world scale is also a powerful means of unification. One need only think, for instance, of the results of the cohesion and missionary drive given to the whole Congregation by "Project Africa". The meaning of 'solidarity' is evidently not confined to its economic aspects (which are spoken of specifically in art. 76 of the Constitutions), or to simple feelings of individuals. Solidarity implies active commitment, mutual help of many kinds between the provinces of the world, involving apostolic plans, availability of confreres, and possible participation of the Salesian Family etc.

— The article also indicates as an efficacious instrument for promoting world communion "*communication and exchange of information about the work of the confreres*". The SGC had already stated that "each confrere must be conscious of the fact that all communication inside the Congregation or among outsiders must be such as to help and not hinder communion".² Here we recall in passing the importance which also the GC22 gave to social communication, specifically entrusting it to a member of the General Council.³

The article ends with a reference to the positive results that will follow from a wider and deeper world communion: in the confreres and local communities there will be an increased sense of belonging to the Congregation, and the commitment of openness and availability "for the service of the world community" will develop more and more.

¹GC21, 34

²SGC, 516

³Cf. C 137; GC22, 73-75

*Lord our God,
by calling us to the Salesian Society of Don Bosco,
which by your will has spread throughout the world,
you have made us sharers in the richness of its spirit,
in its life of communion,
and in its activity in the Church.*

*Give greater breadth to our love,
ecumenical dimensions to our desires
and universal openness to our plans.*

*Make us happy to have so many brothers
who differ in race and language.
May we be solid with their efforts
for the spreading of your Kingdom,
desirous of promoting and sharing true unity
around our superiors,
and witnesses of the presence of our Father and Founder*

Through Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER VI

FOLLOWING CHRIST, OBEDIENT, POOR AND CHASTE

“I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ...because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil 3, 8.12)

Paul’s energetic declaration of total donation to Christ has been chosen to express the radical nature of the following of Christ already noted in connection with the religious profession (Mk 1, 17-18). At this point its consequences are taken up (cf. C 60). It is a matter of each one adopting Jesus’ *“form of life”* of which the three evangelical counsels are the classic expression.

In the New Testament Paul has given us a very good glimpse of the extraordinary relations between himself and Christ (1 Cor 4; 2 Cor 10-13; Gal 1-2). He does it again now, writing to the Philippians, and not without polemical intent. A group of promoters of Jewish observance accused Paul of betraying his Jewish heredity, putting themselves forward as what perfect christian should be. Paul responded by showing them in the first place that his break with his Jewish past, which had been a glorious one (3, 5-6), had been caused by the fact that Christ had seized him (the conversion on the road to Damascus, Acts 9, 5-6), and that in consequence Christ had now such a hold on him that he counted every alternative as so much rubbish (3,8). But if Christ has seized Paul in a warm embrace, Paul felt in conscience that he was bound to continue too gain Christ. He is not yet as perfect as his denigrators think themselves to be. The life of Christ had been a journey, which started at Bethlehem and ended with his Passover, and the Apostle says with humility, thus stamping his donation to Christ with the seal of sincerity: “I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward to the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3, 13-14).

One cannot easily forget what following Jesus meant for Paul: the recognition that Jesus had taken the initiative in seizing him, the courage to make a painful break with values that were good but had been wrongly placed above Christ Himself, Patience in accepting the consequences (which meant persecution), the humble admission of being still on the way to his goal, and the eschatological dimension which rise to hops.

All this is basically what the Constitutions are saying about the evangelical counsels: they represent not merely the practice of virtue, but first and foremost the radical following of the master, putting Paul’s words into effect through grace by “finding the fullest meaning of the life in Christ the Saviour” (C62).

After presenting the obligations of the apostolic mission and analysing the communal character of the mission and the salesian's whole life, the Constitutions describe in chapter VI the third fundamental element which combines with the two preceding ones to form a complete picture of our apostolic consecration: *the following of Christ in the practice of the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity.*

As is well known, the profession of the evangelical counsels has been, since the earliest christian tradition a characteristic of consecrated life in its various forms.¹ It is the response to the gratuitous call by God on the part of a man who wants to conform himself to Jesus even to the extent of taking up the same form of virginal, poor and obedient life, committing himself totally to God and his Kingdom. This kind of existence is publicly recognized by the Church as belonging to her own life and holiness.² The Church, in fact, not only accepts the vows or other sacred bonds by which individual members of the faithful profess their wish to follow Christ through the way of the counsels, but makes herself the guarantor of the authenticity of the evangelical life inspired by God in the Founders of the various institutes;³ each institute carries all the riches of its particular charism in the way it lives the Gospel.

Don Bosco was called by God to carry out in the Church a mission for the benefit of the poor and neglected youth, and was inspired to found a Society (the Society of St Francis de Sales), in which apostolic service is lived in complete dedication to God expressed through the public profession of the evangelical counsels. The Special General Chapter reflecting on the fact that Don Bosco wanted his closest collaborators to commit themselves by vow to an evangelical life of obedience, poverty and chastity (we recall the solemn moment of the first profession, 18 December 1859),⁴ explains the reasons which lead the Founder to link service of the young to the practice of the evangelical counsels.

Admitting that the linkage between the two is not an absolute one (one could dedicate oneself to youth, even adopting the salesian style, without necessarily becoming a religious), the SGC detects in a vocational fact the principal reason for the *connection, which for us is essential, between apostolic service and the profession of the counsels*. It was the gratuitous initiative of the Holy Spirit which prompted Don Bosco to found a Society of "*evangelical*" educators, in whom the commitments of the active life would be animated through full conformity to Christ, lived through the religious vows. Without any doubt Don Bosco was given signs from on high (one need only recall the dreams of the ribbon tied round the foreheads of his collaborators, of the pergola of roses, and in particular the dream of the wheel and that of the ten

¹ A look at the most ancient christian tradition reveals the special honour that was given to virginity or celibacy for the Kingdom. The Fathers of the Church were at one in exalting it as an excellent way of following Christ. Little by little as new forms of religious life came into being first the hermits and then the coenobites, other obligations were added to characterize the kind of life of these men and women who wanted to dedicate themselves to God's service; there was often a tendency to make the obligations assumed at profession three in number. In the writings of the Fathers these three began to correspond to the triad "poverty-chastity-obedience", but not always. In Latin monasticism, for instance, obedience began to be promised, but not poverty or chastity. The classical threefold commitment is clearly indicated by St John Climacus in the seventh century (he speaks of renouncing things, persons and one's own will) only among the canons regular, in the tradition of priest communities, does celibacy come to be linked with the communion of goods and the vow of obedience. Later St Thomas will speak expressly of the religious state as being characterized by the profession of the three Counsels of poverty, perpetual continence and obedience

² Cf. LG 44

³ Cf. PC 2; CIC can. 573,576

⁴ Cf. BM VI. 181

diamonds),⁵ but he also sought advice from enlightened persons (Don Cafasso), and even from Pope Pius IX.⁶

We can get an even deeper understanding of the significance of the evangelical counsels in salesian life. Love of one's neighbour is the fruit of an authentic love of God. Don Bosco's zeal was such that he wanted his sons to be ready to commit all their time and the whole of their very existence to the service of youth in a stable and enduring work. The Spirit led him to understand, not least by experience all the objective resources and fruitful prospects for an apostolic mission that derive from life lived in perfect imitation of the obedient, poor and chaste Christ. The interior dynamism of the evangelical counsel means that their generous and faithful practice not only orientates people towards God, but also strengthens the quality and efficacy of apostolic action and of the spirit which characterizes it.⁷

Starting from these considerations, which are at the foundation of our vocation, chapter VI of the Constitutions gives a deeper significance to the evangelical counsels for our life and our apostolic mission to the young.

The plan of the chapter is quite simple: after a brief introduction which considers in a general fashion the "sequela Christi" in the way of the counsels, the individual vows of obedience, poverty and chastity are presented successively in a connected manner in three sections.

The scheme is as follows:

Art. 60-63: Introductory articles

- Overall significance of the evangelical counsels in our life (*art. 60*)
- Fruitfulness of this evangelical way for the life of fraternal communion and for apostolic service (*art. 61*)
- Its particular witness value
 - in proclaiming the Gospel to youth (*art. 62*)
 - of the hope given by the death and resurrection of Christ (*art. 63*)

Section I Art. 64-71: Our obedience

- Evangelical foundation of our obedience (*art. 64*)
- Obedience and salesian mission: characteristic style of salesian obedience and authority (*art. 65*)
- Obedience in the salesian community: united in looking for God's will (*art. 66*)
- Personal obedience:
 - attitude of faith and responsibility (*art. 67*)
 - requirements of the vow (*art. 68*)
 - personal gifts and obedience (*art. 69*)
 - colloquy with the superior (*art. 70*)

⁵ Cf. MI II 233; III, 25; V, 297; VI, 531-544; VII 199; MB XV, 183-186

⁶ Concerning the advice of Don Cafasso, cf. BM V, 452, for Pius IX's opinion. Cf. MB IX 345, and the *Introduction to the Constitutions* written by Don Bosco

⁷ Cf. SGC, 117- 120

— Obedience and the mystery of the cross (*art. 71*)

Section II Art. 72-79: Our poverty

— Evangelical foundation of our poverty (*art. 72*)

— Poverty and salesian mission: witness and service after did example of Don Bosco (*art. 73*)

— Personal commitment to poverty:

- requirements of the vow (*art. 74*)
- attitudes in a poor life (*art. 75*)

— Communal poverty

- Communion of material and spiritual goods (*art. 76*)
- Witness in community life and in our works (*art. 77*)

— Characteristic features of our spirit of poverty:

- work (*art. 78*)
- love for the poor (*art. 79*)

Section III Art. 80-84: Our chastity

— Evangelical foundation of our chastity

— Chastity and the salesian mission (*art. 81-82*)

— Consecrated chastity in community life (*art. 83*)

— Means for preservation and growth in chastity (*art. 84*)

To the above we may add three further observations concerning the criteria which lead to the arrangement of the contents of the chapter.

a) We note in the first place that the treatment of the three evangelical counsels has been gathered into *one single chapter even though it is divided into three sections*. The intention was to give prominence in this way to the unity of evangelical life according to the counsels. Although the individual counsels have their own significance and content (each of them points to the relationship with one. Aspect of the mystery of Christ, consecrated and sent by the Father). It must be kept in mind that together they define consecrated life in its essential features of the "sequela Christi" and the radical acceptance of the demands of the Gospel. In Christ the mystery of obedience to the will of the Father ("obedient unto death") is strictly linked with the poverty he assumed for love of us ("he humbled himself") and with the virginity through which he loved all with undivided heart even to the extent of giving his life ("he loved them to the end"). So too in the disciple, who follows his Lord, obedience, poverty and chastity are three facets of the commitment to live as Jesus lived: the three vows therefore mutually integrate and shed light on each other.

b) Secondly it should be kept in mind that the Constitutions describe the life of obedience, poverty and chastity not in the abstract but *according to the characteristics proper to the salesian apostolic plan*. This is in line with the indications of the Code of Canon Law, which says: "Each institute, taking account of its own special character

and purposes, is to define in its constitutions the manner in which the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are to be observed in its way of life".⁸

In conformity with this principle the text, after setting out the gospel foundation for each of the counsels, considers them in the light of Don Bosco's experience and of salesian life and activity; it always gives prominence therefore to the links between the counsels, the apostolic mission and the fraternal community, and emphasizes the characteristic manner, suggested by the Holy Spirit, for the salesian practice of the vows, i.e. according to the teaching and example of Don Bosco. This is the scheme followed in all three sections.

c) A last remark concerns the *order in which the three counsels are considered*: it will be seen at once that this is not the same as that adopted in the documents of Vatican II (chastity poverty obedience, which was also the order chosen by the SGC), nor is it the traditional order (poverty chastity obedience) which had been inserted in our Constitutions after the promulgation of the Code of 1917.

The GC22 decided to restore the order which had been used in the Constitutions written by Don Bosco himself: *obedience poverty chastity*. This order has been approved by the Apostolic See and therefore becomes one of our characteristic features.

The first reason why the GC22 put obedience first was the historical and traditional one just referred to. Don Bosco, in fact, although making reference as far as we are aware⁹ to sources using the traditional order of the vows (poverty chastity obedience), adopted for his own Society a different order which emphasized the central position of obedience in the spiritual and apostolic experience the Lord had inspired in him. On the other hand, we know too the great value Don Bosco assigned to obedience in the Society's mission: think, for instance, of the importance given to obedience in the dream of the ten diamonds.¹⁰ We shall see in due course how the Constitutions themselves provide clear evidence of the strict linkage between obedience and the salesian mission (cf. C 64, 65, 66).

⁸ CIC, can. 598

⁹ Cf. F. MOTTO *Constitutiones Soc. S. Francisci Salesii, Fonti letterarie*, RSS July-December 1983, p. 348-356

¹⁰ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The salesians according to Don Bosco dream of the ten diamonds*, ASC 300 (1981)

ART. 60 FOLLOWING CHRIST

By religious profession we mean to live the grace of our baptism radically and more fully.

We follow Jesus Christ, who "virginal and poor, redeemed and sanctified mankind by his obedience",¹ and share more closely in his paschal mystery, in his self-emptying and in his life in the Spirit.

Surrendering ourselves totally to God whom we love above all else, we commit ourselves to a form of life based entirely on gospel values.

¹ PC 1

In presenting the essential significance of the profession of the evangelical counsels in our life as religious apostles, the Constitutions follow closely the doctrine of Vatican II, which gave a vivid description of the spiritual experience lived by an innumerable throng of disciples and witnesses of Christ.

In three successive paragraphs art. 60, after linking religious profession with the universal vocation to holiness of all the baptized, indicates the christological and theological dimensions of life according to the counsels.

The gospel way of the counsels, a development of the grace of baptism

The opening statement of chapter VI of the Constitutions takes us back to art. 3, which from the outset presented our life of the Lord's disciples as a free gift of the Father, who consecrates us through his Spirit, and as our free and loving response in offering ourselves 'to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom' (C 3).

Now this double movement of love — God's initiative and our humble response — is deeply rooted in the grace of baptism, through which the father has called us to be sons in the Son and, marking us with the seal of the Spirit, has made us members of the new people, the Church, and sharers in its mission of salvation. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "(Every christian) is called to realize this baptismal vocation in evangelical charity inspired by the beatitudes: a single commandment, filial love of the Father and fraternal love for his neighbour, after the example of Christ, is the only way towards the same sanctity for all the baptized".¹

The linking of the gift of religious profession with the one vocation of all the baptized to sanctity is significant. As was said in the commentary on art. 23, it is clearly in line with the Council's intention, which the Constitution "Lumen gentium" placed religious among the one People of God called, by a specific vocation, to follow the path of christian holiness.

¹SGC, 109

The text of art. 60 explicitly recalls n.5 of the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis".² The SGC commented as follows: "The Council characterizes religious consecration by saying that it brings about a more profound interior implanting (*"intimius consecratur"*, *"intime radicatur"*) and a richer exterior expression (*"plenius exprimit"*) of baptismal consecration. The religious is one who, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, wishes to intensify to the maximum the following of Christ according to the Gospel in search of love".³

We note the double expression of intensity used to describe the salesian's commitment to realize the grace of his baptism through the profession of the counsels: *fullness* and *radicality*. In the wonderfully synthetic formula of "Perfectae caritatis", it is a case of "the pursuit of perfect charity by means of the evangelical counsels"⁴ through a deep and renewed intention of adhering to Christ and his Gospel: a radical living of the Gospel, following Christ as closely as possible, and this through love and so as to love him ever better. John Paul II explains it very well: "Upon the sacramental basis of Baptism in which it is rooted, religious profession is a new 'burial in the death of Christ': new, because it is made with awareness and by choice; new, because of love and vocation; new, by reason of unceasing conversion. This 'burial in death' causes the person 'buried with Christ' to 'walk like Christ in newness of life'".⁵

Christological dimension of the profession of the counsels

After this deep reflection on the baptismal roots of religious profession, the second paragraph concentrates on the most characteristic element, belonging to all christian tradition, of the practice of the counsels: the *"sequela Christi"*, i.e. the commitment to follow Christ in the same form of life so as to dedicate oneself totally to the service of the Kingdom.⁶

The Constitutions quote literally from the decree "Perfectae caritatis" which is linked with the text of the Constitution "Lumen gentium": "The counsels, when willingly embraced in accordance with each one's personal vocation, contribute in no small degree to the purification of the heart and to spiritual freedom: they continually stimulate one to ardour in the life of love; and above all they have the power *to conform the christian man more fully to that kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Virgin Mother embraced also*".⁷ We can glean from this

² Cf. also ET 7; RD 7

³ SGC, 110

⁴ PC 1

⁵ RD 7. Here is found the essential nucleus of a reply to the objection made by some regarding the use of comparatives in connection with the religious life made by the Council and taken up by the Salesian Constitutions ("fuller". "more radical" etc.). Based on the baptismal consecration and therefore on the universal vocation to holiness, consecrated life excels because of its purpose of a radically evangelical "sequela Christi"; religious consecration does not impart a new character different from that of the grace of baptism, but gives a new impetus of love which leads to a more determined will to follow the way of holiness. This is a true gift of the Spirit which justifies the expression "special consecration" used by the Council (cf. PC 5)

⁶ That this is the central element of the article is also indicated by the title ("Following Christ"), and by the biblical quotation at the head of the whole chapter.

⁷ LG 46

the deep purpose of one who accepts the divine call: he wants to follow Jesus, modelling his own existence on His, reproducing in himself (albeit in an imperfect and limited way) Christ's way of life and his fundamental attitude in the service of the Father.

Obedience, poverty and virginity have really no sense apart from Jesus Christ, his life and his word. Coming into this world to bring salvation to it, he chose for himself a kind of life and a concrete way of realizing it even as a human being; he inaugurated an original style of life which is the fullest and total affirmation of the values of the Kingdom. Obedience, poverty and virginity were in Christ not merely edifying examples but three fundamental dimensions of his earthly existence, the expression of the giving of himself to his Father and to mankind.

Religious life intends to *live and present once again, in a form perennially new in the Church, Christ's manner of living*, his fundamental attitudes.

All this takes on a special significance for the salesian who, by accepting the divine call, has followed Christ the "Apostle of the Father)) (C 11), and has committed himself "to work with him in building up the Kingdom" (C 3). Like Christ the Apostle, the salesian wants to live in virginity, poverty and obedience, with full and loving availability so as to become an instrument of salvation for his fellow men.

But it is in the *sharing of the Paschal mystery* that the "sequela Christi" attains its fullness. If for every Christian, baptism is immersion in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6,4-5), for the religious conformity to Christ crucified and risen again is the constant and supreme norm of his life as a disciple. The cross reveals the totality of God's love: it reveals the love of the Father who gives his Son to the world, and at the same time reveals the Son's loving response. On the Cross the Son is the true "religious of the Father", totally obedient to his will, who has no longer anything of his own because he has loved "with all his heart, with all his mind, and with all his strength".

The text of the Constitutions well illustrates this intimate participation in Christ's paschal mystery, which takes place in the profession of the counsels. In the Cross the salesian finds the deepest reason for his life: by renouncing the old man he realizes his union with Christ crucified, and reaches the totality of love; from the Cross stems the new life of the risen Christ, life according to the Spirit with his fruits of grace and salvation.⁸

To conclude these reflections we cannot fail to quote the reference made by our Founder to the Divine Saviour as the supreme model of our life according to the counsels. We shall see this in detail when we deal with the individual vows. Here it will be sufficient to cite some of Don Bosco's expressions from a circular of 1867 concerning the dispositions needed for entry into the Society: "It would be wrong to enter (the Society) to enjoy a tranquil life, complete one's education, or free oneself of parental or other authority. This would hardly be a response to Christ's call. Such a person would be seeking temporal advantages, not his spiritual good. Our Saviour

⁸ Participation in Christ's humbling of himself and in his life in the Spirit is clearly indicated by PC 5; cf. also RD 7

praised the Apostles and promised them an eternal Kingdom not because they had abandoned the world, but because they had abandoned it in order to follow him through thick and thin; this indeed they did, wearing themselves out with work, penance and suffering, and finally undergoing martyrdom for the faith".⁹

Theological dimension of the profession of the counsels

The article's third paragraph gives explicit emphasis to the theological dimension of the profession of the evangelical counsels: *through Christ and in Christ we are led to the Father*, whom we want to love above all else. This is an overt reference to the statement of "Lumen gentium": "By vows or other sacred ties of a similar nature the christian...dedicates himself wholly to God, his supreme love, to whom he makes himself over in a new and special way to serve and honour him".¹⁰ The life of those who embrace the evangelical counsels becomes a particular "confession" of God's existence, of his saving presence, of his rich love and mercy. It has been said that religious are "*practitioners of God*", in the sense that they give themselves full-time and incomplete availability to the interests of God and his Kingdom; conquered as they are by God's love, their lives are a revelation of the essential nature of communion with him as a constituent relationship of man's ultimate truth; they are in other words "men of the Absolute".

This is true not only of those consecrated persons on whom the Spirit has bestowed the sublime gift of dedicating themselves totally to the contemplation of God, but also of those religious more directly involved in works of charity and the apostolate. As Paul VI wrote: "When your vocation destines you for other tasks in the service of men — pastoral life, missions, teaching, works of charity and so on — is it not above all the intensity of your union with the Lord that will make them fruitful?"¹¹

All this we gather from the invitation of the Constitutions to adhere to God whom we love above all else. And we seem to hear in it an echo of the simple words of our Father Don Bosco inculcating in his boys the way of holiness by loving and serving God above everything else.¹² By the witness of his consecrated life the salesian will educate young people to discover God, and to love and serve him, an idea which will be taken up at greater depth by art. 62.

The article concludes with a synthetic expression summarizing the preceding doctrine: life according to the counsels is a "*life based entirely on gospel values*", i.e. an evangelical path to holiness which the Church has recognized by approving the Constitutions and proclaiming the Founder a Saint (cf. C 1 and 192). At the end of the

⁹ BM VIII, 354-356

¹⁰ LG 44

¹¹ ET 10; cf. PC 5

¹² Cf. Don Bosco's expressions about loving and serving God in the "*Companion of youth*" (OE II, p. 185 ff); cf. also what Don Bosco wrote in the preface to his *Life of Dominic Savio*: "May God give you and all the readers of this book good health and the grace to profit by what I have written. May the Blessed Virgin, to whom Dominic was so devoted, keep us all united in one heart and soul to love and serve our Creator, for he alone deserves to be loved above all things and served all the days of our life" (OE XI, p. 160).

complete description of the salesian project we shall be able to assert that "the Gospel is our supreme Rule" (cf. C 196).

*God our father, we thank you
for having called us from the day of our baptism
to be your sons
and collaborators in your work of salvation.*

*Through our religious profession
you have increased in us our baptismal grace,
by calling us to follow your Son more closely
in the way of the evangelical counsels.*

*We ask you, Father, to bestow on us
an abundance of your Spirit,
that we may be fully conformed to Christ Jesus in
unceasing participation in his paschal mystery as
a pure offering pleasing to you.*

*Grant that we may cleave totally to you,
loving and serving you above all else,
that we may become a loving prophecy
of your saving presence among men
and especially among the young.
we ask you this through Christ your Son, our Lord.*

ART. 61 FRATERNAL AND APOSTOLIC LOVE

Don Bosco frequently points out how the sincere practice of the vows strengthens the bonds of brotherly love and makes our apostolic work coherent.

The profession of the counsels helps us to live a life of fellowship with our brothers in the religious community as in a family which enjoys the presence of the Lord.¹

The evangelical counsels, by fostering purification of the heart and spiritual freedom,² render our pastoral charity more concerned and productive: the obedient, poor and chaste salesian is quick to love and serve those to whom the Lord sends him, especially poor youth.

¹ cf. PC 15

² cf. LG 46

As is shown by the title itself, the purpose of this article is to emphasize the bond which exists in our life between the practice of the evangelical counsels and the apostolic mission lived in the fraternal communion: the salesian, faithfully following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ, is able to live in his community as in a true family and dedicate himself to his mission with ever new enthusiasm.

A clear indication from Don Bosco

The article begins by recalling Don Bosco's teaching, which provides a guarantee of fidelity to the plan of evangelical life inspired by God for the salvation of youth.

Reference has already been made in the introduction to chapter VI to the significance of the religious vows in the apostolic designs of the Salesian Society: they are a bond which firmly unites the members in the love of Christ and brotherly affection, and renders them fully available for the fulfilment of the mission.

Don Bosco was particularly sensitive to the value of communication, which is consolidated by the practice of the religious vows. We recall the first article of chap. II of the Constitutions of 1875, taken up in art. 50 of the present text which points out the fundamental role of the vows for the growth of fraternal charity, to the point of forming "*one heart and one soul to love and serve God*". Don Bosco said the same thing at greater length in his Introduction to the Constitutions: Our Lord takes great pleasure in seeing brethren dwelling in his house in unum, that is, united in heart and mind, serving God and helping one another in charity. This is the praise given to the early Christians by St Luke, that they so loved one another that it seemed that they had but one heart and soul".¹

As far as the linkage between the evangelical counsels and the apostolic mission is concerned, we know of Don Bosco's insistence on promoting God's glory

¹D. BOSCO, Introduction to the Constitutions, Brotherly charity; cf. Appendix Constitutions 1984, p. 236

and saving souls. It is interesting to read again another extract from our Father's Introduction to the Constitutions: "Our vows may be considered as so many spiritual cords by which we consecrate ourselves to God, and place our will, our goods, and our spiritual and moral faculties in the power of the superior, so that we may all form but one heart and one soul in order to promote, according to our Constitutions, the greater glory of God; precisely as the Church invites us when in prayer she says: *"That the faith in their minds and the piety of their actions may be one"*.²

The evangelical counsels reinforce brotherly communion

In and for the Church religious profession has always been an outstanding sign of love: a sign of the love of God who reserves a person for himself and sets that person aside for a mission, and a sign of the love of the disciple who responds with generosity to the divine call.

Now this sign of love is showered in all its richness on the Church itself, and contributes like leaven to building it up as a community of love. This is the sense in which must be understood the expression of Vatican II: "The evangelical counsels unite those who practise them to the Church and her mystery in a special way":³ they arise from within God's loving design for his Church and help it to grow in charity and in its mission.

But the article, with its quotation from the decree "Perfectae caritatis", emphasizes the contribution made by the practice of the vows to the religious community by laying the sure foundation for a peaceful common life and brotherly communion *"as in a family which enjoys the presence of the Lord"*.⁴ faithful observance of the evangelical counsels not only removes obstacles in the way of Christian cohabitation (selfishness, excessive attachment to worldly goods, exclusive love of creatures), but more especially and from a positive standpoint releases energy for a richer and more complete life of communion: consecrated celibacy makes it possible for us to give ourselves to our brothers in the Lord with great freedom and concern; poverty leads us to share everything, both material and spiritual goods, in a family spirit, common obedience to the Father's will helps us to adopt an attitude of brotherly attention and submission, according to the Apostle's advice: "be subject to one another" (Eph 5, 21).

Speaking especially of our salesian communities, the SGC expressed this reality as follows: "Our task requires 'teams' which are well knit together and coherent in their method of action; it requires also a particularly cordial family spirit. All this is sustained by the evangelical virtues of the religious life".⁵

²D. BOSCO, Introduction to the Constitutions, the vows: cf. Appendix Constitutions 1984, p. 228

³Cf. LG 44

⁴PC 15

⁵SGC, 123

The evangelical counsels make us more painstaking in our apostolic activity

The article's last paragraph is a synthetic statement of the influence exerted by the practice of the evangelical counsels on the mission; the vows, lived in a spirit of love, can not only unite the members among themselves but are prerequisite for an apostolically efficacious service.

Here too should be remembered the liberating effect of evangelical life according to the counsels. Substantially the article carries the content of the text of the Constitution "Lumen gentium" where it states that the counsels, when willingly embraced in accordance with each one's personal vocation, contribute in no small degree to the purification of the heart and to spiritual freedom", and so "they continually stimulate one to ardour in the life of love".⁶ External freedom, which the counsels foster, gives us greater full-time availability for the effective service of the young with all our resources; and internal freedom directs in their direction all our affective capabilities, enabling us to love them with the kind of affection and dedication desired by Don Bosco, and in line with the requirements for a truly complete education.

The Acts of the SGC provide an authoritative explanation of this *apostolic dimension of our vows*: "The evangelical values of the religious life favour our saving work for youth and for the working classes, and the spirit of zeal and affectionate kindness with which we must fulfil it. They allow us to realize the 'cetera tone' which conditions the fullness of the"; in fact they render us available both in our exterior life and in our deeper emotional response. The salesian renounces having children of his own through marriage in order to love the young people with whom he works. He renounces the possession of goods to put both himself and the goods he receives at the service of the poor; he renounces a life at his own choice to be ready to go wherever service is most necessary".⁷

The history of our Society clearly shows how much a frugal and austere life, chaste and generous self-dedication, and the convinced family solidity of generations of salesians at the school of Don Bosco, have made it possible to start up works and initiatives and carry out other tasks in conditions which would seem at first sight quite impossible. It is still true at the present day that the unconditional dedication stemming from the evangelical counsels is without any doubt the secret of a high apostolic return.

⁶LG 46

⁷SGC 123

*Lord Jesus,
you have gathered us together into a family,
united by the bond of charity
and sustained by the evangelical life
of obedience, poverty and chastity,
after your own example and that of our Founder Don Bosco.*

*Increase the generosity of our daily self-donation,
and help us to live our holy vows
in the brotherhood of our religious family,
as a way of pure love.*

*Grant that by following with joyful enthusiasm
the path of the evangelical counsels, we may be
freed from everything opposed to charity, and
be ready to love those to whom you send us,
especially young people who are poor.*

ART. 62 A PARTICULAR SIGN OF GOD'S PRESENCE

The practice of the counsels, lived in the spirit of the beatitudes, makes our proclamation of the Gospel more convincing.

In a world tempted by atheism and the idolatry of pleasure, possessions and power, our way of life bears witness, especially to the young, that God exists, that his love can fill a life completely, and that the need to love, the urge to possess, and the freedom to control one's whole existence, find their fullest meaning in Christ the Saviour.

Our way of life also affects our manner of dressing, which is meant to be an external sign of this witness and service. The clerics follow the dispositions of the particular Churches in the countries in which they reside,¹ and the lay members adopt the simple style which Don Bosco recommended.²

¹ cf. CIC, can. 669

² cf. C 1875, XV, 1-3

After presenting the evangelical counsels in their fundamental relationship to Christ (C 60), and indicating their value with respect to fraternal and apostolic love (C 61), the Constitutions go on to devote two articles to the witness given by those who follow this way of holiness.¹ Evangelical testimony of the counsels in the salesian mission

Evangelical testimony of the counsels in the salesian mission

If it is to be efficacious, every apostolic mission, and particularly the proclamation of the Word, needs to be "confirmed by the signs that accompany it" (Mk 16,17-20). The most eloquent sign is the witness of the life of the one who bears the message: thus it was for the prophets, for Jesus himself and for his Apostles.

Now the practice of the counsels, by which we are conformed to the life of Christ, gives to this witness particular force, because it obliges us to live those evangelical values which we teach to our youngsters.²

This is the basic theme developed in art. 62: one who testifies to the Gospel by his own way of life is able to proclaim it in a more convincing way. The religious vows, which impose on us the radical living of the spirit of the beatitudes, make our existence accord with the task and demands of evangelization.

This is all the more important at a time in history when young people are extremely sensitive to any lack of consistency between the life of an educator and what he says. This was a point made by Paul VI: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are

¹ The title of the article draws its inspiration from the Apostolic Letter "Redemption donum" of John Paul II, nn. 14, 16

² Cf. SGC, 125

witnesses".³ And referring specifically to religious, the same Pope wrote: "Religious have a special importance in regard to that form of witness which is a primary element of evangelization. This silent witness of poverty, of detachment from the things of this world, of chastity, pure innocence of life and voluntary obedience, as well as offering a challenge to the world and to the Church herself, constitutes an excellent form of preaching which can influence even non-Christians who are of good will and appreciative of certain spiritual values".⁴

This too was the conviction of Don Bosco, who often recommended "good example" as an efficacious means of drawing other people to the Lord. No sermon is more powerful than good example", he wrote in the first Regulations for the Oratory.⁵ And he reminded salesian educators: "Never try to tell others to practise virtue or carry out a duty unless you first set the example".⁶

A witness for the voting in a world tempted atheism and materialism

The Rule points w two main situations in which people, and especially young people, find themselves at the present day and which for the witness of the salesian.

On the one hand they are suffering the effects of being in a world which is tempted to atheism: a practical atheism indifferent to religious values, one which just ignores God rather than explicitly denying him. Our life in accordance with the Gospel testifies to God, to his presence and his Love, because the way in which we live and stay with young people in great need would make no sense hut for him, the one we have freely chosen as the supreme Love the highest Good and perfect Teacher.

And on the other hand, in a world which exalts materialism in so many ways, the young are tempted to look for solutions apart from God (and sometimes in place of him) for the three fundamental problems they meet with in their process of growth: the need for love and sexual activity, the urge to obtain and possess what is needed for their existence, and finally the freedom to manage their own life, with its needs for personal autonomy and self-assertion and within the limitations imposed by social cohabitation. The problems are difficult, and on their solution depends the individual's fulfilment or whether he gives astray.

The salesian educator, by his chaste, poor and obedient life, testifies to the christian sense of the above mentioned values: sexuality is ordained for personal relationships inspired by a true love; money is destined for a function of service; freedom is given not for the domination or opposing of others but for building with them. The SGC declared: "The religious holds these values highly and by his consecrated life he challenges every deviation from them (eroticism, unjust amassing of wealth. And oppressive power); he shows their limitations and proclaims their

³ Paul VI, *Address to the members of the "Council of the Laity"*, quoted in EN 41

⁴ EN 69

⁵ BM IV, 557

⁶ BM X, 443

relationship between the work of education and life according to the evangelical counsels, and it is important that we be aware of the fact.

Witness of the manner of dress

The last paragraph dwells on a particular external sign of our life as religious apostles: the way we dress.

The text draws attention in particular to the significance of religious dress for the public. It is an external sign, and one which links a person with the designs of God, who has chosen him and set him aside for Himself.⁸ Without claiming that the habit or manner of dress is of absolute importance, it should be kept in mind that even by what we are exteriorly we can proclaim the love of God and make known what he is doing in the world. This is all the more important in a world in which the signs of God are becoming ever more hidden.

As far as the salesian is concerned, the text reflects what has been our constant tradition: Don Bosco did not want his sons to have a distinctive mode of dress, a habit of a uniform kind throughout the Congregation; he spoke of a simple but dignified way of dressing, suitable for religious dedicated to a work of education among youth.⁹ Certainly we must not undervalue what our responsibility as educators calls for, even in the way we dress.

The text goes on to specify that the clerics,¹⁰ in accordance with the example and teaching of Don Bosco, will follow the dispositions made for the secular clergy. The relevant norms (as regards both the kind of dress and the circumstances in which it may be worn) vary from one country to another, and are for the particular Churches to decide; clerical salesians will be faithful to them, giving in this way a further indication of their love for the Church.

7SGC, 125

⁸The text expresses the substance of an article that the GC22 wanted to place in the General Regulations. The CRIS asked that in harmony with the dispositions of the new Code of Canon Law the theme be dealt with in the Constitutions. Can. 669, referred to in the note to the constitutional article, is based on the thought of Vatican II, which said: "The religious habit, as a symbol of consecration, must be simple and modest, at once poor and becoming. In addition it must be in keeping with the requirements of health and it must be suited to the times and place and to the needs of the apostolate" (PC 17)

⁹In the Constitutions of 1875, Don Bosco dealt with the habit in a short chapter (XV) of three articles: in the first he says that the Society does not have a uniform habit but the dress of the members will be in accordance with the usage of the different countries: the other two refer specifically to the dress of clerics and coadjutors. The conclusion should be noted: "Rut everyone alike shall strive to avoid all the new fashions of seculars" (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 199)

¹⁰The word "clerics" is used here in the general sense of art. 4 of the Constitutions within our Society.

*God our Father,
Christ your son has made us signs of himself
in a world which adores creatures
rather than you, the one God, living and true.*

*Grant that by living our vocation in complete fidelity
we may become living witnesses among youth
to the Beatitudes of the Gospel,
and that all we say and do
may manifest to them your love
and the supreme sense of existence in Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

ART. 63 WITNESS OF THE WORLD TO COME

The offering of his own freedom through obedience, the spirit of evangelical poverty and the love which becomes a gift in chastity, make the salesian a sign of the power of the resurrection.

The evangelical counsels, fashioning his heart entirely for the Kingdom, help him to discern and welcome God's action in history; in the simplicity and hard work of daily life they transform him into an educator who proclaims to the young "new heavens and a new earth",¹ awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise.²

¹ cf. Rev 21,1

² cf. Rom 12,12

The theme of the witness which the salesian gives by living the spirit of the beatitudes in the practice of the evangelical counsels is here considered in its paschal and eschatological dimension: he testifies to the Kingdom of God, already in operation through the Passover of Christ, which continues to grow until it reaches its definitive fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Art. 63 gathers together and points out the aspects of the sign and anticipation of the Kingdom of Heaven which are present in the profession of the evangelical counsels.

The article takes its rise from the doctrine of Vatican II which, in speaking of the character of the sign proper to religious profession, says: "For the People of God has here no lasting city but seeks the city which is to come; and the religious state of life, in bestowing greater freedom from the cares of earthly existence on those who follow it, simultaneously reveals more clearly to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, witnessing to the new and eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ and foretelling our future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom".¹

For us Salesians the article reflects the pedagogical insistence with which Don Bosco spoke of Paradise to the confreres and boys: "Always remember, my sons," he wrote in the *Companion of Youth*, "that you have all been created for Paradise";² "Bread, work and Heaven", he promised the salesians;³ "A piece of Paradise will make up for everything!", he used to repeat when in difficulties.⁴ In the dream of the diamonds, "Reward" (on the back of the garment representing the physiognomy of the Congregation) is associated with the diamonds of the three vows and with that of "Fasting". On the rays were written: If the greatness of the reward pleases you, do not be deterred by the amount of work involved. He who suffers with Me will rejoice with Me. What we suffer on earth is only for a moment, while the joys of my friends are

¹ LG 44

² D. BOSCO, *Companion of Youth*. Part 1 (OE II, p. 190)

³ Cf. BM XII, 443; MB XVII, 251; MB XVIII, 419

⁴ BM VIII, 200

eternal in heaven.⁵ It can truly be said that the continual awareness of heaven was one of the central principles that added thrust to Don Bosco's distinctive spirituality and Pedagogy.⁶

These preliminary remarks will help us to understand better the ideas expressed in this article of the Constitutions.

The salesian is a sign for the young of the power of Christ's resurrection

The text opens with a reaffirmation of the paschal value of consecrated life in the profession of the counsels. The offering of the salesian who dedicates to the Father his own freedom, his possessions and all his love, is joined with the offering of Christ and the mystery of his death and resurrection; it testifies to the world that Christ's work of salvation is alive and working even now among men. In this way the salesian becomes a witness to the redeeming force of Christ's paschal mystery, a sign of the power (*'dynamis'*) of the resurrection, which is able to transform the human heart. As Paul VI wrote to religious: "Today more than ever, the world needs to see in you men and women who have believed in the Word of the Lord, in his resurrection and in eternal life, even to the point of dedicating their lives to witnessing to the reality of that love, which is offered to all men".⁷

By his life the salesian proclaims to the young "new heavens and a new earth"

The second paragraph delves more deeply into these truths. The two characteristic attitudes of the christian are emphasized, which should shine in the religious with a brighter living light.

On the one hand he testifies to a fact that has already happened: the Lord has come! The Lord is present! Christ's Passover has inaugurated the new and final epoch, and the messianic benefits are already given to men.

On the other hand the life of the christian is an act of hope in the coming of the Lord once again, the hope of the definitive fulfilment of Christ's Kingdom in the "new heavens and a new earth", which God is preparing for his children. It is expressed in the constant prayer of the Spirit and the Betrothed: "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22, 20).

The salesian, as is well expressed in the text, bears witness to this double reality. He *testifies in the first place to the fact that the Lord is alive and is present in history*, and that as the Council says, "heavenly goods are already present in this age" in a way that is real though imperfect.⁸ St Teresa of Lisieux once said: "In heaven I

⁵ MB XV, 184

⁶ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The salesian in the dream of the diamonds*, ASC. 300 (1981), p. 25

⁷ ET 53

⁸ Cf. IG 44 for the witness of religious; LG 48 for the eschatological nature of the Church

shall certainly see God, but as for being with him, that I have achieved already on this earth". Life according to the counsels, conformed to the kind of life embraced by the Son of God for the fulfilment of the Father's will, little by little shapes the heart of the salesian to that of Christ, which beats only for the Kingdom. In this way he learns to "discern and accept God's action in history" and is able to point it out to the young.

With this obligation there is linked another, that of the *prophetic task of proclaiming the coming of the Lord*, the Kingdom to be fulfilled, the new heavens and a new earth" which will be the definitive condition of humanity. Here the evangelical counsels have an evident function. Virginity is eternal life already begun: "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven" (Mk 12,25). The same is true of poverty: "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mk 10,21); and the same for obedience: "Father, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6,10).

The text of the Rule emphasizes the message of hope that the salesian must proclaim by his life, after the manner of a prophet. It has a special importance when linked with his mission as an educator of youth, and therefore able to embed the roots of the future of the young generations in the sure horizons of hope. This hope does not consist in passive waiting, but carries obligations and is the permanent source of true happiness. We have as an indication the words of the Apostle used in the liturgy on the feast of our Father, Don Bosco: "Be always joyful; the Lord is near!" (Phil 4, 4-5).

*God, my Father, on the day of my profession
you accepted the humble offering
of my freedom and my love,
uniting it to the redemptive sacrifice of your Son;
you transform my poverty by the power of your Spirit,
and make my life a living sign of the resurrection.*

*Conform my heart to that of your Son,
that henceforth it may beat only for the Kingdom.*

*Help me to discern the signs of your presence
and of your activity among men,*

*So that I may be, like Don Bosco,
the bearer of joyful and active hope,
able to bear witness at every moment
that after the sufferings of this present life,
"new heavens and a new earth" are awaiting us,
in which justice will be found.*

Through Christ our Lord.

OUR OBEDIENCE

"Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Heb 5, 8-9).

There are other biblical texts found in the Constitutions in connection with obedience, and all of them relate to the obedient attitude of Christ: Phil 2,8; Mt 26,42; Jn 12,24 (C 71). Christ, with his motives and style of submission to the Father, are at the centre of all of them. Heb 5, 8-9 powerfully reinforces this christological dimension of religious obedience by adding the important motive: "*Christus oboediens*" because "*Christus patiens*".

The whole passage Heb 4,14-5,10 (which provides the context for the quotation) depicts Jesus Christ as the merciful high priest, deeply solid with those in travail. This he has become through a dramatic series of events: he accepted with complete availability the Father's plan of salvation; in fidelity to it, although he was his Son, he did not hesitate to accept the consequences to the fullest extent: death on the cross. But God raised him to life again as the bringer of eternal salvation to all who courageously follow his path of obedience.

And Jesus is not only a model. In accordance with the wise saying that 'experience teaches' repathen-emathen'², through what he suffered for us in obedience to the Father, he learned in his own flesh the hard price of our obedience. He learned the sense of obedience by courageously suffering the pains that accompanied it.

We therefore obey God in Christ because of the happy outcome of his obedience, but also in the awareness that he is solid with us. Not only is he waiting for us at the goal, but he is at our side on the way. Not only is he our model, but he is our priest and intercessor that we might learn to obey. This communion with the obedience of Christ and the saving significance he has given to it become the principal reasons for the salesian obedience which the Constitutions present to us (C 64-71).

* * *

ART. 64 GOSPEL SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR OBEDIENCE

Our Saviour assured us that he came on earth to do not his own will but that of his Father in heaven.¹

By professing obedience we offer our will to God and by carrying out the mission entrusted to us we relive in the Church and in the Congregation Christ's own obedience.

Docile to the Spirit and attentive to the signs he gives us in the events of each day, we take the Gospel as our supreme rule of life,² the Constitutions as a sure path to follow, and the superiors and the community as day by day interpreters of God's will.

¹ cf. C 1875, III, 1

² cf. PC 2

The purpose of this article, which introduces the section on salesian obedience, is to indicate the gospel foundation for obedience and hence to reveal its deepest sense. The text is based entirely on the thought of our Founder and on the doctrine of the Council, of which the SGC made a deep analysis.¹ We may dwell especially on three lines of thought developed in the article.

Jesus Christ obedient to the Father

The obedience of the religious has its foundation in the obedience of Jesus Christ, and is one of the aspects involved in following him. When the Council wanted to indicate within the People of God those who followed the way of the evangelical counsels, it defined them as "men and women who pursue more closely the Saviour's self-emptying and show it forth more clearly... so as to conform themselves more fully to the obedient Christ".² In its turn the decree "Perfectae caritatis" emphasizes that the obedience of religious is in imitation of "the example of Jesus Christ, who came to do his Father's will (cf. Jn 4,34; 5,30; Heb 10,7; Ps 39,9) and, 'taking the form of a servant' (Phil 2,7), learned obedience through what he suffered (cf. Heb 10,8)".³

Hence we cannot understand the obedience of the salesian, unless we are deeply aware of the mystery of the obedient Christ. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "Jesus' obedience to his Father sums up his life and the mystery of his death and resurrection. It reveals at one and the same time his identity of Son and Servant, and shows him united in an ineffable and absolutely unique way to the Father and hence his total submission to him".⁴ And so it is easy to conclude: "Our obedience draws its real origin from our baptismal incorporation in Christ and in the love uniting him to the Father".⁵ This fundamental concept cannot be overemphasized: the obedient Jesus

¹ Cf. *Salesian obedience today*, SGC, 624 ff.

² LG 42

³ PC 14

⁴ SCC, 627

⁵ Ibid.

is the living source and model of our own obedience; without faith in Christ religious obedience makes no sense!

In addition to the scriptural text placed at the head of the section (Heb 5, 8-9), the present article asserts this fundamental characteristic of salesian obedience by quoting the phrase which Don Bosco had included in the first of the constitutional articles on the vow of obedience: "Our Divine Redeemer has assured us that he came down on earth not in order to do his own will but that of his heavenly Father".⁶ This expression of our Founder brings to mind the gospel statement in which Jesus declares his own attitude as the Son and perfect servant of the Father: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn 4,34).

This reference to the obedient Christ will be taken up again in the last article of the section, where obedience is considered in its culminating moment, i.e. in the sharing in the Lord's paschal mystery.

We relive Christ's obedience in the fulfilment of the mission

The second paragraph goes more deeply into the significance of our obedience: "By professing obedience we offer our will to God". Once again the text calls explicitly on the decree "Perfectae caritatis",⁷ which declares that this is an intensely evangelical use of liberty. To renounce for reasons of faith the control of one's own life and to filially submit to the will of God the Father, is the obedience of every Christian. Our obedience as religious consists in living this mystery in an all-embracing way ("we offer our will to God") within a community project ("we relive in the Church and in the Congregation Christ's own obedience").

The text asserts the ecclesial and communal character of our obedience: Christ who is always alive continues to obey the Father through the Church and his baptized members; for this reason it has been said that "a son of the Church is a son of obedience".⁸ Within the Church obedience to Christ is relived in the humble service rendered by our Congregation in the plan of salvation.

Special emphasis must be laid on the close *linkage between obedience and the mission the Church entrusts to us*. The text of the Rule is at pains to say that we relive the obedience of Christ "by carrying out the mission entrusted to us". For Jesus "obedience unto death, even to the death of the cross" was for the purpose of fulfilling the redeeming mission for which he came in to this world (*"for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven"*, we say in the Credo). For us too the profession of obedience, which makes us adhere totally to the will of the Father, gives us a place in his plan of salvation and enables us to work efficaciously in a specific apostolic project: obedience to God makes us fully available for the service of our brothers in

⁶ *Costituzioni* 1875, III, I (cf. F MOTTO, p. 93)

⁷ Cf. PC 14

⁸ Cardinal H. De Lubac

apostles, and is directed to our mission for the salvation of youth.

Don Bosco attached great importance to the obedience of individual members in pursuance of the Society's mission. We remember his dream of the ribbon around the forehead⁹ and that of the diamonds.¹⁰ On many occasions our Founder stressed the crucial importance of obedience: "A steady obedience is the life of a religious congregation, its bond of unity", he said.¹¹ Worthy of quotation in particular is the conference he gave to the salesians on 11 March 1869, immediately after the Congregation had been approved by the Apostolic See. After recalling that until then the Society, lacking ecclesiastical approval, had been to some extent suspended in mid-air, he continued: "But now, my dear sons, things are no longer the same. Our Congregation is approved; we are mutually bound to each other: I to you, you to me, and all of us to God... We are no longer private individuals but a Society, a visible body". And then he went on to develop the Pauline image of a body, emphasizing the importance of obedience for the life of the Society: "*This is, so to speak, the hinge on which our whole Society turns. Without obedience there would be chaos. If, instead, obedience reigns, we shall form but one body and soul to love and serve the Lord*".¹²

Means by which the will of the Father is made known

The last paragraph of art. 64 explains more fully the way in which obedience is exercised "in the Church and in the Congregation". The difficulty, in fact, is not always that of heartfelt obedience to the will of the Father, but rather of knowing what precisely his will is, by what signs it can be discovered, and what instruments exist for its interpretation. Don Bosco tells us: "We make the vow of obedience, precisely in order that we may be sure that we are doing in everything the holy will of God".¹³

What then are the signs and instruments for a sure adherence to God's will? The article provides a response by indicating the means by which the will of the Father is made manifest. To understand it better we may turn to the SGC, on whose study and observations the text is based.¹⁴

Among the many signs which manifest God's will (say the Acts of the SGC), of great importance are the happenings and concrete situations of the present moment ("God speaks through history"), whether they be of general implication like the "signs of the times", or of particular import like the needs, emergencies, demands and problems of the young, of each moment, place, community and individual.

These signs however cannot always be interpreted with ease and clarity. To discover their deeper meaning we go in the first place to the GOSPEL, where we find

⁹BM II, 232-233

¹⁰MB XV, 183; cf. *Dream of the diamonds*, ASC 300(1981)

¹¹Cf. BM XII, 332

¹²BM IX, 267-269

¹³*Costituzioni* 1875, III, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, P.93)

¹⁴Cf. SGC, 630

displayed the perfect obedience of Jesus. This is something evidently valid for all Christians but the Council thought it well to recall that 'a fortiori' it is the "supreme rule" for all religious.¹⁵

The CONSTITUTIONS are another instrument which is specifically ours: they constitute our gospel viewpoint for understanding realities in depth. The fact that they have been approved by the Apostolic See is a guarantee for us that they are a practical and safe road to sanctity for us to follow (cf. C 192), and at the same time they unite us in a spirit of obedience to the Church.

The Gospel and the Constitutions are objectively certain instruments which ensure fidelity to the Congregation's spirit and mission. To set them in a specific historical context and apply them to concrete realities, the SUPERIORS AND THE COMMUNITY have a specific role to play as "day by day interpreters of God's will". Obedience to God through a man who represents God is a participation in the radical obedience of Christ, who submitted himself to men in his incarnation and redeeming mission. This aspect of obedience to the Superior will be taken up at greater length in the articles which follow. Suffice it to recall that the aspect which distinguishes "religious" obedience from the common christian virtue of obedience is precisely that of submission of the will to the lawful Superior: this is the commitment we made through the formula of profession (cf. C 24)

The mention of the community as a place in which God's will is made manifest, deserves special comment. It is clear that here the "community" includes the Superior as father and guide, but what is being emphasized is that in the community, be it local, provincial or world, each member has a providential indication of the Father's will. This aspect too will be taken up again when communal obedience is dealt with (C 66).

*God, our Father, we thank you for
having called us to relive in the
Church and in the Salesian Society
the mystery of your Son,
who became for us an obedient servant
"even to the death of the cross".*

*With the spirit and dedication of Don Bosco
we offer you our freedom as sons,
uniting it completely to your loving designs
in fulfilling the mission of salvation
which you have entrusted to us.*

¹⁵ Cf. PC 2

*Send us, Father, your Spirit of truth
and enable us to read the signs of your will,
which you continue to show us
in the Gospel of Jesus,
in our Constitutions,
in the dispositions of our Superiors
and in every circumstance of our life.*

*Make us always ready to respond to
you in loving generosity and fidelity.
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 65 SALESIAN STYLE OF OBEDIENCE AND AUTHORITY

In salesian tradition obedience and authority are practised in a family spirit of love which inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust.

The superior directs, guides and encourages, making discreet use of his authority. All the confreres collaborate by obeying readily and sincerely, "with cheerfulness and humility".¹

The service of authority and the willingness to obey are the principles of cohesion in the Congregation, and guarantee its permanence; for the salesian they are the path to holiness and the source of energy in his work, of joy and of peace.

¹ C 1875, III, 2

After describing obedience in its gospel source and with relation to the divine model, Jesus Christ, who came to do the will of his Father, the Constitutions go on to present the particular way in which the salesian obeys: art. 65 deals, in fact, with the "salesian style of obedience and authority".

We may note at once that here, as in other articles of the section, *obedience and authority are strictly united with each other*. This emphasizes not only that the manner of obeying is linked with that of commanding, but more especially that the one who exercises authority and his brother, who has freely chosen to submit his will to that authority, are both servants of one and the same apostolic project, linked by the same Rule and united in the genuine search for the will of God.¹

The guidelines given in this article come directly from the teaching and example of Don Bosco, which have been passed on to his sons and become part of our family heritage and a basic element of our tradition (note in this connection the reference to tradition in the introductory words of the article).

Already in the commentary on art. 64, attention was drawn to the importance Don Bosco gave to obedience in his Society's apostolic project: the salesian's obedience is directed to the fulfilment of the mission, and is therefore the obedience of an apostle who finds his fulfilment in the unconditional donation he makes of himself for the service of those to whom the Lord sends him. The parallel task of salesian authority is primarily that of animating the community and guiding it in the development of this service.

But after stating the fundamental apostolic character of salesian obedience and authority, the article goes on to describe the way in which these are carried out.

What does Don Bosco teach us in this connection?

We all know the principle of total availability that Don Bosco wanted to be realized in obedience. He wanted his sons to "see in the will of the superior the will of

¹ Cf. what Don Bosco said in the conference of 3 February 1876 concerning the link between the superior and the Rule (BM XII, 62). This will be taken up at greater length in the following article dealing with communal obedience

God",² "let us ever bear in mind that the superior is God's representative, and that in obeying him we obey God himself".³ He wanted his salesians to be "like a handkerchief" in the hands of the superior,⁴ i.e he wanted them to be completely available and ready to do anything when necessary.

But this need for total availability is linked with another principle on which Don Bosco founded his community, the value of Christian brotherhood; in Don Bosco's mind the soul which gave life to this hierarchically structured body had to be charity.⁵ This is a duty of everyone in relationships which bind the members to one another, but it is particularly necessary in the one who must be the father of his subjects:⁶ charity should be his word of command;⁷ he must make himself loved rather than feared.⁸

And so, while Don Bosco wanted obedience to be expressed in full and complete availability, he was deeply human about the exercise of authority, because he wanted obedience to be practised through love and not constraint, with joy and not unwillingly.⁹ He knew how to make use of the particular talents of individuals and wanted "each one to work according to his strength and capabilities",¹⁰ a responsible adult obedience was what he was looking for.

To put it briefly Don Bosco exercised authority and asked for obedience *as these would be exercised in a family*.

This reference to Don Bosco's practice helps to a better understanding of the present article, which presents in three paragraphs some features of the salesian style of commanding and obeying with the positive results that derive from it.

Obedience and authority lived in charity and the family spirit

The family spirit and charity provide the atmosphere which among us surrounds both obedience and authority.

We have already said when dealing with the salesian spirit (cf. C 16) and the fraternal community (cf. C 49, 51) that the family spirit is an idea which is central to Don Bosco's way of doing things. To it he often makes reference in his words and writings and draws on it in giving life to his work and controlling it. He wanted the community to be a healthy, well-ordered and harmonious family; love should reign in it and inspire its life, work and mutual relationships, in it the superior should be present as a friend, brother and father (cf. C 55).

² Cf. BM IX, 269

³ Cf. BM IX, 270

⁴ Cf. BM III, 385, cf. also BM IV, 294; VI, 8; XIII, 150

⁵ Cf. BM IX, 269

⁶ *Costituzioni 1875*, III, 2 (cf. F. MOTTO. p. 93)

⁷ Cf. BM XIII, 554

⁸ Cf. BM VII, 317

⁹ Cf. BM XII, 62

¹⁰ BM IX, 269

anniversary of the approval of the Constitutions are significant: "Rather than a Society, Don Bosco wanted to form a family, based almost exclusively on the gentle, affable and watchful fatherliness of the superior, and on the filial and fraternal affection of his subjects".¹¹ We understand what Don Bosco wrote to a salesian to whom he was entrusting the direction of a house: "*Go in the Lord's name, not as a superior but as a friend, a brother and father. Let your way of commanding be governed by charity, concerned to do good to all and harm to none*".¹² To Don Rua, rector at Mirabello, he had given as a norm: "Strive to make people love you rather than fear you. When commanding or correcting, always make those concerned understand that you are prompted by a desire to do them good and not your own whim".¹³

The article points to this family style of charity as characteristic of the salesian spirit, and says that it "*inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust*"; i.e. a spirit which unites the confreres with each other and with the superiors in the greatest possible atmosphere of mutual confidence, of trust and fellow-feeling, of peaceful and constructive discussion, precisely as would happen in a family where the members esteem and love each other.

We note the explicit reference to the reciprocal nature of relationships: confidence of the salesian in his superior and the latter's trust in the confreres: "mutual trust", to use the expression of art. 16. Esteem and trust on one side only are insufficient. A successful outcome depends on the coalescence of positive efforts on both sides: each must strive to contribute his own full confidence and to deserve that of his brother.

Let us not forget that the practical solution to many problems concerning authority and obedience can be found in a determination to foster this atmosphere, which is so characteristic of our family.

The salesian manner of commanding and obeying

The expression we find in the Rule when depicting the salesian superior, that he "makes discreet use of his authority", may seem surprising at first sight.

The intention is certainly not to take from the precise task of the superior of guiding the community and confreres with an authentic power of government, but rather to emphasize that among us the use of formal orders is kept to the minimum, and government is customarily exercised through animation. Art. 55 described the salesian superior as a "brother among brothers", who acts as a "father, teacher and spiritual guide". The present article confirms that he follows this line of action: he "*directs*" as the teacher of spiritual doctrine; he "*guides*" as the one bearing primary responsibility, full of zeal and pastoral prudence; he "*encourages*" as an affectionate

¹¹ D. RINALDI, *Letter for 50th anniversary of approval of Constitutions*, ASC 23, 24 January 1924, p. 179

¹² Letter to Fr. Pietro Perrot, *collected letters*, III, p. 360; cf. also Letter to Fr. Domenico Tomatis, *collected letters*, IV. P 337

¹³ BM VII, 317

father and brother. In such conditions it is evident that frequent recourse to authoritative interventions becomes unnecessary: when the confreres are enlightened and guided they proceed with responsibility and a spirit of initiative in the realization of the common project.

Clearly the article does not exhaust the presentation of the characteristics of salesian authority; it needs to be completed by what is said elsewhere in the Constitutions and Regulations.¹⁴

The salesian characteristics of obedience are described with expressions dear to Don Bosco, taken in part from one of the articles of the Constitutions written by our Father: "Let everyone be obedient to his superior, and consider him in everything as a loving father, obeying him without any sort of reservation, promptly, cheerfully and with humility".¹⁵

It will be worth our while to draw attention to the three qualities of salesian obedience:

— A sincere obedience: the adverb "sincerely" translates the expression "without any sort of reservation"; it recalls the generous and unconditional availability, and at the same time the sincerity and depth of the salesian's response to God who calls him through the mediation of the superior.

— A *ready obedience*: it requires no stretch of the imagination to see that "readily" implies not only the material promptness of the response but also that spirit of collaboration full of initiative which is expressed so well by Fr. Caviglia in one of his conferences on the salesian spirit: "We have a spirit that can be summed up in the salesian motto 'I'll do it'. I don't know how many days indulgence are attached to it, but it is certainly the greatest triumph for the Congregation which has grown on the strength of the sacrifices associated with that 'I'll do it.'"¹⁶

— A *cheerful obedience*: the expression "with cheerfulness" does not necessarily mean that one must obey on every occasion with a broad smile (all the better if that happens!); it is equivalent to "willingly", and it recalls the quotation from St Paul used by Don Bosco in his Introduction to the Constitutions: "Obey promptly and willingly... True obedience... consists in doing *cheerfully* whatever is commanded... for as St Paul affirms: "God loves a cheerful giver". In an address to the confreres of Varazze on the Strenna of 1872 Don Bosco spoke of "true obedience", i.e. he said, "the kind which makes us cheerfully accept our orders, taking them all as something good, commanded by the Lord".¹⁷

The results of this obedience

¹⁴ Cf. in particular, C 55, R 121-124, 173-176

¹⁵ *Costituzioni 1875*, III, 2 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 93)

¹⁶ A. CAVIGLIA, *conferenze sullo spirito salesiano*, Turin 1985, p. 57

¹⁷ BM X, 443

The final paragraph of the article is an encouragement to maintain the salesian spirit in the service of authority and in obedience because of the subsequent results, which concern both the whole Society and each member.

— *Cohesion of the Congregation and a guarantee of continuity*: these two fruits of salesian obedience are given prominence by Don Bosco himself in the above-mentioned conference to the confreres on 11 March 1869. As we have said, Don Bosco applied to the Congregation the idea of a body, with its single head and members which have complementary functions: "If this body, which is our Society, is animated by charity and guided by obedience, our Society will prove its worth and will have the energy to perform great deeds God's glory, for the good of our neighbour and for the welfare of its members".¹⁸

— For each member of the Society, obedience is the "*path to holiness*": it makes him adhere to God's will and puts him in the right position for the realization of the mission which the Lord has entrusted to him in Don Bosco's family; in this, said art. 2, we find our own way to holiness". Obedience is also "*the source of energy in his work*", because it gives free reign to the action in him of God's grace, and also gives him the certainty that he is where God wants him to be. Finally it is the "*source of joy and of peace*". Don Bosco promised this almost in the form of a solemn pronouncement: "if you practise obedience in this way, I can guarantee in the name of God that you will lead a peaceful and happy life in our Society".¹⁹

*Lord our God, we thank you
for having called us to work in your service
and for the salvation of the young,
in a family guided by the spirit of charity,
in a climate of mutual esteem,
confidence and tranquillity,
as Don Bosco desired.
enable superiors and brothers to live together
in a mutual service of love,
animated by your Holy Spirit.*

*Grant that the service of guidance and animation
rendered by our superiors,
and our ready, sincere and cheerful obedience, may
be for the Congregation a guarantee of continuity,
and for every salesian the path to holiness, the
source of energy in work, and of joy and peace.*

¹⁸ BM IX, 270

¹⁹ D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Obedience; cf. Appendix constitutions 1984 p. 220

ART. 66 SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IN OBEDIENCE

In the community, in view of the mission entrusted to us, we all obey even though we have different tasks to perform.

In listening to the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist, we express and renew our common dedication to the divine will.

In matters of importance we seek the will of the Lord together in patient brotherly dialogue, with a deep awareness of shared responsibility.

The superior exercises his authority by listening to the confreres, encouraging all to make their contribution and promoting a union of wills in faith and charity. He concludes this phase of searching in common by making appropriate decisions. These will normally emerge from a convergence of the views expressed.

We all then set to work to carry out these decisions by our sincere collaboration, even when our own views have not prevailed.

Obedience, founded on the Gospel and lived in the salesian style, is called for from both the individual confrere and the community. The present art. 66 of the Constitutions deals specifically with the *communal dimension* of obedience, and develops some of the more important aspects which characterize it. This point was the object of particular study on the part of the SGC and the GC21.¹

The obedient community

A first and fundamental statement is made in the opening paragraph: *the community as such is the subject of obedience, i.e. it is an obedient community*. God has designs on it; to it the mission is primarily entrusted (cf. C 44). Hence the community has a precise obligation to seek the divine will and fulfil it, and this as regards both the entire Congregation for the totality of the mission, and the provincial and local communities at their own level.

The text points out a particular aspect: the community is obedient because *in it we all obey*, even though we have different tasks to perform. Not only the confreres who are not in positions of authority, but also the superiors (in a form, indeed, which is more delicate and demanding) must have a constant attitude of obedience; each one according to his own role shares the responsibility for putting into effect the plan that God has decided on for us, and has entrusted to us for the salvation of youth. In connection with obedience on the part of superiors, we may recall the words of Don Bosco who, after declaring: "Among us let the superior be our all", immediately went on to add: "The Rector Major has the Rule as his guide; let him never stray from it, otherwise instead of a single focal point there will be two: the Rule and his own will.

¹Cf. SGC, 632-637; GC21, 391-392

Instead, the Rule should almost be embodied in the Rector Major; the Rule and the Rector Major should be one and the same".²

Supernatural sources of shared responsibility

After this fundamental assertion in the first paragraph, the article next presents the typical religious context in which the community exercises its responsibility in seeking God's will.

It points out that our method for seeking together the way to fulfil the Father's plan (as will be explained in the third paragraph) differs from the logical process in use in human assemblies and has its roots in listening to the Word of God and participation together at the Lord's table.

Explicit reference is made to two articles which are developed more fully in the chapter on prayer (cf. C 87, 88), to indicate the manner in which the community gives visible expression to and fosters its daily reality as an "obedient community".

Listening together in faith to God's Word means that we want to be "informed" by it so as to put ourselves at its service: For us the Word is... light to see God's and strength to live out our vocation faithfully" (C 87). It could be said from this point of view that the community is called to imitate Mary's obedience, prolonging it in its own life and activity. "Be it done unto me according to thy Word"

But the act of submission to God par excellence, the most dynamic proclamation of our common dedication to the divine will, is the celebration of the Eucharist. "There the community celebrates the paschal mystery" (C 88): in a spirit of priestly offering it unites itself with Christ's perfect obedience "even on the death on the cross". This is our vital support in reliving our obedience in our daily concrete situations and accepting the daily and sometimes crucifying demands they make on us.

The three stages of communal obedience

In the third, fourth and fifth paragraphs, the article describes the stages in the communal process of seeking the Father's will together and fulfilling it responsibly.

We may note first of all the opening phrase: "*in matters of importance*". This formula presupposes that in the daily life of the community the members, each at his appointed task, carry out their work competently and with love, in the knowledge that what they are doing corresponds to the Father's desire. Communal search for the Lord's will becomes important when it is a question of laying down the main lines the community will follow in carrying out the communal plan, and when new circumstances arise which cause serious problems tier the community as such or for

² BM XII, 62. A comment on obedience "in a spirit of communion" can be found in SGC, 632

is not immediately evident and needs to be clarified. It is then that the members must together show themselves "docile to the Spirit and attentive to the signs he gives us" (C 64).

Communal obedience is attained through *three stages or phases which are closely linked with each other*.

— The first stage is that of RESEARCH, an important phase in which the members try to discover together the signs of the will of God, who is speaking to the community. The particular instrument for such research is *communal dialogue* in which all the members, moved by a constructive spirit and in a fraternal atmosphere, give frankly and patiently their competent contribution for the benefit of the community and its members. It is important that each one should be really and disinterestedly seeking the will of God, and not seeking to impose his own ideas.

In this phase animation is the specific responsibility of the superior. The text says that he listens to the confreres, "encouraging all to make their contribution and promoting a union of wills in faith and charity". He must serve the community by helping it to express itself in meaningful dialogue, but at the same time guiding it so that in the process of research communion and unity are maintained, which are essential to its life.

— The second stage is that of DECISION. This "will normally emerge from a convergence of the views expressed", say the Constitutions. Note the word "normally"; in fact, if all the elements of brotherly communion are effectively present (the same spirit, the same concern for the common good, the same pastoral zeal for attaining apostolic efficacy), the normal result will be that any divergence of views present at the beginning will be slowly resolved. In this movement towards unity, as we have said, the superior has his part to play: he must guide his confreres, prompt an outlook of faith among them,³ and try as far as possible to reconcile opposing views, in which case his final word will set a natural seal on the convergence of ideas.⁴

Nevertheless he will intervene when necessary in virtue of his authority, and make decisions for the good of the community and its mission, taking into account as far as possible the opinions of everyone, but without being obliged to follow the majority. On this point the text is clearly based on the decree "Prefectae caritatis": "Superiors therefore ought to listen to their subjects willingly and ought to promote cooperation between them for the good of the institute and of the Church, retaining however their own authority to decide and to prescribe what is to be done".⁵

Finally there is the third stage, that of EXECUTION. Here in a quite special way comes in the concept of loyal shared responsibility in obedience. In the Acts of the SGC we read: It is at the moment of execution that obedience is translated into action,

³In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio*, Paul VI wrote: "It is the duty of everyone, but especially of superiors and those who exercise responsibility among their brothers or sisters, to awaken in the community the certainties of faith which must be their guide" (ET 25)

⁴Cf. SGC, 635

⁵PC 14; cf. also Et 25

and brings to light the riches of personal initiative and the generosity of sacrifice. The whole community or the individual concerned, will unite freely, responsibly and actively with the Father by deeds, i.e. by carrying out what has been decided. This should be done always as an act of faith, but especially in cases where the decision does not accord with their own opinion. They should do it freely and willingly, with loyalty and responsibility. They will take what steps are necessary within the limits imposed by the directives given, cooperating fully and cordially as loving members of a family even when the work is very varied. While community decisions need to be taken only occasionally, their practical execution will involve in each one the daily virtue of obedience".⁶

Art.123 of the Constitutions, in setting out the principles and criteria which must guide the life and activity of the community, specifically includes the responsible and effective participation of all the members", applied practically in terms of planning, organizing and evaluating. This is the way in which the obedient community is careful to fulfil the Lord's will for the realization of the mission.

*God, our Father
in listening to your Word,
and in our communion in the one eucharistic Bread,
you give us the true sources of cohesion with each other.
Grant that we may learn to seek together
what you would have us do.*

*Help us to accept with faith
the decisions of our superiors,
and to fulfil them with love,
so that our life of obedience
may be the instrument of our own salvation
and of those you have entrusted to our care.*

Through Christ our Lord.

⁶SGC, 637

ART. 67 PERSONAL OBEDIENCE AND FREEDOM

The salesian is expected to obey in freedom of spirit and with an awareness of his personal responsibility, pledging his "powers of intellect and will, and his gifts of nature and of grace".¹

He obeys with faith and sees in the superior an aid and a sign which God uses to manifest his will.

Obedience like this "leads to maturity by extending the freedom of the sons of God".²

¹ PC 14 2

² PC 14

This and the two following articles are dedicated to a description of the commitments and characteristics of *personal obedience*; they should be read and considered in the light of the guidelines already indicated when dealing with the evangelical significance and the salesian style of obedience.

This article puts forward some fundamental attitudes which give to obedience the availability and promptness desirable in a salesian. Two requirements are easily discernible in the text: the salesian obeys with adult responsibility, and with the faith of a convinced believer.

The obedience of men who are free and responsible

The first part of the article is taken literally from the decree "Perfectae caritatis", which addresses the following exhortation to religious and their superiors: "Religious should be humbly submissive to their superiors, in a spirit of faith and of love for God's will and in accordance with their rules and constitutions. They should bring their powers of intellect and will and their gifts of nature and grace to bear on the execution of commands... Superiors should govern the' subjects in the realization that they are sons of God and with respects for them as human persons, fostering in them a spirit of voluntary subjection... They should train their subjects to cooperate with them by applying themselves to their ordinary duties and to new undertakings with an active and responsible obedience".¹

The text of the Council makes it clear that great qualities and human virtues enter into obedience and are developed by it.

The first quality is *freedom*. Contrary to a current opinion which sees obedience as a virtue of children, it must be said that religious obedience is really an *adult virtue*, incompatible with a juvenile psychology. Obedience is an act of personal autonomy which consists in the interior assent to a decision accepted for the realization of one's

¹ PC 14

life in Christ.² The salesian obeys therefore "in freedom of spirit", i.e. as a free person who knows the reasons for his obedience. John Paul II writes: "Remember, dear Brothers and Sisters, that the obedience to which you committed yourselves... is a particular *expression of interior freedom*, just as the definitive expression of Christ's freedom was his obedience 'unto death': I lay down my life, that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (Jn 10, 17-18)".³

The second human quality is the *sense of responsibility rich in initiative*. Effectively it is a case of a further form of the exercise of freedom, which accepts the mandate received, shares the responsibility for it with brothers, and transforms it into a personal commitment, dedicating oneself to it with all one's energy and rejecting any passive or mechanical attitude.

If it is true that initiative requires obedience, it is equally true that obedience is strengthened by initiative. This is an aspect of the salesian spirit, according to what is expressed in art. 19. Don Albera observed: "To the submission due to the superior must be added the spirit of personal initiative; it is precisely from this spirit that our Society derives that genial modern aspect which makes it possible for us to do the good called for by the needs of times and places".⁴ Fr Caviglia too speaking of the style of obedience to which Don Bosco wanted to educate his sons, notes with keen discernment that "he did indeed have in mind a religious Congregation with three simple vows, but he wanted it to be made up, and so to speak 'materialized', by men who were awake to reality and able to think for themselves. The kind of work that has been done and remains to be done in his institutes is of such a kind and quantity that it could not be thought of without a certain freedom being granted to the individual, and is quite irreconcilable with a form of life which, although meritorious in God's sight under other conditions, in this particular situation would become a hindrance and an obstacle to the work".⁵

Obedience rooted in faith

The supernatural quality of obedience which includes the others and which strengthens the human qualities, making them more dynamic, is evidently *faith*. All the articles of this section either say this or implicitly take it for granted. Anyone who wanted to base his obedience only on human reasoning would not succeed in obeying freely and with conviction for very long. The love, in fact, which prompts him to seek ardently for the will of God and to fulfil it wholeheartedly, following the path traced out by Jesus, is born of faith which leads him to discover and taste the presence of the Spirit and the joy of entrusting his life completely to the Father.

² The Acts of the SGC state: "Obedience will no longer be a childish act, but a mature disposition: it will not be a renunciation of the will and the personality but rather a resolute will to carry out God's will in preference to one's own desires. This is the way for men to become truly free" (SGC, 639)

³ RD 13

⁴ D. ALBERA, Circular on vocations 15.5.1921, ASC 4. p. 201 (*Circular letters*, p. 499)

⁵ A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco--Profilo storico*, SEI Turin 1934 (2nd edtn.), p. 168-169

In reality, says the Rule, faith enables us to look beyond the limitations and human defects of the superior, and see in him "an aid and a sign which God uses to manifest his will".

This faith, the animating element in obedience, is rich in humility, after the example of Jesus Christ, the obedient servant, meek and humble of heart, and of Mary the humble handmaid of the Lord. It is not out of place to recall that humility and obedience always go together.⁶

In this way the salesian grows in holiness

The article's concluding paragraph takes up once again the text of the decree "Perfectae caritatis", already quoted at the beginning, and emphasizes the part played by obedience in leading a person to maturity, from both a human and Christian point of view. The decree says: "In this way, far from lowering the dignity of the human person, religious obedience *leads it to maturity by extending the freedom of the sons of God*"⁷ The Constitution "Lumen gentium" too speaks of a "freedom fortified by obedience".⁸

Obedience opens the door to an ever more complete freedom, because it discloses the ways of the Spirit who is perfect freedom. Led by the Spirit, the salesian matures in this way in his humanity and his stature as a son of God, being conformed ever more to Christ the Lord. We may recall the words written on the rays of the diamond of obedience: "The foundation of the whole edifice and the compendium of sanctity".⁹ By guiding us towards holiness, obedience leads us to the most complete realization of our personality and to a true and enduring happiness.

⁶ We read in the Memorie Biografiche (it has been omitted in the English edition): "The edifice of my sanctification must have humility for its foundation, obedience for its walls, and prayer for its roof" (MB X, 1286)

⁷ PC 14

⁸ LC 43; cf. ET 27

⁹ MB XV, 184

*Lord our God,
grant that our obedience
may be always an act of intelligence,
of freedom and responsibility,
and at the same time an act of living faith,
which enables us to see in the superior
a sign and an aid which you offer us
so that we may know your will.*

*Through the humble homage of our obedient heart
may we follow your ways
and so reach the perfect liberty of
sons, conformed to the image of your
Son, the perfect Man and our Saviour,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

ART. 68 REQUIREMENTS OF THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE

By vowing obedience the salesian pledges himself to obey lawful superiors in matters concerning the observance of the Constitutions.¹

When an order is given expressly by force of the vow of obedience, the obligation to obey is a grave one. Only major superiors and rectors can command in this way, but they should do so rarely, in writing or before two witnesses, and only when some serious reason requires it.²

¹ cf. CIC, can. 601

² cf. CIC, can. 49 ff.

This article expresses the obligations of obedience which the salesian undertakes by vow before God on the day of his profession, and includes the juridical aspects. The content is taken from its traditional expression in our earlier Constitutions and from the indications of the Code of Canon Law.¹

It will be seen that the article speaks of the obligations of the religious who is called to obey, and also of the duties of the superior who has the task of commanding (and who must be submissive in his turn to a higher superior and to the Rule).

The life of the salesian a sign of obedience

The first paragraph is a precise statement of what the salesian obliges himself to by vow. It is true that the whole of his consecrated life as an apostle is lived under the sign of obedience in imitation of Jesus Christ (cf. C 64), but the vow he makes to God expressly concerns the submission of his will to "lawful superiors in matters concerning the observance of the Constitutions."²

Obedience to God on the part of the religious, as was said in the preceding article, passes through the mediation of a brother in the community who has been chosen to exercise the ministry of authority. It is also strictly linked with the Institute's apostolic project expressed in the Constitutions, approved by the Church as an evangelical way and means for realizing the mission desired by the Holy Spirit. By making the vow of obedience, the salesian obliges himself to seek the will of God in the Society's apostolic plan, by freely submitting himself to the guidance of a superior whom he recognizes as God's representative (C 67).³

¹ In the texts of the Constitutions written by our Founder the canonical details concerning the precept of obedience are found from the first draft of 1858 to the second printed text of 1873. They are not found in the approved edition of 1874 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 92-95); they then appear again in subsequent [editions](#). cf. in particular art. 41 and 42 of the Constitutions of 1966, the substance of which is reproduced in this article of the present Constitutions

² Can. 601 of the CIC expresses the object of the vow of obedience as follows: "The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one's will to *lawful superiors, who act in the place of God when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute's own constitutions*"

³ Cf. PC 14

It is clear that the application of the vow is of wide extent: it covers the whole of the salesian's consecrated life for the fulfilment of the mission received from the Lord and described in the Rule. This is precisely what each member promised God at his profession: "I make the vow to live obedient, poor and chaste, *according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions*" (C 24).

Occasions when the salesian is called to assume Christ's obedience more explicitly

After expressing this overall view of the commitment made at profession, the article goes on in the second paragraph to specify the occasions when the vow of obedience becomes gravely binding before God, the Church and the Congregation. It is required, says the text, that the precept be a formal one, i.e. "*given expressly by force of the vow*". The external conditions indicated ("in writing or before two witnesses") manifest more clearly the superior's intention to command. There is a proper concern in this matter for juridical clarity so as to foster tranquillity of conscience, a point which is made in the Code⁴ itself and follows also from what Don Bosco had written in one of the first editions of the Constitutions: "The observance of this vow does not oblige under pain of sin except in those things which are against the commandments of God and our holy Mother the Church or the dispositions made by superiors with the express obligation of obedience".⁵

Referring to superiors, the text indicates those who are the "lawful superiors" who can bind by force of the vow". They are the "major superiors" (i.e. the Rector Major and his Vicar, the Provincials and their Vicars), and the Rectors of the individual communities.

This brings us back once again to the delicate point (already mentioned in art. 65) of the discretion and prudence needed by superiors in having recourse to formal precepts of obedience: "they should do so rarely, and only when some serious reason requires it". The text emphasizes that the salesian, having offered his will to God so as to "relive the obedience of Christ", does not normally need formal commands: his own internal enthusiasm leads him to seek always and everywhere what is pleasing to God.

The perfection of salesian obedience, according to Don Rinaldi, is that "the superior has no need to command",⁶ but that each member generously lends himself for the benefit of the community and of young of people.

Above all the canonical specifications given in the article there remains the fundamental fact, so well expressed in the preceding articles: by professing obedience the salesian freely and joyfully obliges himself (cf. C 65, 67) and makes himself available to seek and carry out God's will in everything, in imitation of Jesus and for the salvation of youth.

⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 49 ff. Some conditions are expressed for the validity of a "decree" or "precept" given to a single person

⁵ *Costituzioni 1860*, III, 3 (cf. F. MOTTO p. 94)

⁶ D. RINALDI, Letter for 50th anniversary of approval of Constitutions, ASC 23, 24 January 1924, p. 179

*God our father,
you have led us in your spirit
to offer our freedom for your service
by the vow of holy obedience.
Help us to live it as a sacrifice pleasing to you
in humble submission to our brothers
who are your representatives among us,
and in the faithful observance of our Constitutions
for the good of the community and of our young people.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 69 PERSONAL GIFTS AND OBEDIENCE

Each one places his abilities and talents at the service of the common mission.

The superior, with the help of the community, has a special responsibility for the discernment of these gifts, and for promoting their development and right use.

If the concrete demands of charity and of the apostolate require the sacrifice of personal wishes or plans which are in themselves lawful, the confrere accepts with faith whatever obedience asks of him, while still retaining the right of recourse to a higher authority.

Before taking on tasks or offices other than those assigned to him in the community, he seeks authorization from the lawful superior.¹

¹ cf. CIC, can. 671

This third article concerning the individual who obeys touches on the problem of harmonizing the exercise of personal talents with the commitments proper to obedience.

In the development of this theme there is a clearly discernible double line of reflection in faith: personal abilities and talents are a great enrichment for the service of the mission, but special needs or circumstances may require them to be sacrificed for the good of the community or of youth.

Obedience in the exercise of personal talents

The first two paragraphs point to the fact that salesian obedience, inserted in the redeeming obedience of Christ, although implying an effective renunciation, should not be identified with the sacrifice of personal abilities.

"Each one places his abilities and talents at the service of the common mission", says the Rule. In the normal development of the vocation, obedience is not opposed to each one's God-given talents, but rather accepts them, exploits them and sanctifies them "for the service of the common mission". We must not forget what was said in art. 22, i.e. that each one receives from God personal gifts so as to respond to his vocation, so that in fact these gifts (of nature and grace) represent one of the signs of the Lord's call to serve him in the Salesian Society.

If we look back at our history we see how Don Bosco was able to put to good use the talents of each confrere, so as to form a united body and give life, with God's help, to enterprises on a scale which to us at the present day seems gigantic. Referring in particular to the care superiors should show for the confreres, he wrote in the Introduction to the Constitutions, speaking of the 'rendiconto': "The members open

their hearts... and the superiors get to know (their) moral and physical strength, and in consequence can give them those tasks for which they seem best suited".¹

The text dwells precisely on the responsibility of the superior, "helped by the community", for the "*discernment of these gifts and for promoting their development and right use*".

It should be made clear in the first place that the "gifts" spoken of are not only attitudes and natural abilities, but also the "special gifts" of the Spirit which he distributes for the common good and for a richer and more fruitful apostolic service: in other words it is a case of the real personal "charismata" of which the Apostle Paul speaks, which are given for the benefit of all.

This said, the superior's responsibility and that of the community itself is based on a principle of an ecclesial nature, but also on psychological considerations. In the first place it must not be forgotten that from a human standpoint the salesian is an educator who must find himself at home among the young and make a competent contribution to the overall apostolic work. It is clear that the efficacy of his influence and efforts call for the use of his best resources.

But it is especially in the light of Scripture and the Church's teaching² that one can understand the duty of the superior to bring to light these personal charisms, recognize them with gratitude, foster their development, and control their proper use. The text must be interpreted in its genuine significance: it expresses the concern that these charisms be regulated for the common good, and that they be exploited in the authentic sense of a service to the community.

In this context is inserted art. 173 of the General Regulations which, in speaking of the duties of the rector, translates the principles of the Constitutions into practical directives: "He must see that the confreres practise co-responsibility and collaboration in the family spirit desired by Don Bosco. He should respect areas of responsibility, fostering in an atmosphere of healthy freedom the employment of natural gifts and personal talents for attaining the common end".

A final observation: as has been said already, the Rule points to the responsibility of the entire community in discerning and exploiting these charisms; it must help the superior to fulfil his role. This is a task which forms part of the process of the communal seeking of God's will, which becomes manifest also through the particular endowments given to individual confreres. We need to look again, from the stand point of obedience, at the requirements of brotherly sharing and responsible participation characteristic of the apostolic community, to which the carrying out of the mission is primarily entrusted (cf. C 44, 51, 66, 123).

¹D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Rendiconto and its importance, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 241

²On gifts of the Spirit or charismata, cf. in particular Rom 12,6 ff. and 1 Cor 12. In the documents of Vat. II cf. LG 4, 7, 12, 30; cf. also ET 28; MR 12

Obedience may call for the sacrifice of personal plans

After considering the obedience of the religious in the more usual conditions, the text next presents the doctrine of Christian obedience in its more upsetting aspect. The same words of Scripture (and for us the words and example of Don Bosco) which justify the exploitation of personal gifts (i.e. the apostolic service carried out by a community), can at times also justify their sacrifice. Personal talents and plans are not something absolute. For a Christian, and still more for a religious, the only thing that is absolute is God's design and will, and for us that will is made manifest, says the Rule, through "the concrete demands of charity and of the apostolate".

It is easy to understand therefore the delicacy of the superior's task when he must impose a renunciation for the good of the community and its mission. The Acts of the SGC speak of "open and patient dialogue", which must accompany the superior's discernment.³

On his part too the confrere must carry out a process of discernment to discover God's design in his regard. If the order of the superior does not seem to him to be in conformity with the Lord's will, the Rule, in harmony with the dispositions of the Church, gives him "the right of recourse to a higher authority".

But what the text is really emphasizing is that beneath obedience (if it is genuine) there must always remain in the religious the willingness for renunciation. No religious, salesian or not, should be surprised if in some circumstances obedience proves painful. He has offered his will to God, reliving the obedience of Christ. His point of reference therefore is Jesus, who renounced the seeking of the glory due to him, i.e. the road of personal realization, to unite himself fully with the Father's will: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me... If I were to seek my own glory that would be no glory at all: my glory is conferred by the Father" (Jn 4, 34; 8,54). He did not hide from his disciples that this was the road they would have to travel: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16, 24).

Obedience to God's designs may conflict with one's personal desires; it may prevent the realization of some aspirations or personal projects which are in themselves lawful; in some circumstances it may seem at variance with what we call human "rights". In the realization of God's plan, obedience may sometimes seem to be even a defeat, like that of the cross! The moment of renunciation (and of apparent defeat) is the moment of truth for the one who obeys. Our father Don Bosco says to us: "We must each of us be willing to sacrifice our own will, even at heavy cost."⁴

In its final paragraph the article goes directly to the Code of Canon Law⁵ for a practical norm regarding the application of the principles that have been set out: the

³ Cf. SGC, 640-641; cf. also the reflections of Paul VI on "Conscience and obedience" in ET 28

⁴ BM VII, 35

⁵ Can. 671 of t CIC says: "Religious are not to undertake tasks and offices outside their own institute without the permission of the lawful superior"

acceptance of eventual tasks or offices, arising from projects extraneous to the community's plan, should be submitted to the lawful superior whose task it is to appraise (with the help of the community) the service rendered by such tasks in the light of the community's educational and apostolic mission.

It should be emphasized once again that obedience forms part of a communal project, and that all the gifts the Lord has bestowed on us for the realization of our vocation are at the service of the common mission (cf. C 44).

*God our Father, give us that clarity of vision
that will enable us to see in our superiors
and in their directives
an indication of your loving designs.
help us to grow in availability,
to sacrifice, in accordance with your will,
our desires and personal interests,
so as to become more like your Son
in the complete giving of ourselves
for the salvation of our fellow men.
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 70 THE TALK WITH THE SUPERIOR

Faithful to Don Bosco's recommendation each confrere meets frequently with his superior for a friendly talk.

This is one of the best opportunities for dialogue, both for his own personal advantage and for promoting the good running of the community.

In it he speaks with confidence of his own life and work and, if he so wishes, also of the state of his conscience.

This article deals with a point of great importance in salesian life, which concerns the personal relationship between the confrere and his superior, and is at the same time of great help for the growth of the community. It is of interest that the theme of the *friendly talk* was the object of analysis and reflection in all the recent General Chapters;¹ in particular its place in the context of salesian obedience was given opportune motivation. Although it is one of the best means of fostering community life, it was thought better to deal with it in this section, both to respect a tradition which goes back to Don Bosco,² and because the friendly talk is an instrument which contributes efficaciously to the discernment of the will of God.

The article is brief and summarizes two much longer articles of the constitutions in existence before 1972,³ but is rich in content. We shall try to pick out its more salient features.

A typically salesian spiritual help

The article begins with an important statement —“*Faithful to Don Bosco’s recommendation*”— which bases the practice of the friendly personal talk on the teaching and practice of the Founder. We know, in fact, that it is a practice on which our Father frequently insisted, to such an extent that we can say that it is one of the characteristic elements of the salesian spirit. For Don Bosco it was one of the

¹It should be remembered especially that the SGC after gathering observations from the whole Congregation produced a first revised draft of the constitutional article. The GC21 made a further analysis of the theme and introduced a new article in the Regulations expressing the fundamental content of Don Bosco's Introduction to the Constitutions (cf. GC21, 435-430). The GC22 concluded the revision of the text of the Constitutions and Regulations, defining more completely both the purpose and the content of the talk.

²In the successive drafts of the text of the Constitutions there is always an article on the talk with the superior in the chapter on obedience; cf. F. MOTTO, p. 96

³Cf. Constitutions 1966, art. 47-48

"fundamental norms of salesian houses";⁴ it was "the key to good order and morality",⁵ and hence a duty to which the superior must attend with the greatest diligence.⁶

Already in the first draft of the Constitutions Don Bosco had planned an article on full confidence in the superior, to whom the confrere should open his heart without hiding anything;⁷ it is found once again in the text approved by the Apostolic See in 1874, with some important modifications which concentrate the content especially on the "external life". But to reach Don Bosco's genuine thought on this point of salesian life, it is useful to read again what he himself wrote in 1877 for the second edition of the Introduction to the Constitutions in the section headed "The 'rendiconto' and its importance". Beyond the practical details which he gives, those pages are a canticle to total confidence in the superior, describing the true nature of the private talk and the climate in which it should take place.

"*Confidence*" well describes the salesian atmosphere essential to the conversation, and is stressed in the text of the article; such confidence was in fact emphasized by the name the SGC gave to this encounter between the confrere and his superior: a "fraternal colloquy". This is certainly not the same thing as a simple conversation between friends, because its content concerns the very life and mission of the community. It is the meeting of a brother with one who represents Don Bosco, to whom he gives his confidence for his own good and that of the community. On his side, the superior who receives the confidence of the confrere must be at this time more than any other a "friend, brother and father" as was said earlier (cf. C 55 and 65).

Against this background one can understand the fine definition given by the constitutional text: "*one of the best opportunities for dialogue*".

Purpose and advantages of the fraternal talk

Don Bosco always assigned to the talk, then called *rendiconto*, a double objective, referring to the two principal advantages that derived from its regular practice. The Constitutions sum up the thought of our Father with a brief but pregnant expression: the salesian likes to meet with his superior "*for his own personal advantage and for promoting the good running of the community*".

The first objective is the "*personal advantage*" of the individual confrere. In his Introduction to the Constitutions Don Bosco, after saying in general that the

⁴ BM X, 458

⁵ BM XI, 331

⁶ Cf. BM XI, 323, 331; cf. also BM X, 454; MB X, 1118; BM XII, 44-45

⁷ Art. 7 of chap. III of the *Costituzioni* 1858 reads: "Let everyone have great confidence in the superior, and have no secret in his heart in his regard. Let him keep his conscience open to him whenever he is asked or whenever he feels the need". In the *Costituzioni* 1875 the article (III,4) is modified as follows: "Let everyone place the fullest confidence in his superior. To that end it will be of great assistance to the associates to give, from time to time, an account of their exterior life to the principal superiors of the Congregation. Let everyone at such times lay open before them with simplicity and readiness the faults committed against the Rule which he may have outwardly committed, and also what progress in the virtues he has made so that he may receive both counsel and comfort and, should they be needed, some suitable admonitions well" (cf. MOTTO, p 96-97)

'rendiconto' contributes "to the peace and happiness of each member", goes on to list its numerous advantages: "(the members) find relief for the troubles they may have; anxieties connected with their duties cease, and the superiors are able to make provision to avoid unpleasantness and discontent. They get to know the moral and physical strength of the confreres and in consequence can give them those tasks for which they seem best suited... Let all be persuaded that if they make it (the 'rendiconto') well, with perfect openness and humility, they will find in it a great relief of soul, and a powerful aid to progress in virtue...".⁸

The second objective and consequent advantage is "*the good running of the community*". "A reason why sincerity and confidence with superiors is important", writes Don Bosco again, "is that they are thus better enabled to arrange for and provide what is best for the whole Congregation of whose well-being and honour, together with the honour of each member, they have the duty to take care."⁹

The superior is powerfully helped in his task of carrying the primary responsibility by the better knowledge he comes to have of his confreres. The confrere in turn will understand why it is that his 'rendiconto' is a real service which he renders to the superior and to the entire community.

The content of the talk

This is expressed in the article's third paragraph: "In it he speaks with confidence of his own life and work and, if he so wishes, also of the state of his conscience".

Part of the content is therefore laid down by the Rule and, according to our tradition, concerns the *confrere's life and activity*. The meaning of this is amply explained in an article of the General Regulations, which sums up Don Bosco's arguments in his Introduction to the Constitutions: "In an atmosphere of mutual trust, every confrere should frequently see his rector to let him know the state of his health, how his apostolic activity is proceeding, the difficulties he faces in religious life and fraternal charity, and everything that may contribute to the welfare of the individual members and of the community" (R 49). This means that the talk covers everything that concerns the concrete life of the confrere: personal life, community life, apostolic life.

It is clear too that a sense of responsibility and personal initiative are called for to enrich the dialogue and make it a real instrument of growth.

The Rule then proposes a further item which is left to the freedom of the individual confrere: the "*state of conscience*", an expression which refers to the interior life in the Spirit, and which was explained by art. 46 of the 1966 Constitutions as: "progress in virtue, and doubts and anxieties of conscience." The superior is ordinarily not the confessor but, according to art. 55, among his tasks is certainly that of being a

⁸D. BOSCO, Introduction to the Constitutions, p. 241-244

⁹D. BOSCO, Introduction to the Constitutions, loc. cit.

Nevertheless the Constitutions wish the liberty of each member to be safeguarded, especially in this field.

Frequency of the talk

Concerning the frequency of the talk with the superior, the Constitutions previous to the SGC used to say that the salesian should meet his superior "at least once a month", a norm which Don Bosco had already recommended in his Introduction to the Constitutions.¹⁰ The SGC, GC21 and GC22 preferred to leave the matter more to the interior freedom of the confreres. They did not lay down any precise frequency, but preferred to use the simple adverb "*frequently*" in both the Constitutions and the corresponding article of the Regulations already quoted. But it is clear that the text in no way diminishes the importance of a sufficiently regular meeting between the confrere and his superior: it is the responsibility of the confrere and the superior to establish an opportune rhythm so that regularity may be efficaciously realized.

We may note that in this matter the General Chapters thought it well to emphasize the special importance of the talk for the young confreres in the period of initial formation: for them infact a more precise norm has been laid down in art. 79 of the Regulations, where it is said that the meeting should take place "once a month".

We conclude with two further brief reflections.

In the first place, since the talk is a "dialogue", it is clear that its success does not depend only on the confrere; much depends also on the superior, on his human and spiritual personality, on his availability and kindness, and on his competence: art. 49 of the Regulations, already quoted, recalls that this is one of the "principal duties" of the rector.

Secondly, it should be kept in mind that the talk takes place within a fraternal community, where exist forms of communal dialogue which are of great benefit to the life of the individual confrere. But the fact that the talk with the superior is integrated with other forms of dialogue should not be allowed to diminish its importance. This great means needs to be considered under its most authentic aspect, both for the development of the individual and for the creation of that fraternal and apostolic community that is so necessary for the efficacy of the salesian mission.

¹⁰In the Constitutions the phrase "*at least once a month*" is a later addition (text of 1923), but it was already in accepted use, based on Don Bosco's indication in his Introduction to the Constitutions

*God our Father,
instil in us the spirit of filial confidence,
and grant that we may express and develop it
through frequent and cordial colloquy with our superiors,
as Don Bosco wished;
so that we may make our constant contribution
to the building of the community
on the model of your divine family,
so as to become efficacious signs among young people
of your salvation.
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 71 OBEDIENCE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS

"Substitute acts of penance", Don Bosco tells us, "with acts of obedience".¹

Sometimes obedience will clash with our own selfish attitudes and desires for independence, or may really test our love. This is the moment to look to Christ, who was obedient even unto death:² "Father, if this chalice cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done".³

The mystery of his death and resurrection teaches us how fruitful it is for us to obey: the grain of wheat which dies in the obscurity of the earth bears much fruit.⁴

¹ MB XIII, 89; BM XIII, 68

² cf. Phil 2,8; cf. MB IV, 233; BM IV, 163

³ Mt 26,42

⁴ cf. Jn 12,24

This last article of the section takes us back again to the first one, and looks at obedience once more in the light of Jesus Christ. In this way the salesian's obedience is presented, beginning with the mystery of the Son of God, who "came on earth to do not his own will but that of his Father in heaven" (C 64), and culminating with the contemplation of the fruitful results of the paschal mystery which is prolonged in us.

In this way the Constitutions offer the salesian the supreme reason for his obedience, even at moments when this may "test his love".

Obedience and penance

The text is introduced by a phrase of Don Bosco which puts before us the ascetical aspect of obedience: "*Substitute acts of penance with acts of obedience*". Our Founder invites us to see in obedience an authentic form of 'penance, very suitable for our condition as apostles. Earlier art. 18 of the Constitutions included among the characteristic features of our spirit the acceptance of the "daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life in preference to "unusual penances", this is now made concrete in a special way in the practice of obedience, which presupposes an attitude of listening and docility to the voice of God, and calls for constant purity of heart, interior detachment and the overcoming of self in accordance with the spirit of the beatitudes.²

This is a deeply ascetical process, because it demands the renunciation of the independence and egoism to which we are all naturally inclined and which centre everything on ourselves, so as to make God the centre instead, accepting defeat at his hands in a mysterious combat. Our true ascesis consists in accepting that our life depends on another, in such a way that all our plans and activity are no longer ours alone but are also and primarily his, the one we recognize as the Lord of our life. Like

¹ BM XIII, 68

² Cf. SCC, 642

Jesus, each of us becomes in this way a true "Servant" of the Father, ready to carry out his work of salvation.

Don Bosco does not hesitate to refer us to the obedience of the cross through his example of ecclesial obedience in difficult circumstances, and also through his teaching. In the Introduction to the Constitutions he tells us: "Obedience ought to be after the example of our Savior who practised it even in things most difficult, even to the death of the cross; and should the glory of God demand as much from us, we ought also to be obedient to the sacrifice of our own lives."³

"Father, thy will be done"

The central part of art. 71, which we are at present considering, concentrates our attention on Christ crucified. It is the Cross, in fact, which fully reveals the mystery of Christ's obedience: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak as the Father taught me" (Jn 8,28). The cross is the perfect revelation of who Jesus is, the obedient Son who loves "even to the end" (Jn 13,1); at the same time it reveals the boundless love of the Father, who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3,16).

Our obedience must be modelled on this submission of Jesus to the will of his Father, even to the extent of sacrificing his life for the salvation of his fellow men. Paul W exhorts religious: "Let the Cross be for you, as it was for Christ, proof of the greatest love".⁴

The text quotes the words pronounced by Jesus in Gethsemane "Father, if this chalice cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done" (Mt 26,42). The Gospel does not hesitate to make it clear that Jesus felt a natural repugnance at what he was about to undergo, but in prayer he entrusted himself completely to the will of the Father. The Saviour's example is a reminder for us too that in the face of the difficulties and repugnance we may feel in certain trials, fervent prayer can help to insert us perfectly in the mystery of the divine will, and thus show forth the reality of our love.

Victorious obedience

But the Rule emphasizes especially that this mystery of obedience is fertile in the highest degree, even though its fruits often remain hidden: the grain which falls into the earth becomes the shoot which brings forth much fruit, and the apparent defeat of the cross results in the glory of the resurrection. Paul VI says again: "Is there not a mysterious relationship between renunciation and joy, between sacrifice and magnanimity, between discipline and spiritual freedom?"⁵ Obedience in union with

³ D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 229

⁴ ET 29

⁵ *ibid.*

that of Jesus makes us experience faith's victory over the powers of evil and associates us with the work of redemption, making us instruments of Christ's love for men.⁶

And this is a wonderful witness that we can give to our young people. In a world inclined to reject anything divine, bemused by the desire for power and concerned only about tangible results (cf. C 64), the obedient salesian's generous self-donation takes on a special importance: for the young it is an invitation to discover in faith the true sense of freedom and to understand that there is no greater self-realization than to give oneself through love.

In conclusion let us turn to Mary, standing at the foot of the Cross. She united herself in silence with the sacrifice of her Son, thus fulfilling the mystery of total docility to the designs of God, which she had expressed from the moment of the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1,38). As she was for Don Bosco, so also for the salesian Mary is the guide and model in fidelity to the mission received from the Father.

*God our Father,
send us your Spirit
that we may always believe with a living faith
that our salesian obedience is a participation
in the death and resurrection of your Son.*

*Grant that in moments of difficulty
we may be able to raise our eyes to Christ
nailed to the Cross for love of us; may
he teach us how fruitful it is to obey,
and help us to testify to the young that
the grain of wheat
which dies in the obscurity of the earth
brings forth much fruit.*

⁶For a fuller treatment of the saving value of Christ's obedience in the mystery of our Redemption, cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter "Redemptionis donum", n. 13

OUR POVERTY

"Jesus said to him: 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' (Mt 19,21).

Other biblical quotations are mentioned in the constitutional text: the example of Jesus' choice (2 Cor 8,9; C 72), trust in God and not in material things (Mt 6,25 ff; C 72), the beatitude of poverty (Mt 5,3; C 75). But in particular there is the account of the so-called "rich young man" which provides the motive which heads this section, not least as a mark of respect for the two thousand years of christian tradition which has always linked it with the evangelical counsel of poverty.

The text is a transparent synthesis of all the elements essential to the true gospel significance of poverty: the full realization of life (*"if you would be perfect"*); the radical renunciation of material things (*"go, sell what you possess"*); the destination of goods in the charity (*"give to the poor"*); the very happy eschatological consequence of such renunciation (*"you will have treasure in heaven"*); the total subordination of the renunciation to the following of Christ, imitating him and sharing his destiny (*"come, follow me"*). Last but not least, St Mathew tells us that it was a young man who put the question to Christ (19,20). Once again the choice of poverty must be interpreted and lived with reference to the cause of Christ, the messianic Kingdom. But it is also true that such a choice becomes the criterion for evaluating the truth of the same "sequela Christi".

In the context of the gospel account (Mt 19,16-29), we note the emergence of doubts and perplexity, and even refusal (the reaction of the rich young man: 19,22); in other words the choice of poverty is not something obvious and compelling (cf. the question of the disciples: who then can be saved? 19,25). Jesus does not tone down the radical nature of his Gospel, but indicates how it can be sustained by grace by which "all things are possible" (19,26). This grace is evidently already working in the decision of Peter and the others who "have left everything" and have "followed" Jesus. Jesus praises them and blesses them (19,27-29). By doing this he not only gives them a difficult theory, but at the same time provides a courageous and feasible example for its practical expression.

Don Bosco's solicitous reminders that poverty has to be lived with one eye on Christ and the other on poor youngsters (C 72, 73, 79), put a happy seal on the biblical heritage we now have in our hands.

ART. 72 GOSPEL SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR POVERTY

We are aware of the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ: though he was rich he made himself poor so that through his poverty we might become rich.¹

We are called to a life closely modelled on the Gospel. We choose to follow "the Saviour who was born in poverty, lived deprived of everything and died stripped on the cross".²

Like the apostles at our Lord's invitation, we free ourselves from concern and worry about earthly goods³ and, trusting in the providence of the Father, we dedicate ourselves to the service of the Gospel.

¹ cf. 2 Cor 8,9

² C 1875 (Introduction), p. xxiv

³ cf. Mt 6,25 ff.

Just as, when speaking of the obedient salesian, it was shown first of all that he shares in the mystery of Christ who "redeemed and sanctified men by his obedience".¹ so the voluntary poverty of the salesian is immediately linked with its gospel source, i.e. with the example and teaching of our Saviour and Teacher.

In reality the question: "Why does the salesian choose a life of poverty?" can only have as its first and fundamental answer: because Jesus willed to be poor, because he chose poverty as the constant companion of his existence, because he used poor means for the fulfilment of his mission. Contemplation of the poverty of Christ, and in particular of Christ at Bethlehem and on the Cross, is the only real motive that can explain the mystery of salvation hidden in Christian poverty and lead to its loving embrace. Poverty for the Kingdom is possible and can be loved because Jesus practised it and made of it the instrument for revealing the love of God for men.

Art. 72 of the Constitutions develops this thought and associates the example of the Apostles with that of Jesus himself.

Following the perfectly poor Christ

The decree "Perfectae caritatis", wanting to describe the poverty of the religious, begins with the simple but profound expression: Voluntary poverty, in the footsteps of Christ"², and in this way emphasizes the response of faith given freely in Jesus' name. For many people poverty is nothing more than an economic and social situation: it is something that has to be endured, not something deliberately chosen. Religious poverty, on the other hand, is a voluntary choice not made for human motives but solely for the love and imitation of Christ. Commenting on St Peter's words to Jesus: "We have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10,28), St Jerome explains: "The

¹ PC 1

² PC 13

important thing is not *'we have left everything'*, because the philosopher Crates did that, and many others have shown disdain for riches. What is important is the reason *'to follow you'* which is that of the Apostles and of believers".

To provide a better explanation of this Christian significance of poverty in the life and mission of the salesian, the Constitutions (in the first and second paragraphs of the article we are examining) carry two quotations, one from St Paul and the other from our Founder Don Bosco.

The quotation from St Paul is the same one as is cited by the decree "Perfectae caritatis": "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich*" (2 Cor 8,9). Paul highlights the mystery of the abasement of Christ who, although he was God, assumed the very extremes of man's condition of poverty (expressing here in different words the depth of humiliation spoken of in the Letter to the Philippians); but from these amazing depths, from this total impoverishment of the Son of God, is born the possibility for man to be saved, i.e. to be admitted to communion with God, enriched by the same divinity. In the light of this mystery we can see that poverty embraced in Jesus' company is not only the stripping of one's possessions but is an enrichment by the saving power of Christ; for us Salesians it becomes the ability, through the total spending of ourselves, to enrich the young with the abundant life that Christ has brought.

The motive of the "sequela Christi" as the foundation of evangelical poverty is further endorsed by the simple expression used by Don Bosco in his Introduction to the Constitutions: we choose to follow the *"Saviour who was born in poverty, lived deprived of all things and died stripped of his clothes on the cross"*. The whole life of Christ and his saving mysteries, especially the mystery of the Cross, are present in the sign of being deprived of everything; the same choice is put to the disciple, that of renouncing everything. In the same Introduction to the Constitutions Don Bosco added another significant quotation: "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14,33).

The evangelical picture of our choice of poverty, described in the Rule, harks back to Don Bosco's life. In particular we seem to hear the echo of the words said to John by Mamma Margaret, which became his lasting programme: "Follow your vocation without regard to anyone... God comes first. Don't worry about me. Remember this: I was born poor, I have lived poor, and I want to die poor".³

Imitating the Apostles who left everything for the service of the Gospel

Concrete models of evangelical poverty for religious in the service of the Kingdom are the Apostles, who heard from the lips of Jesus himself the invitation to leave their possessions and their family itself so as to follow him in the mission of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of

³ BM I, 221

men. Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Mt 4, 19-20). The reference to the reply of the twelve who had "left everything" (cf. Mt 19,27) for Jesus, is all the more important for us, because it refers directly to the apostolic mission and therefore to the role of voluntary poverty in an efficacious apostolate.

Starting from the witness given by the Apostles, the article emphasizes three attitudes common to all disciples who want to follow in the Master's footsteps, and live in the spirit of the beatitude of poverty that he proclaimed. Such attitudes have been incarnated with different nuances by the Saints; they also form part (as we shall see in the following article) of the spiritual experience of our Founder.

— There is first of all the attitude of *interior freedom as regards worldly goods*, characteristic of one who lives evangelical poverty. Far from despising God's gifts, the religious accepts the invitation of Jesus not to be anxious about earthly possessions (cf. Mt. 6,25), and by detachment from them to testify among men to the pre-eminence of the Kingdom of God: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt 6,33).

— This attitude of freedom and detachment is founded entirely on *trust in the Father's Providence*: religious poverty is an explicit act of faith and a living proclamation that God is our highest and only Good, the Creator and Father who loves us with an infinite love, our greatest Treasure. In the awareness of his condition of innate poverty and hence of his total dependence on God, the poor man entrusts himself completely to love, and in this way evangelical poverty becomes an expression of love. It is worth recalling how deeply rooted was this attitude in Don Bosco. With his active and enterprising holiness he had unlimited trust in Providence and invited his followers to do likewise, as he was convinced that "God's assistance will never be wanting, even by miracles".⁴

— The attitudes of detachment and trusting abandonment to the Father's Providence lead to that *total dedication to the service of the Gospel* which was central to the missionary life of Jesus and the Apostles, and which must be characteristic of us too. Following Jesus, who has shared the lot of the poor and preached to them the good news of freedom (cf. Lk 17-21), we learn to love and serve the poor and bring them the joyful message of God's love.⁵

Mary too is a model for us: as in her case, recognition of our poverty makes us able to give our full collaboration to the salvation plan and to be servants and instruments of Love.

These gospel attitudes, which are at the basis of our choice of evangelical poverty, will be taken up again and further developed in the following articles.

⁴ MB XV, 502

⁵ On the poverty of Jesus, which we to imitate, cf. SGC, 586-588

*Lord Jesus,
from being rich you chose to make yourself poor
to enrich us with your immense generosity.
Intercede with the Father for us,
who have followed you in the way of poverty,
so that by living our choice with joy
like your Apostles and our Founder,
we may entrust ourselves in everything to your Providence,
and so be free to dedicate ourselves entirely
to the service of the Gospel.*

ART. 73 POVERTY AND THE SALESIAN MISSION

Don Bosco lived his poverty in detachment of heart and generous service of others; his manner was marked by austerity, hard work and much initiative.

Following his example we too live detached from all earthly goods;¹ we participate with a spirit of enterprise in the mission of the Church and in her struggle for justice and peace, especially by educating those in need.

The witness of our poverty, lived in a common sharing of our goods, helps the young to overcome their selfish possessive instinct and opens them to the christian sense of sharing.

¹ cf. C 1875, IV, 7

After solidly basing our religious poverty on Jesus Christ and his Gospel, the Constitutions present the salesian with another source which provides inspiration for his life interwoven with the spirit of poverty. This source is the example and teaching of the Founder, whom God himself has raised up to personify and pass on to his sons an original method of following the poor Christ. The experience of Don Bosco, who accepted a really poor life for himself so as to commit himself completely to the service of the young, is part of the witness of the Church which, in fidelity to its Lord, proclaims the supreme value of the benefits acquired by the death and resurrection of Christ, and at the same time accompanies by its service the path of progress of the human community.

Art. 75 develops what was said briefly in the previous article, it gives a more complete description of the linkage between the life of evangelical poverty and the salesian's mission for the young carried out in the Church: the very title of the article ("poverty and the salesian mission") shows that this is the perspective.

To explain this linkage the text concentrates on "two forms of incarnation of poverty",¹ which were characteristic of Don Bosco and must distinguish the salesian: *the witness of a poor life and commitment to the service of fellow men*. The features of witness and service, which are here introduced, will be taken up and analysed more fully in the following articles of the Rule, where their various aspects will be developed.

Don Bosco: a witness of evangelical poverty for the service of poor youth

Art. 73 looks at Don Bosco, the model of the salesian (cf. C 21), to reveal his way of living poverty. It highlights synthetically and precisely two attitudes which stand out in him: on the one hand he lived a truly poor life, detached from worldly goods and with great trust in Providence; and on the other he had a practical love of poor people, especially the young ones among them, spending his life in their service by uplifting them materially and morally.

¹ Cf. SGC, 600

In connection with the Founder's personal practice of poverty, the Rule describes it as a *witness of detachment* marked by "austerity". It is very true that from John's words to the heirs of Don Calosso: "I'd rather be poor... I'd rather have heaven than all the riches and money in the world",² right down to what he said to Don Viglietti on his deathbed: "Please see what there is in the pockets of my clothes... I want to die in such a way that it can be said: Don Bosco died without a cent in his pocket",³ Don Bosco's life is marked by a real and tangible poverty that is a source of astonishment to anyone who looks at what he achieved with God's help and that of Mary. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "We find the expression of the characteristic traits of this poverty in an unshakeable trust in divine providence, in austere simplicity, exemplary temperance, and an almost sacred regard for thrift and economy which led him to look upon money as a gift and an instrument for doing good".⁴

Don Bosco's life style (and he has passed it on to the Congregation as an instrument of the wonders God works for the young) is well summed up in the motto: "*Work and temperance*". With his long experience behind him, Don Bosco could rightly assure the Congregation of a happy future tied to the practice of poverty: "Love poverty... Divine Providence has prepared a happy future for our Congregation... When the desire for ease and comfort grows up among us, our Society will have run its course".⁵ "As long as we are poor", he would say, "Providence will never fail us".⁶

But Don Bosco's witness of a poor life is strictly connected with his exceptional *commitment to service for the young*; the Constitutions describe this as being carried out "with hard work and much initiative". Reading the life of the Saint, one has no difficulty in detecting his wealth of initiative in undertaking the most varied and impressive works for youth. Man of God that he was and detached from money, Don Bosco was nevertheless an industrious worker for the Kingdom who knew how to obtain and use worldly goods for the service of his poor boys. But above all he was able to put himself at their service, with his talents and energy, his time and even his very health. Even in this context we can understand his reply to those who wanted him to let up a bit: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys".⁷

The salesian: a poor person who shares in the Church's mission of witness and service

The Founder's example becomes a rule of life for each of his sons: like Don Bosco every salesian is called to live detached from worldly goods so as to be more available for the service of the young and the poor. The Constitutions have their starting point in the Rule written by the Founder himself, which said: "Let each one

² BM I, 162

³ MB XVIII, 493

⁴ SGC, 596

⁵ MB XVII, 271-272

⁶ BM V, 443; cf. BM XII, 60

⁷ MB XVIII, 258; cf. C 1

spiritual attitude, the text goes on to show that the salesian style of a poor life accords with the Church's mission and permits our natural insertion in it to make our contribution.

In the Church's mission, in fact, we find the two aspects of witness and service already referred to. On the one hand the Church is in the world, but not of the world: she proclaims the superiority of the resurrection and the future life, and works to prevent worldly values being given absolute significance. In "Gaudium et spes" we read: "Let Christians preserve a proper sense of values in their earthly activity, in loyalty to Christ and his Gospel, in order that their lives, individual as well as social, may be inspired by the spirit of the beatitudes, and in particular by the spirit of poverty".⁹

But on the other hand the Church is in the world and solid with it. As the messenger of Him who came to save the whole of man and animated by his love, she shares in the efforts of men of good will for the development and progress of justice and peace: the joyful proclamation of Christ the Saviour is closely tied in with the commitment to bring about a humanity that is more fraternal and consequently better conformed to God's pain.¹⁰

We Salesians, while testifying to the values of the resurrection by our spirit of detachment *play our part decisively and "with a spirit of enterprise" in this ecclesial mission*, especially through our competence as educators of the young most in need. This highlights what we may call the "social dimension" of our poverty, which is directly linked with the service of the mission described in chap. IV of the Constitutions (cf. in particular C 26-30 and 31-33). Being made poor with Christ in his Church, we want to enrich our fellow men with the gift we ourselves have received: the inexhaustible and saving love of Christ himself.

The witness value of evangelical poverty in the work of education

The final paragraph continues the study of the connection between the spirit of poverty and the salesian mission, and goes further into the special relationship that exists between our condition of poor people according to the Gospel and our task as educators. The perspective is that already referred to in art. 62 which spoke of young people of our time tempted by the "idolatry of possessions": they are living in a world

⁸ *Costituzioni* 1875, IV, 7 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 105)

⁹ GS 72

¹⁰ In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* we read the following enlightening expressions on the connection between announcing the Gospel and human advancement: "There are close links between evangelization and human advancement, i.e. development and liberation. There is a connection in the anthropological order because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but a person subject to social and economic factors. There is also a connection in the theological sphere because the plan of creation cannot be isolated from the plan of redemption which extends to the very practical question of eradicating injustice and establishing justice. There is, finally, a connection in the evangelical order, i.e. the order of charity: for how can the new law be proclaimed unless it promotes a true practical advancement of man in a spirit of justice and peace?" (EN 31)

which extols "having" much more than "being", the body at the expense of the spirit, 430 material goods to the exclusion of anything spiritual.

Our Rule, based on the Word of God, gives prominence to the fact that the witness of poverty in the spirit of the beatitudes is very efficacious and can help the young to mature in the understanding of life's values: it can help them to perceive the genuine sense of worldly possessions as means for personal growth, and by leading them to "overcome their selfish possessive instinct" can bring them to appreciate the fraternal destiny of such goods for the building of a community founded on justice and love. We have the great responsibility of educating youngsters, by our example, to free themselves from slavery to material things, to recognize the value of spiritual goods and the pre-eminence of "being" over "having", and to form themselves to the ability to share. The expression "christian sense of sharing", used in the article, takes its inspiration from Christ's word reported in the Acts of the Apostles: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20,35).

*Lord, our God, we thank you
for giving us in Don Bosco
a model of evangelical poverty,
detached from worldly goods,
and generous and rich in initiative
in the service of the young and the poor.*

*Grant that we may imitate him
in detachment of heart and commitment of service,
so that we may share in your Church's mission for
the building of a world of justice and peace.*

*Sustain us by your grace so that,
by the example of a poor life lived in communion,
we may educate youth
to the true Christian sense of possessions.*

ART. 74 REQUIREMENTS OF THE VOW OF POVERTY

By the vow of poverty we undertake not to use and not to dispose of material goods without the consent of the lawful superior.

Each confrere retains the ownership of his patrimony and the right to acquire other goods, but before his profession he freely disposes of their use and enjoyment and cedes their administration to others.

Before perpetual profession he draws up his will in conformity with the norms of civil law. After serious reflection, as an expression of his complete abandonment to divine Providence, he may also renounce definitively the goods of which he has retained the ownership in accordance with universal law and that of the Society.

After setting out the evangelical and salesian motives for our poverty, the Rule goes on to deal with its practical realization, beginning with the personal obligations that each one freely assumes when he makes the vow before God and the Church.

Art. 74 presents some concrete norms stemming from the radical demands of the Gospel, to which the Lord has invited us to respond with generosity: "Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19, 21).

We undertake not to use or dispose of material goods autonomously

The first paragraph encapsulates in a short formula the matter of our vow of poverty. The formulation is clearly inspired by the Code of Canon Law, which says: "The evangelical counsel of poverty... involves dependence and limitation in the use and the disposition of goods, in accordance with each institute's own law".¹ For us Salesians such a norm is part of our tradition and goes back as far as the text written by the Founder. We read, in fact, in chap IV of the Constitutions of 1875: "The vow of poverty, of which we are speaking here, relate only to the administration of property, be this what it may, and not to its possession. Those, therefore, who have made the vows in this Society, will retain the ownership of their goods, hut the administration and the distribution and use or their products are wholly and entirely for bidden them".²

Two observations can be made on the way in which the text sets out the matter of the vow:

a) "*We undertake...* ": the use of the active form of the verb is meant to indicate the voluntary assumption of the limitations imposed by evangelical poverty, as a personal sacrifice offered to God. We oblige ourselves to practise the vow of poverty only because with full freedom we joyfully want to do so (cf. also C 72).

¹ CIC, can. 600

² *Constituzioni 1875*, IV, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 101)

b) "...not to use and not to dispose of material goods without the consent of the lawful superior": the formula evokes, as was said earlier, the radical nature of the words of the Gospel. If, in fact, we use or dispose of some material possession, it is with the consent of the superior and, as will be said more precisely in the following article, within the ambit of community life and for the fulfillment of the mission. We accept the mediation of other person (the superior) to express our complete dependence on God, whom we proclaim in an explicit and practical manner to be the absolute Lord and provident Father in every aspect of our lives. The problem lies, as we shall see in art. 75, in not giving way to the temptation to manipulate this mediation to elude God.

The administration and use of goods

The article's second paragraph completes the description of the requirements of the vow of poverty by specifying some canonical points.

Following a custom established in religious institutes during the nineteenth century, and adopted by our Founder (cf. the article in the Constitutions of 1875 already quoted) the Rule states that the vow of poverty does not prohibit the ownership, before civil law and society, of the property belonging to our patrimony³, and the ability to acquire other goods; it does indicate, however, the conditions to which the religious must submit so as to ensure a real renunciation of the administration and use of the goods themselves. A distinction is introduced between the radical possession of goods (the ability to acquire and possess a patrimony), and their use and disposal: the vow refers specifically and directly to this second aspect.

The canonical prescriptions indicated in this article of the Constitutions (and in particular the obligation to cede the use and enjoyment, as well as arranging for the administration of goods before profession together with the duty of making a will) are further specified by art. 51-52 of the General Regulations.

We can renounce the ownership of our goods

The greatest innovation with respect to our traditions is found in the third paragraph which introduces the possibility, under certain conditions, of renouncing the radical ownership of our goods. The norm was suggested by Vatican II, which said in the decree "Perfectae caritatis": "Religious congregations may, in their constitutions, permit their members to renounce their inheritances, both those which have already

³ The question of the vow of poverty of religious of "simple vows" with respect to their radical control over their goods had been raised from the eighteenth century. A solution had been found in 1839 in the "Apostolic Letters" by which the Holy See had approved the Rule of the Institute of Charity founded by Rosmini. The pontifical "*Declarationes*" of 1858, which followed the decree "*Super statum regularium*" of the previous year, practically made normative the principle that the vow of poverty did not take away the capacity for radical ownership of goods. Don Bosco, from the first draft of his Constitutions had included an article '6n these lines. But the formula he wanted to use: "Anyone entering the Congregation will not lose his civil rights..." (*Costituzioni 1858,II, 2*) was not approved by the Holy See, despite his appeal. On this point, cf. F. MOTTO, "*Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii* , *Fonti Letterarie*". in RSS 3, 1983, p. 367-369

been acquired and those which may be acquired in the future".⁴ It is a case of a more radical response to Christ's invitation to leave everything, which the SGC thought well to accept and insert in our Rule of life.

The general statement is accompanied for us by three conditions which belong to our own particular law. In the first place the definitive renunciation of his possessions is an absolutely free choice and supposes in the professed member an inspiration of grace but also a "serious reflection" (on account of which art. 53 of the Regulations will specify that it can be done only after at least ten years of perpetual profession). Secondly, on the part of the Society it requires the consent of the Rector Major (cf. R 53). But especially its meaning must be clear: it is done in a spirit of evangelical detachment, so as to better express dependence on God and complete abandonment to his fatherhood. It is a kind of stripping of oneself, which would have no sense outside a poverty already deeply lived in all its aspects.

*Father, pour out in us your Spirit
and give us a heart
generous in detachment and burning with love,
so that our practice of poverty
may never be a mere external observance,
but in seeking you, the one true Good,
may become a trusting abandonment to your Fatherhood,
and free us from all created bonds
in the service of our fellow men.*

Through Christ our Lord.

⁴ PC 13

ART. 75 PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO POVERTY

Each one us bears prime responsibility for his own poverty, daily living out by the frugality of his life the detachment he has promised.

He accepts his dependence on the superior and community in the use of temporal goods, but he knows too that permission does not dispense him from being poor in spirit and in fact.¹

He is careful not to give way gradually to a desire for a comfortable and easy life, which poses a direct threat to fidelity and to apostolic generosity.

When his state of poverty causes him some inconvenience or suffering,² he is glad to be able to share in the blessings promised by the Lord to the poor in spirit.³

¹ cf. PC 13

² cf. C 1875 (Introduction), p. xxvi

³ cf. Mt. 5,3

This article goes more deeply into the content of the preceding one and completes it: the canonical specifications concerning the vow must, in fact, be seen in the wider context of the virtue and spirit of evangelical poverty.

The four brief paragraphs indicate four elements in the approach of one who has resolved to follow Christ by sharing his poverty. We shall study them in two groups.

Personal assumption of poverty

The first two paragraphs emphasize the *personal responsibility* involved in the assuming and effective living of a poor life. Evangelical poverty, as was said in art. 72, is a process of progressive assimilation to Christ who chose poverty and accepted its extreme consequences ("He abased himself, taking the condition of a slave"). This cannot be done by simply making the vow; what is necessary is the daily concrete acceptance of its consequences, or (as Don Bosco called them) "the poverty."¹

When he makes his profession in the Congregation, the salesian (and, for that matter, every religious) enters a structure which guarantees him food, lodging, clothing and a certain economic security. He runs the risk of living poverty in a manner which is almost automatic, trusting implicitly in the security of the institution. Without prejudice to the common life of a fundamental means of living the state of poverty (which will be dealt with in the following articles), the salesian is reminded that poverty (as indeed all the other virtues) will not be genuine unless he personally makes it his own. The conditions of life offered him by his house are often demanding and stimulating, but unfortunately we know that at times they may not

¹ In the *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Don Bosco quotes St Bernard: "There are some who glory in being called poor, but who will not bear the consequences of poverty" (Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 232)

prevent a drift towards a comfortable and easy life. In any case the salesian is called to think personally of his poverty in the light of the poor Christ, and check that he is really "*daily living out the detachment he has promised*", amid the circumstances, urgent needs and appeals, with which he may be challenged by times and places for a fuller and more generous self-donation. Evangelical poverty is not just a habit but a living love incarnate in each one's existence.

Explicitly recalled is the fundamental attitude which Don Bosco pointed out in his text of the Constitutions: "The observance of the vow of poverty in our Congregation consists essentially in detachment from all worldly goods".²

Following the same line of thought the Constitutions put the salesian on guard against a legalistic approach to "permissions". Art. 74 said that with the consent of the superior he can "use" and "dispose" of certain goods, and that he can buy, sell and administer. Art. 75 emphasizes a further important element, when it says that he accepts dependence not only on the superior but also on the community; living as in a family he is subject to communal norms, and willingly compares his life style with that of the community. This double dependence in the use of goods, on the superior and on the community (even though it be in different ways), is part of our family tradition, but also points to the "character of dependence which is inherent in every form of poverty".³

But the Rule goes further than this and says that such material dependence is not enough. Vatican II, quoted in this article, says the same thing, inviting to be "*poor in fact and in spirit*".⁴ Paul VI said on this topic: "Religious should be distinguished for their example of true evangelical poverty, and so they must love the poverty they have freely embraced. It is not sufficient that they depend on the superiors as regards the use of goods, they must also be content with the necessities of life and shun ease and comfort".⁵

Even though Don Bosco invites him to go to the superior with complete confidence in every need,⁶ it is still true that the religious cannot leave to the superior the entire responsibility for a decision: he must himself make a judgement about the need and expediency of what he is asking for. Both trust and loyalty are needed for a poverty which is real and not just nominal! Our Founder tells us: You can- not practise poverty unless you love it"⁷

Courageous acceptance of the hardships of poverty

² *Costituzioni 1867*, V, 1: cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, IV, 7 (cf. F. MOTTO, 100 and 105)

³ ET 21

⁴ PC 13

⁵ cf. Paul VI, *Address to Superiors General*, 23 May 1964, AAS 56 (1964), p. 567

⁶ In the *Costituzioni 1875*, III, 3, we read: Let no one be anxious to ask for any particular thing, or to refuse it; but on perceiving that such or such a thing is either harmful or needful to him, let him respectfully mention the fact to the superior who will then, with the greatest care, make the provision that his needs require", (cf. F MOTTO, p. 97). In poverty, as in obedience, confidence in the superior was a characteristic of Don Bosco's house

⁷ BM V, 422

life, in which renunciations and sacrifices will not be lacking: so it was for Jesus who "had nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9,58), and so it will often be in the life of his disciple.

On this point Don Bosco is clear and forceful (we might even say radical), just as Jesus was. We need only recall the words he wrote in the Introduction to the Constitutions: "All that is beyond food and clothing is superfluous for us, and contrary to a religious vocation. It is true that at times we shall have to suffer some inconvenience on our journeys, in our work, in times of health and of sickness; we shall sometimes have food, clothing and other things not to our liking, but it is precisely then that we should bear in mind that we have made profession of poverty, and that if we wish to have its merit and reward, we ought to bear with its consequences".⁸

The article recalls the duty of *vigilance* in this connection. Our selfishness, always lying in wait to trap us, and the world in which we live, dominated by the desire for possessions (the "concupiscence of the eyes" of which St John speaks: 1 Jn 2, 16), can cause us to lose sight of where our true treasure is, and without our noticing it gradually lead us in the direction of ease and comfort. In addition to the motive of fidelity to the promise made to God, the text gives prominence to a reason which concerns us directly as religious and apostles: giving way before the demands of poverty is "a direct threat to fidelity and to apostolic generosity". Can a salesian, in fact, who seeks an easy life and becomes attached to material things, be still available for the young? How can he be "ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain" (cf. C 18) for them? How will his life bear witness to "seeking first the Kingdom of God and his justice"?

Here we take up again a topic that was touched on earlier. Art. 18 spoke of renunciations connected with apostolic life as a characteristic of the salesian spirit: "the seeking of an easy and comfortable life will bring about the Congregation's death"; and art. 61 describes the link between life according to the counsels and the apostolic mission in these words: "the obedient, poor and chaste salesian is quick to love and serve those to whom the Lord sends him, especially poor youth".

The article ends by indicating another element which should distinguish the attitude of the salesian in his life of poverty, even at times when this is the cause of "some inconvenience or suffering"; it is the *joy* experienced by one who has chosen to be the friend of Jesus and the servant of his Gospel: one who accepts poverty as a state on which God looks with predilection. Once again the text returns to Don Bosco's clear words in the Introduction to the Constitutions: "Should our state of poverty however cause us any inconvenience or suffering, let us rejoice with St Paul, who declares that he is overjoyed with all his affliction. Or again let us do as did the apostles, who were filled with happiness when they returned from the Sanhedrin, because they had been counted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. It is precisely to this sort of poverty that heaven is not only promised but assured by our

⁸D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*: cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 32

kingdom of heaven”.⁹ This is a fine reminder from Don Bosco of the beatitude of poverty, which the Congregation has made its own; here lies the explanation of the joy shown by Don Bosco in privations and sufferings, and this too must be the perennial source of joy for every true salesian.¹⁰

*Let us pray with confidence to God our Father, for
love of whom we have professed holy poverty,
and ask him to help us to practise our vow with
spiritual adherence
To all that its observance demands of us
as religious and Salesians.*

*That each one of us may feel a personal responsibility
in the practice of poverty,
by the generous daily living
of detachment from all material things
in a truly poor manner of life,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the strength of the love of God and our neighbour
may enable us to see in our loyal dependence
on our superior and community
the expression and means for the integral living
of our filial dependence
on God, our one and only Good,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to accept together with poverty
the renunciations and sacrifice it imposes on us,
and thus adhere to the beatitude
of being poor for the Kingdom of God,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

• *ibid.*

¹⁰ Don Bosco's biographer speaks of the faith of Founder in difficulties and trials, and adds: "From this trust he drew his unshakeable serene confidence in the future as well as his heroic love of voluntary poverty and the joy he felt in lacking even essentials" (BM V, 442; cf. also BM V, 444). Fr. Caviglia, after noting that many of Don Bosco's talks to the confreres dealt with work, temperance and poverty, adds: "an austerity of life therefore that would seem opposed to joy?" He answers the question with an explanation of the saying "servire Domino in laetitia", which is not opposed to a life sacrifice: in Don Bosco's house nothing is done by force, but everything spontaneously and willingly through love ('loving kindness); nothing is suffered as an authoritarian imposition, but everything is done through conscientious conviction ('reason' and 'religion'). cf. A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco — Profilo storico*, SEI Turin 1934, 2 edtn., p. 93

ART. 76 THE CHRISTIAN SHARING OF GOODS

After the example of the first christians, we share together our materials goods,¹ the fruits of our work, the gifts we receive and whatever comes to us from pensions, subsidies and insurance policies. We do the same with our talents, our energies and our experience.

In the community the good of each individual becomes the good of all.

As brothers we share what we have with the other communities of the province, and we show solidarity with the needs of the entire Congregation, of the Church and of the world.

¹ cf. Acts 4,32

With this article the Constitutions pass on to describe the community aspect of poverty, i.e. of poverty understood is its dimension as a way to fraternal communion.

This is an aspect to which Don Bosco was very sensitive. In the first drafts of the Constitutions he had headed the chapter on poverty with this definition: "Observance of the vow of poverty in our Congregation consists essentially in detachment from every earthly thing, which we practise by common life as regards food and clothing, and by keeping nothing for our own use without the permission of the superior"¹ In the text of 1875, approved by the Appostolic See, this article was moved to the end of the chapter to meet canonical requirements, but it remained one of the characteristics of salesian poverty. We embrace personal poverty to imitate Jesus Christ in his fruitful poverty, but also to form a community and have greater love for our brothers. This is also the thought of our Patron, St Francis de Sales: "To be poor means living in community".²

Art. 76 substantially develops two lines of thought, which we shall consider in sequence: communion of goods within the community, and fraternal sharing beyond it.

Sharing of goods within the community

The first two paragraphs refer directly to sharing of goods within the local community, without excluding the application of the principles involved to the provincial and world communities.

Our considerations are based on the situation of the first christian community born of the Lord's Passover. In the chapter on the fraternal and apostolic community was quoted the summary from the Acts of the Apostles which described the community of the disciples using an expression dear to Don Bosco: "they formed one heart and one soul" (cf. C 50). In the present context we recall one of the concrete

¹ *Costituzioni 1864*, VI 1, (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 100)

² *Oeuvres de St. Francois de Sales*, Ed. Annecy, vol IX, p. 229; cf. also SGC, 606

manifestations of this "cor unum et anima una", which the Acts describe in these words: "No one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common" (Acts 4,32). The sharing of possessions became a sign and means for the realization of a community of love after the example of Jesus.

In this way prominence is given to the evangelical basis for brotherly sharing, showing that it is an aspect of a deeper communion of persons. Paul VI, in the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelica testificatio", expresses this thought well, referring back to the Christian tradition: "According to the expression in the Didache, 'If you share eternal goods, with all the more reason should you share the goods that perish'. Poverty really lived by pooling goods, including pay, will testify to the spiritual communion uniting you".³

On the basis therefore of the example of the first Christians, the Constitutions assert that we too "*share together our material goods*", and because the reference is to a real sharing, the text goes on to enumerate some of these goods which we bring to the community: "the fruits of our work", obviously without making comparisons between the income from different activities (the hardest work does not necessarily bring in the greatest returns!); "the gifts we receive", which we feel were given to us for the good and enjoyment also of our brothers; "whatever comes to us from pensions, subsidies and insurance policies", which are a contribution for the life of our family.

The good of each becomes the good of all

But the sharing of goods extends beyond and above the ownership of purely temporal goods. Art. 16, speaking of family spirit, said: "In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced". And art. 51 on "relationships of fraternal friendship" specified that "we share our joys and sorrows and we are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences". It is in this wide perspective of exchange and sharing at a deeper level that the present article adds: "*We do the same with our talents, our energies and our experience*". The GC21 comments on this attitude with the happy expression: "Poverty means sharing all that we have, all that we are, and all that we do".⁴ The sharing of goods becomes an expression of a shared existence.

The Rule therefore, following the spirit of the Gospel, leads us from the sharing of material possessions to the shared participation in deeper personal goods, and hence to the height of charity: as we said earlier, evangelical poverty becomes the *road to love*.

This is what is meant by the short but dense phrase of the second paragraph: "*In the community the good of each individual becomes the good of all*".⁵ One may also read into this a human motivation of poverty as communion: It is a mutual

³ ET 21

⁴ GC21, 40

⁵ The phrase is inspired by an expression of Don Bosco: "Let the good of one be the good of all" (cf. MB XII, 630)

enrichment; each one contributes his goods, his personal resources and his work, making them serve the community and thus enriching it; and on the other hand each one receives from the community according to his needs and is enriched by it.

But it is above all in the light of the Paschal mystery that "the good of each individual becomes the good of all", because each one, in the awareness that he has been redeemed by Christ and is a member of God's family, is able to communicate fully with his brothers the riches he has himself received.

In our salesian tradition a poverty lived in this way is described as a *poverty lived "in a family spirit"* or, as the SGC summed it up, a "poverty of the family."⁶ In it the common life with its austerities (in the demanding sense of Don Bosco) flourishes in brotherhood lived in joy for the service of the young. It is fostered by the fatherliness of the superior who is attentive to the needs of each one, and the full confidence of the confrere who is not afraid to make known his needs.

For Caviglia has a significant passage about the joyful austerity in Don Bosco's house: "austerity is found in the daily usage, in the willingness for sacrifice and detachment, not in the tenor of life; everyone works, is tolerant, and feels the pinch of poverty quite happily, because the heart enters into everything, and the soul is so tempered to high ideals, so disposed to the renunciation of what is not necessary, that it allows of the greatest ease and nonchalance in spirit and action".⁷

Fraternal solidarity with other communities

A feature of the family spirit passed on to us by Don Bosco is the sharing of goods, not only in the local community but in the provincial community and in the entire Congregation. This is what is referred to in the third paragraph of the article, which is a clear reminder of something said by the Council: "Provinces and houses of the different institutes should share their poverty with one another, those who have more helping those who are in need".⁸ But the expression in the text would seem to be of still wider application: "*As brothers we share what we have with the other communities of the province, and we show solidarity with the needs of the entire Congregation*"; this is a sharing which involves not only material goods (referred to explicitly in art. 197 of the General Regulations), but also spiritual goods and the apostolic capabilities of each member. We must not forget Don Bosco's insistence on the fact that the Congregation forms a single body, a single family around the Rector Major, who is its father and guide: art. 59 had already anticipated the idea.

It should be noted however that art. 76 give particular prominence to communion within the province. Referring back to art. 58 it emphasizes how the communal aspect of our poverty is important for the fostering of a true provincial community.

⁶ SGC, 606

⁷ A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco-Profilo storico*, SEI Turin 1934 (2 edtn), p. 93

⁸ PC 13

needs of the Church and of the world". Here too we are sent back to the directives of Vatican II. The decree "Perfectae caritatis" says, in fact: "The institutes themselves... should willingly contribute part of what they possess for the other needs of the Church and for the support of the poor".⁹ Although the direct reference of the Council text is to witness and service for the very poor, the Constitutions have inserted this appeal in the context of brotherly sharing, both as a reminder that we form part of a bigger family, and to emphasize an important objective for the putting of our goods in common. It was of this that Paul VI reminded religious superiors: "With the temporal goods divine Providence has bestowed on you, meet the requirements of your brothers in need, both those close to you and those scattered in other parts of the world".¹⁰

To sum up, the article makes us feel very clearly that the goods we may have are not to be kept in storage nor as a guarantee of economic security; they are at the disposal of our brothers, because our poverty is at the service of charity; all we have is for the service of poor youth (cf. C 73, 79).

*God our Father,
grant that we your servants
may be able to share with generosity
in our communities,
with the Church,
and with the poorest of our brothers,
the gifts of nature and of grace
and all the spiritual and material goods
that your Providence offers us.*

*May our practice of evangelical poverty
be an efficacious means
for making us a true family,
and for being in the world a sign
foreshadowing the coming of your Kingdom.*

Through Christ our Lord.

⁹PC 13

¹⁰PAUL VI, *Address to superiors general*, 23 May 1964

ART, 77 WITNESS OF POVERTY IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN OUR WORKS

Every community is sensitive to the conditions of its neighbourhood and bears witness to its poverty by a simple and frugal way of life in unpretentious dwellings.

Following the example and spirit of our Founder we accept ownership of the means we need for our work, and we administer them in such a way that all may realize they are being used for the service of others.

Our choice of works and of their location is made in response to the needs of those in want; the criterion for our buildings is that they be simple and functional.

This article continues the theme of communal poverty, developing in particular its witness value for youth and the world. As was said in the commentary on the preceding article the Council asks from religious "*a quasi-collective witness*" to poverty.¹ Such witness is important not only in itself but for the apostolic mission, since (according to what was said in art. 62) it is our life rather than our words which makes the announcement of the Gospel convincing. Addressing religious, Paul VI told them that this is a task specifically theirs: "At a time when there is an increased danger for many of being enticed by the alluring security of possessions, knowledge and power, the call of God places you at the pinnacle of the Christian conscience. You are to remind men that their true and complete progress consists in responding to their calling to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men".² Our own SGC added that this witness to poverty is particularly meaningful when lived in community.³

In connection with the Council's doctrine and salesian tradition, art. 77 deals with three principal areas of the collective witness of poverty: a simple and frugal way of life, the manner of using the means needed for apostolic work, and poverty in works and structures. We shall look at these points one by one.

Witness by a simple and frugal way of life

In art. 76 it was said that a characteristic feature of the poverty of the sons of Don Bosco is that they live in perfect communion of material and spiritual goods. But it should be noted that although the individual religious by putting his own goods in common may realize an eminent form of personal detachment and generous self-giving, this may not be sufficient for a real collective witness of poverty. History shows unfortunately that there have been religious institutes in which the loyal detachment of the members led to an accumulation of goods which made rich the community

¹ PC 13

² ET 19

³ Cf. SGC, 606

itself. On the other hand Don Bosco himself warned his Congregation against the risk of seeking ease and comfort.⁴

In this light the first paragraph emphasizes that witness to the Kingdom of God and its transcendence is not only the duty of the individual. The profession of poverty calls in question the community as well, which must provide credible testimony precisely as a community; but at the same time it must not be forgotten that it is difficult for a religious to call himself poor if he is a member of a community that is rich!

How is this communal witness to be provided? "*By a simple and frugal way of life in unpretentious dwellings*", replies the Rule. The Acts of the SGC provide a very clear illustration of this obligation: "An austere style of common life: we must feel that we are closer to the poor by being frugal in food, by refusing all that is superfluous, and by aiming at functional simplicity in our buildings".⁵ A little earlier the same Chapter had spoken of a "way of life that is simple and austere, which rejects those comforts and conveniences that are commonly associated with the middle class".⁶ These expressions recall what Don Bosco had written in his souvenir for the first missionaries: "Let the world know that you are poor in clothing, food and abode, and you will be rich in the sight of God and will win the hearts of men".⁷ And on another occasion he said: "My ideal was to found a Congregation which, at my death, would be a model of frugality".⁸

The text adds a nuance which is of practical importance: "Every community is sensitive to the conditions of its neighbourhood". The idea and phrasing come from the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis"⁹ already quoted in the preceding article. They are explained in the Acts of the SGC in the following terms: "We must bear in mind that the concrete picture of the social and economic poverty of the religious and consequently its value as a sign... varies for different environments and countries, different cultures and civilizations as well as particular situations. This means that the exercise of poverty is subject to the principle of pluralism".¹⁰ In practice, every community must find its own style of simplicity and austerity in line with its precise mission in a particular neighbourhood; but in every case the overriding norm is the same: to bring Christ to life and make him "visible" to those to whom we have been sent!

Witness by the use of means necessary for the mission

⁴ Cf. MB XVII, 271-272

⁵ SGC, 606

⁶ SGC, 605

⁷ *Souvenir for missionaries* (n.12); cf. Appendix 1984 Constitutions, p. 266. Don Bosco reminds us "To dwell willingly in a room which is uncomfortable or poorly furnished, to wear plain apparel, to eat coarse and common food, greatly honours him who has made the vow of poverty, because it makes him like Jesus Christ (*Introduction to the Constitutions*, Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 233)

⁸ BM IV, 134

⁹ PC 13

¹⁰ SGC, 609

The second paragraph of the article deals with a problem strictly tied in with the carrying out of our mission: that of the means needed for the community's work.¹¹

The Society Don Bosco founded aims at the education and evangelization of youth, especially the poorest of them, and at the advancement of the working classes; these educational and promotional objectives require adequate means which are often quite expensive.

Don Bosco was not afraid of seeking and using the most suitable means for giving his youngsters, in addition to their daily food, the instruction they need. It may seem strange, for instance, to find on the lips of Don Bosco, who had such a deep love for poverty, an expression like: "The Congregation will flourish as long as the salesians can appreciate the value of money".¹² Although he was so detached he did not revile money; he knew what toil it cost poor people to obtain it, and knew also that it was a means to help his boys and ensure them a less dismal future; it made their training possible. And so Don Bosco used money and every other means his ingenuity managed to obtain for the service of his boys. What he had to say about the use of means for education and advancement is well known; referring explicitly to the press he said: "In these things Don Bosco wants to be in the vanguard of progress".¹³

From this standpoint must be read the constitutional text: "Following the example and spirit of our Founder we accept ownership of the means we need for our work". We are aware that our mission needs means, and so we use them. But we must be guided always and solely by the spirit of disinterested and visible service: "*We administer them in such a way that all may realize they are being used for the service of others*". Our beneficiaries and those who observe us must be able to see quite clearly that our communal goods are effectively used for the purposes of the mission (evangelization, education and youth service), and that the Salesians live, individually and collectively, as the simple administrators of these goods.

Witness in works and structures

What has been said about means necessary for the mission leads naturally to a discussion of the works and activities in which the mission is carried out. These too must be considered in the context of the witness of the evangelical poverty, which is indispensable.

The general criterion which must guide the community in its choice of works and activities is similar to that stated with respect to instruments and means for apostolic work: they are first and foremost for the service of youth most in need, and therefore should be designed to meet those needs. A criterion of this kind has been already indicated by articles 7 and 41, in the context of the apostolic priorities of our

¹¹ The SGC expressed this problem in the form of a question: "How is it possible to reconcile a witness of poverty leading to total solidarity with the world of the poor with the functional and structural requirements of education? Is it possible to be poor in an institute which in some places takes on the appearance of grandiosity?" (SGC, 610)

¹² MB XVII, 486

¹³ MB XVI, 323

mission. Art. 26 too, speaking of those to whom our work is primarily and principally directed, concluded with a clear choice of our field of work: "we work especially in areas of greatest poverty". All this is now taken up again indicating in fidelity to the service called for by the mission a way to provide a real witness of evangelical poverty.

Referring specifically to structures, the text adds to the general indication already stated a further detail: "the criterion for our buildings is that they be simple and functional". Though it is necessary that the structures be functional in order to provide a truly efficacious service, the article points to the care necessary to avoid useless or excessive embellishments that would be a counter-testimony. Art. 59 of the Regulations states this aspect more clearly: "In every case whatever has the appearance of counter-witness to poverty should be avoided, remembering that effective service can often be rendered with very simple material structures and in works we do not own".

The depth of what is being said here should be noted. We are being asked to understand the real meaning of structures, which are only a means of realizing our service to the young and testifying to the Gospel. Not only must we not ascribe to them an absolute value, but we must indeed be always willing to modify them so as to adapt them to the real needs of our beneficiaries. The ability to make use of simple structures and to adapt them easily to new situations is a sign of our full docility and trust in Him who sends us and whose alone is the saving work. The life of Don Bosco and the origins of our Society are a model we must never forget!

In this context too enters the invitation to a periodic verification (*"scrutinium paupertatis"*) made by the General Regulations to local and provincial communities (cf. R 65).

*Lord, you want all our communities
to be practical witness among youth
of the beatitude of poverty.
Help us to provide a credible sign
by our plain and frugal life
and the simplicity of our dwellings.*

*Lord, in your kindness
and with the generous help of so many benefactors
you have given us houses
and the means needed for our work.
Grant that we may always remember
that we are only administrators of these your gifts,
and use them as instruments for the service of youth.*

*Lord, the activities and works we undertake
are signs of your love for us and for the young.
Grant that we may not attach our heart to
them, but see them always in their purpose of
service to those for whom we work.*

ART. 78 WORK

Unremitting and self-sacrificing work is a characteristic left us by Don Bosco, and is a concrete expression of our poverty.

In our daily labours we are at one with the poor who live by the sweat of their brow, and we bear witness to the human and christian value of work.¹

¹ cf. ET 20

The last two articles of the section dwell on two characteristic features of the salesian manner of practising poverty: a life of work, and love of the poor. These are attitudes which refer to both witness and service, and equally concern both the individual and the community.

Apostolic work and expression of our poverty

Art. 18 has already spoken of work in the life of the sons of Don Bosco as being one of the elements, which together with temperance, forms part of the salesian spirit: "Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish". Tireless work is an expression of pastoral charity, a fruit of the mystique of "da mihi animas, cetera tolle".

Art. 78 takes up the theme of work and presents it in its relationship with our poverty as religious and apostles: after following Jesus as agents of the Gospel, we imitate him in his tireless work for the Kingdom of God by dedicating ourselves with all our strength to the service of our fellow men.

To explain the connection between the work of the salesian and his choice of poverty, the article develops three main lines of thought: it recalls the example of Don Bosco the worker, declares that our work links us with our brothers who work for their livelihood, and speaks of the efficacious witness we can give to men of the present day, and especially to the young.

To get an idea of the extent to which Don Bosco spent his life in work, one has only to read his biography: the pages of the Biographical Memoirs provide continuous testimony to the "unremitting and self-sacrificing" work (the two adjectives have been chosen deliberately), with the Saint carried out for poor boys. The words of Prof. Fissore of the University of Turin are well known: "He wore himself out through too much work! He did not die of illness, but rather as an oil-lamp which faded out through lack of fuel".¹ Fr Ceria, in turn, wrote: "It would be difficult to find another Saint who worked, and got others to work, to the extent that Don Bosco did".²

Don Bosco left his followers this style of work as a "*precious heritage*". In the Acts of the SGC we read: "Sensitive to the signs of his times which gave much credit to

¹ MB XVIII, 500

² E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*, p. 262-263

hard work, and urged on by interior zeal, Don Bosco wanted a Congregation that was established on tireless hard work".³ He wanted his Salesians to be joyful, poor, frugal, but above all industrious: "Work, work, work!" he used to repeat, "That should be a priest's objective and glory. Never tire of working. How many souls would be saved!".⁴ "My dear children," he said on another occasion, "I don't ask you to fast or scourge yourselves. I exhort you to work, work, work!".⁵

Apostolic work therefore (and not just any kind of work), is for us salesians a precious family heirloom; it forms part of our identity and is therefore a concrete way of following Christ, putting ourselves totally at the service of the mission he has entrusted to us. In this sense work becomes an *expression of poverty*, because it is the sign of the generous gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers.

Work done with love makes us one with the poor and becomes a testimony

To the salesian motivation another may be added of a sociological nature. Work, says the Rule, makes us one with so many of our fellow men who live by the sweat of their brow in daily toil and hope: rightly these are called poor before God. This motivation which sustains our commitment to humble work is drawn from the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis" which says: "Religious should, each in his own assigned task, *consider themselves bound by the common law of labour*".⁶ Rightly can it be said that this is a concrete way of practising poverty according to the Gospel.

Finally there is a third motive which explains the salesian's daily dedication to work in joyful generosity even though it be tiring. The motive is expressed in the final phrase of the article and is taken from the text of the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelica testificatio", addressed to religious of our time: "You will be able to understand the complaints of so many persons who are drawn into the implacable process of work for gain, of profit for enjoyment, and of consumption, which in its turn forces them to a labour which is sometimes inhuman. It will therefore be an essential aspect of your poverty to *bear witness to the human meaning of work* which is carried out in liberty of spirit and restored to its true nature as the source of sustenance and of service".⁷ Our work, carried out with love and for love, becomes a testimony for the men we meet. It is a question of an educative aspect of the life of poverty, which acquires a particular importance in our case as educators of the young; we have to be able to form the new generations to a true sense of work in the building of their own lives. Significant in this connection is Fr. Caviglia's statement: "Don Bosco's greatest social merit lies in his discovery of how to educate to work by actually working".⁸ It is a commitment for us too!

³ SGC, 597

⁴ MB XVII, 383

⁵ BM IV, 151

⁶ PC 13

⁷ ET 20

⁸ A. CAVIGLIA, *Vita di San Domenico Savio*, SEI 1943, p. 75

*Lord Jesus,
time is great gift of your Love.
Help us to use it always well,
as agents of the Gospel,
in unremitting and self-sacrificing work,
following the example of Don Bosco
the tireless apostle of the young.*

*In this way may we share the lot of the
poor who gain their living by daily work,
and bear witness for men of the present
day and especially for our young people to
the human and christian sense of work.*

You live and reign for ever and ever.

ART. 79 SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

The spirit of poverty leads us to be one with the poor and to love them in Christ.¹

For this reason we make every effort to stay close to them, to alleviate their needs, making our own their lawful aspirations for a more human society.

In seeking and accepting help for the service of the needy, we imitate Don Bosco in his zeal and gratitude, and like him we retain the freedom the Gospel gives us. "Remember well", he tells us, "that what we have is not ours; it belongs to the poor; woe to us if we do not use it well".²

¹ cf. PC 13

² MB V, 682; BM V, 450

This article which concludes the description of our poverty at the school of the Gospel and following the example of Don Bosco is very significant and is linked, in a certain sense, with the evangelical source of the first article of this section. It presents another distinct feature of the salesian, who derives from the love of the poor Christ (cf. C 72) his love for the poor in whom Christ himself is manifested.

The text of the article evidently draws its inspiration from the experience and teaching of our Founder, but is based also on the whole of Christian tradition which, ever since the first apostolic community (cf. Acts of the Apostles), has always held the poor in great honour as a sign of the presence of the Lord; such an obligation has been confirmed for religious by Vatican II and subsequent documents of the Magisterium.¹

Being solid with the poor

Don Bosco's example, as was mentioned in art. 73, is evident from all his life and work. Born of a poor family and being poor through love, he not only esteemed his condition (he used to call himself "a humble peasant child"),² but showed a practical love of the poor. All his work was dedicated to the human and christian advancement of poor youth:³ he was concerned too about the ordinary people (in the manuscript of the Constitutions of 1864 he spoke of the "lowest classes") who were in greatest need of help. The mind of Don Bosco concerning the poor can be understood from his expression: Our Lord is present in the lowliest and most destitute beggar".⁴ It is pleasant too to recall the advice he left his sons in his spiritual testament: "The world will always welcome us as long as all our concern is for the underdeveloped peoples, for poor children, for those members of society most in danger. *This is our real wealth which no one will envy and no one will take from us*".⁵

¹ Cf. PC 13; ET 17 ff.; cf. also the document "Religious and human promotion" (CRIS, 1980)

² Cf. MB X, 141

³ Costituzioni 1875, I, 1.3.4 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 73,75)

⁴ BM XIII, 84

⁵ BM XVII, 272

Faithful to Don Bosco the salesian, who has chosen to be poor with Christ, commits himself to the love and service of the poor. The Constitutions have already said as much in the chapter on the mission where is indicated the preferential option of the Society for "the young who are poor, abandoned and in danger" (cf. C 26) and its attention to "poor people in general" (cf. C 29). In art. 73 too, in the same context of poverty, was emphasized (as we have seen) our commitment to the service of those most in need, by which the salesian participates in the Church's mission. The present article now takes up the theme from the narrower aspect of the persons of the poor, and outlines an ensemble of basic attitudes which the salesian cultivates for them because of his vocation.

The article speaks of "*solidarity with the poor*" (which is in fact the title of the article). The GC 19 had already outlined this important task: "Today more than ever before Don Bosco and the Church send us by preference to the poor,... to establish practical solidarity with them; only thus can we love them better, serve Christ better in them, and lead them more easily to the Saviour's riches".⁶ The Constitutions make their own this appeal for solidarity with the poor. Now we know that to be solid with a person means to share his deep feelings, his interests and problems, and of course his life and destiny: something which is by no means easy; it needs constant commitment and proven virtue.

For this reason the Rule expressly indicates some manifestations of our solidarity with the poor, which we must make the effort to cultivate:

— "*to love them in Christ*": it is love that makes solidarity possible, and solidarity finds its natural expression in love: Jesus Christ is solid with us because he has loved us and his solidarity has saved us! In this connection the text quotes explicitly from the decree "Perfectae caritatis" (which says literally "loves them with the tenderness of Christ", or with the "deep yearning" of Christ), and is founded on the persuasion of faith which discerns in the needy brother the countenance of Christ himself: "I was hungry and you gave me food... As often as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me!" (Mt 25, 35.40).

One who has made himself poor for love of the Lord is able to love him in the poor because he knows that it is in them that Christ most surely loves to dwell. This means, in St James' well known expression, being concrete in our love for our fellow men. (cf. Jas 2,15-16).

— "*to stay close to them*": it is not only a question of the indispensable need to be close to them in thought and feeling, but also of a material closeness in the service we give them; as has already been said more than once, this is the priority in our mission which is indicated by the Rule.

— "*alleviate their needs*": the expression comes from a moving part of the text of the Constitution "Lumen gentium": "The Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who

⁶GC19, p. 81-82

suffer, the image of her poor and suffering Founder. She does all in her power to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ".⁷ The love of one who has followed the poor Christ makes him quick to see the needs of the poor, lets him become involved in their difficulties, weep with them in their suffering, and share more easily in their vicissitudes. He is able to help his poor brothers by staying at their side. But above all he is able to say to them the Word of God's Love and bring them the good news of Jesus the Saviour: "Pauperes evangelizantur" (Lk 7,22).

— *"making our own their lawful aspirations for a more human society"*: here we return from a different point of view to what has been already said in art. 7 and 33: it is a question of sharing by feeling and action in the great task of the liberation of the poor. Fr Luigi Ricceri, VI Successor of Don Bosco, writing in this connection, said that participation in the commitment to development "belongs to the essence of the Congregation".⁸ Our Constitutions highlight this social implication of our work and witness.

Seeking help for the poor in a spirit of gospel freedom

The third paragraph deals with a problem which is linked to some extent with what was referred to in art. 77: the seeking of help and means for sustaining our works and for coming to the aid of the poor.

Here too we have before our eyes the example of the Founder. With his unlimited trust in Providence ("As long as we entrust ourselves to Divine Providence, our Society will prosper", he used to say),⁹ he never hesitate to make himself Providence's instrument, asking help for his work from anyone who could possibly provide it. He was convinced that "Divine Providence wants to be assisted by the greatest efforts on our own part".¹⁰ How much it cost him in humiliations and fatigue (think for example of his tiring journeys to France and Spain) to beg for his poor boys!¹¹

Don Bosco never spoke badly of the rich, taken as a group; he certainly had some strong things to say about the rich who lived selfish lives, attached to their own possessions and often at the expense of the poor; but he had words of sincere gratitude for those who were generous in helping the needy: if we glance through his Collected Letters we shall be struck by the frequent delicate expressions of gratitude of our Father to so many benefactors of every social class!

The Constitutions tell us that "we imitate Don Bosco in his zeal and gratitude". We too therefore do right to have recourse to the help of benefactors so as to meet the needs of poor youngsters. We feel that our friends and benefactors (who are frequently not among the prominent people of this world, but people of modest means) are

⁷ LG 8

⁸ Cf. ASC 261 (1970), p. 16-17

⁹ Cf. BM X, 77

¹⁰ BM XI, 43

¹¹ Cf. BM II, 201-202

452 sharers in a movement of love, and we are therefore sincerely grateful to them in

the Lord's name.

But the text of the Rule very properly points out that though we ask help from everyone, we remain "evangelically free" , i.e. we remain servants of the Gospel, friends of the poor, "free" before those who might try to use us as a means of covering up their injustices by the donations they make to us.

Conclusion

To conclude the article and the whole section on poverty, the text recalls a very expressive phrase of Don Bosco: *"Remember well that what we have is not ours; it belongs to the poor; woe to us if we do not use it well"*.¹²

Here we have a synthesis of all that we have said about our poverty lived as a witness and service. We have renounced everything in imitation of Jesus and to serve our fellow men. Because of this everything we have (the goods of our community) is a gift of God, given to us to be put at the disposal of our needy brothers. We are called to testify to detachment, but also to oblige ourselves to "make good use" of what Providence sends us for the most needy. In this we are stimulated by the moving appeal which Paul VI made to all religious: "You hear rising up, more pressing than ever, from their personal distress and collective misery, 'the cry of the poor'. Was it not in order to respond to their appeal as God's privileged ones that Christ came, even going as far as to identify himself with them?".¹³

*God, our Father,
you have asked us to make ourselves solid with the poor,
and have opened to us the royal way
of the imitation of Christ.
Enliven our practice of poverty by the conviction
that what we have is not our own
but belongs to the poor,
and help us to be among them
a sign of your loving Providence.
Through Christ our Lord.*

¹²BM V, 450

¹³ ET 17

OUR CHASTITY

"I am sure that neither death nor life... nor things present, nor things to come,. nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8,38-39).

In line with the conciliar guidelines expressly quoted (C 80), chastity understood in the sense of the Gospel is dealt with from a decidedly christological standpoint. Chastity in its positive sense is that aspect of the one following of Christ which concerns religion of the heart (C 80). This fundamental perspective, to which Don Bosco added human concreteness and practical wisdom (C 81), properly finds in the text of Rom 8, 38-39 one of the loftiest inspirations in the whole of the New Testament.

Chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans represents a kind of "Te Deum" to the history of salvation. After overcoming the tragic weight of sin, often expressed in unbridled abandonment to selfish lust (Rom 1-3), man is "set free in Christ" from original sin (chap. 5), from personal sin (chap. 6) and from the impossibility of observing the law (chap. 7). He finds himself immersed in a closely woven story of love and service: with the Spirit of Jesus in the first place, and hence with God as Father and therefore in an inseparable brotherhood with the Risen Christ (8, 1-8); he finds himself linked with all creation in being called to manifest the glory of the sons of God (8, 19-25). In short, he finds himself immersed in God's eternal and inviolable plan of salvation (8,28-30).

"With God on our side, who can be against us? (8,31). Here Paul starts on a series of leading questions, the replies to which overcome all fear. No creature can "separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ": a love which is monolithic, the love which in the first place God has for Paul, but which Paul also has for God. This does not mean that creatures are extinguished, or that the human capacity for loving is diminished. Chastity is not solitude, and still less is it hatred or aggression, but it is able to love while being still centred on Love itself with the joy and freedom, and hence with the attention, generosity, tenderness and delicacy characteristic of the love of the human heart of Christ "our Lord".

The holy memory of Don Bosco, chaste and smiling, capable of real sacrifices but at the same time of spreading joy in the hearts of his boys, becomes for us a happy witness to chastity lived in the spirit of the Gospel.

ART. 80 GOSPEL SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR CHASTITY

Consecrated chastity because of the Kingdom is a "precious gift given to some by the Father".¹ Responding in faith we accept it with gratitude and we pledge ourselves by vow to live perfect continence in celibacy.²

We follow Jesus Christ closely by choosing an intensely evangelical way of loving God and our neighbour with undivided heart.³

Thus with a specific vocation we take our place in the mystery of the Church, which is totally united to Christ, and sharing in its fruitfulness we dedicate ourselves to our mission.⁴

¹ LG 42

² cf. CIC, can. 599

³ cf. LG 42

⁴ cf. ET 13-14; RD 11

This article, which opens the section on consecrated chastity, contains a great deal of doctrine. It presents the principal aspects of the "mystery" of celibacy for the Kingdom, together with the obligations before God that we take on by the vow. It is a presentation which from the outset highlights in its most positive form this aspect of the following of Christ. Although it is true that chastity implies certain renunciations (in the past it may be that too much emphasis was laid on this aspect, but it would be naive at the present day to ignore it altogether), it is first and foremost a positive reality within which renunciation is lived as an inseparable consequence of a greater gift. Chastity is "*a deeply evangelical way of loving*", i.e. it places the religious in a deep and vital relationship of love with God and with his fellow men.¹ The background in which the way of evangelical celibacy finds a place is solely that of Love: chastity is accepted not to renounce love, but to love to a much greater extent.

It may be useful here to refer to a question of terminology which arose during the revision of the constitutional text.

The matter of this vow covers both the renunciation of marriage to follow Christ and serve the Kingdom, and also the concrete practice of chastity which corresponds to consecrated celibacy. It is clear that both aspects must be kept in mind, but to give greater emphasis to the former some would prefer to use always the expression "consecrated celibacy" (or "celibacy for the Kingdom"). The SGC, and more recently the GC22, in harmony with the documents of the Magisterium,² decided to keep the general word "chastity" (C 80, 83), "celibacy because of the Kingdom" (C 83), "perfect continence in celibacy" (C 80), "perfect continence" (C 82). It is clear that the vow and the virtue are dealt with together.

¹ Cf. SGC, 562

² The Council uses various terms when speaking of chastity: "Virginity", "Perfect continence" (LG 43), "*Chaste self-dedication to God*" (LG 43), "*chastity for the sake of the Kingdom*" (PC 12), "following the virginal Christ"; cf. also PC 15 and OT 10. Can. 599 of the CIC expresses it as follows: "the evangelical counsel of chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy"

The three paragraphs of the article present successively three aspects of the mystery of the consecrated chastity: the charismatic, christological and ecclesial aspects.

Chastity, a gift of the father

The text begins in the same way as the documents of the Vatican II. It declares at once the *divine origin of religious chastity* and its absolute gratuity, and recognizes it as an outstanding gift: “a precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father”, as the Constitution “Lumen gentium” put it.³ The decree “Perfectae caritatis” too speaks of it as “an exceptional gift of grace”⁴. The phrase “glorious gift” is found in the decree on the priesthood, and “precious gift” in that of the training of priests.⁵

The Church's doctrine on the point is very clear: virginity is not a human attitude nor an ascetical practice that a man can take up on his own initiative; it is a vocation, a call that stems from the initiative of the Father, to whom man responds by divine grace.

This conviction of the whole of Christian tradition⁶ has its roots in the Gospel. The Council, in fact,⁷ bases its statement on two scriptural references: Mt 19,11-12 and 1 Cor 7,7. Paul declares: “Each has his own special gift from God, one with a gift of one kind and another with a gift for the opposite”. Consecrated chastity is one of the special gifts distributed freely by God to whom he thinks fit. The text from Matthew is quoted to emphasize that God's grace is needed to appreciate such a gift, to accept it and live it to the full. It is the confidential remark made by Jesus to his disciples: “Some there are who have freely renounced sex for the sake of God's reign. Let him accept this teaching who can”.

To God's initiative follows our response. The Rule emphasizes that it is a *response in faith* (only in faith, indeed, can it be understood), and a response full of gratitude: given with joy and thankfulness, it not only expresses our love but becomes also a credible witness for our fellow men.

In connection with the response, the text specifies the obligations we assume by vow before God, and makes use for the purpose of the formula of the Code of Canon Law: it involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy”.⁸

We may conclude this first reflection, offered by the Constitutions as a foundation for the salesian's life of chastity, with a final observation. Chastity is a

³ LG 42

⁴ PC 12

⁵ Cf. PO 16; OT 10

⁶ In “*Evangelica testificatio*” this permanent ecclesial tradition is stated: For our part, we must be firmly and surely convinced that the value and the fruitfulness of chastity observed for love of God in religious celibacy find their ultimate basis in nothing other than the Word of God, the teachings of Christ, the life of his Virgin Mother, and also the apostolic tradition, as it has been unceasingly affirmed by the Church” (ET 15)

⁷ Cf. LG 42

⁸ Cf. CIC, can. 599

of grace and the enduring dialogue which gave rise to it. As will be said explicitly in art. 84 it remains humble and is fostered by faith and grace: "Lord, preserve me in your grace". The Council tells us: "Religious... should believe our Lord's words and, relying on God's help, they should not presume on their own strength".⁹

The consecrated chastity, chosen by Christ, which we follow

After presenting the charismatic dimension of chastity, the article goes on to speak of the christological dimension: "*We follow Jesus Christ closely*".

Here again the text is founded on the Gospel, where Jesus calls his disciples to "follow him", and on the conciliar doctrine which (as we saw already when considering art. 60) presents the three counsels as so many ways of "following Christ more closely", of "conforming more fully to that kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Virgin Mother embraced also."¹⁰ The Council presents celibacy for the Kingdom as a participation in a sacramental expression of the virginity of Christ and Mary, a real configuration to Christ in his earthly life and a manifestation of the glorious Christ, prefiguring the definitive condition of humanity in the heavenly Kingdom. In the Apostolic Exhortation "*Evangelica testificatio*", Paul VI wrote: chastity "reaches, transforms and imbues with a mysterious likeness to Christ man's being in its most hidden depths".¹¹ To those who ask us why we have chosen to live in celibacy, we reply: because this is what Jesus did to fulfil his mission, and because he has called us to follow him!

The Rule tells us that in following Jesus on the way of chastity, we shall reach the fullness of love, i.e. we shall come to love God — and in him our fellow men — "with undivided heart". The expression, culled once again from "*Lumen gentium*", is linked with the Pauline theme from the first letter to the Corinthians: the married man "is torn two ways", distracted by the many preoccupations of his life, says the Apostle, urging the Christians to "give their undivided attention to the Lord" (1 Cor 7,34-35). It is true that every Christian, in every situation, should love the Lord "with all his heart" (cf. Mt 22,37); but one who has chosen to "follow the virginal Christ" can offer him more easily¹² his whole heart, and give himself for the service of the Kingdom.

Consecrated virginity, overcoming the mediation of a creature which belongs to married love,¹³ realizes an intimate and immediate union with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and proclaims his total dedication to the love of "God alone". From this love of God "above everything else" stems the love of our fellow men in God's

⁹PC 12

¹⁰LG, 46; cf. also LG 42; PC I,5

¹¹ET 13

¹²Cf. LG 42. It may be noted that the Council text says precisely "*facilius indiviso corde*"; cf. also LG 46

¹³*Evangelica testificatio* says: "Without in any way undervaluing human love and marriage — is not the latter, according to faith, the image and sharing of the union of love joining Christ and the Church? — consecrated chastity evokes this union in a more immediate way and brings that surpassing excellence to which all human love should tend" (ET 3)

light and hence our dedication to their service, as the Rule will later explain at greater length. The Council's words still resound: chastity "uniquely frees the heart of man, so that he becomes more fervent in love for God and for all men. For this reason... it is a more effective means for religious of dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate".¹⁴

Through consecrated chastity we are deeply inserted in the mystery of the Church

The final paragraph expresses two consequences of the fullness of love lived through commitment to chastity: deep insertion in the Church's mystery, and availability for the mission as a participation in her fertility.

The text says: "*we take our place in the mystery of the Church, which is totally united to Christ*". In this brief phrase is condensed the doctrine of all Christian tradition, which sees in consecrated virginity (in line with a specific charism) the summit of the relationship of love between the creature and his Lord, and therefore the loftiest sign of the union between Christ and his Spouse, the Church. This is affirmed in a fine passage from the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelica testificatio": "Chastity is decisively positive, it witnesses to the preferential love for the Lord and symbolizes in the most eminent and absolute way the mystery of the union of the Mystical Body with its Head, the union of the Bride with her eternal Bridegroom".¹⁵

We know that the Apostle Paul sees in wedded love the sacrament of the mysterious union of Christ with his Church (cf. Eph 5,32); but he makes it clearly understood that the reality of human marriage is no more than a pale image of the intimate communion of life and love which Christ, by his Passover, has inaugurated with redeemed humanity. In matrimony the love of the Church for Christ is indicated by a sign; but when "the world as we know it has passed away" (cf. 1 Cor 7,31) and there is no further mediation by signs, the Kingdom of the resurrection will finally appear, and then the union of the Church with Christ will be perfect and the Church will live only for her Lord. Religious who respond to their vocation of chastity bear witness to this reality of the Kingdom of the resurrection, by living already in faith and love on this earth their exclusive relationship of love with Christ. All this is wonderfully expressed in the decree "Perfectae caritatis": For all Christ's faithful, religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only Spouse".¹⁶

There is still a last aspect of this mystery to which the Constitutions give prominence: the union of Christ with the Church, to which he communicates his Spirit, is the source of a *wonderful spiritual fertility*: the Church, as a "virgin mother" generates the sons of God.

¹⁴ PC 12

¹⁵ ET 13

¹⁶ PC 12. On this theme cf. also the deeper analysis of John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation "*Redemption is donum*" n. 11

Keeping in mind that Christian marriage too is a participation in this fertility of the Church, the text is saying here that consecrated virginity, by totally inserting us in the mystery of the Church's love makes us in a unique way sharers in her spiritual fruitfulness.¹⁷ In this truth is found a foundation for the apostolic mission. An author of the IV century writes in this connection: "Consecrated virginity is raised to the category of spiritual motherhood. It has a value which is essentially apostolic, because the essence of the apostolate is to regenerate men according to Christ, or to form Christ in men (Gal 4,19)".¹⁸ Celibacy for the Kingdom is a stimulus to charity, and provides strength for a deeper and broader love of our neighbour. The Prior of Taizé says of religious chastity: "It enables us to keep our arms wide open, without ever closing them on anyone for themselves".¹⁹

To sum up, this article is rich in content and presents chastity under the sign of a reciprocal "gift": the "precious gift of the Father" and the total gift of ourselves. The salesian can live a chaste life only if he remains within these great faith perspectives, which enable us to share Don Bosco's enthusiasm for this virtue and for the role he attached to it for his mission.

*God our Father, we give you thanks
for the precious gift you have given us
by calling us to follow more closely Jesus your Son
in the way of celibacy for the Kingdom,
through the choice of a deeply evangelical way
of loving you and our neighbour
with undivided heart.*

*Grant that we may respond to your Love
with faith and grateful joy,
so as to be profoundly inserted
in the mystery of your Church,
totally united with her Lord,
and share in the fruitfulness of her mission.*

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

¹⁷ Cf. ET 14

¹⁸ S. Metodios, "Il Banquete"

¹⁹ Cf. J. AUBRY, *Teologia della vita religiosa*, LDC Turin 1980, p. 113

ART. 81 CHASTITY AND THE SALESIAN MISSION

Don Bosco lived chastity as a love for God and for the young which had no limits. He wanted it to be a distinctive mark of the Salesian Society: "Anyone devoting his life to destitute youth should certainly strive to enrich himself with every virtue, but the virtue he should specially cultivate is chastity".¹

Our tradition has always considered chastity a resplendent virtue, bearing a special message for the education of youth. Through it we bear witness to the predilection of Christ for the young; it allows us to love them in an open and uncomplicated way, so that they "know they are loved"², and it enables us to educate them to love and to purity.

¹ cf. C 1875, V. I

² DON BOSCO, Letter from Rome 1884, MB XVII, 110

After basing our response of love on Jesus Christ, who first loved us and called us to follow him, we now turn our eyes to Don Bosco, who lived his vocation to celibacy in the gift of himself to the young for the love of God.

Art. 81 illustrates, in the light of experience and the teachings of Don Bosco, the connection between consecrated chastity and the mission of the salesian.

Chastity a distinctive mark of our Society

To express synthetically how Don Bosco understood and lived the gift of chastity, the Constitutions use the simple expression: "*a love for God and for the young which had no limits*". This text sums up what the SGC had said to indicate the deep significance of consecrated chastity in Don Bosco and how it stimulated him in the mission he received: "Don Bosco chose to live a life of evangelical celibacy in order to express his great love for God and to carry out his mission as father and pastor to the young, in line with his priestly vocation. His total self-giving to the Church and especially to youth fostered a quality in him which was as genial as it was creative and productive of new works; he found optimism and joy in his apostolic work and his zeal showed itself in inexhaustible drive".¹

We know the esteem Don Bosco had for chastity as one of the fundamental virtues in the building of Christian life, an esteem which is evident from the warm way in which he used to speak of this virtue, especially to his boys; he described it as "the loveliest flower of Paradise, ... a pure lily whose immaculate candour would make us akin to the angels".² "What a beautiful virtue this is! I would like to speak to you for days on this topic... It is the loveliest, most resplendent and, at the same time, the most delicate of all virtues".³ Certainly Don Bosco was convinced of the pre-eminence

¹ SGC, 572

² BM IV, 331

³ BM XII, 413

of charity in Christian life, but he was no less certain that chastity accompanies charity and is an expression of it. He says: "Charity, humility and chastity are three royal virtues which always go together: none of them can exist without the others".⁴ As long as one is chaste, he will always have a living faith, firm hope, and burning charity".⁵

To priests and religious Don Bosco recommended chastity as a fundamental virtue for fully corresponding with their vocation. He wrote: "This virtue enables a religious to attain his goal of total consecration to God".⁶ "When a priest lives a pure and chaste life, he becomes the master of all hearts".⁷

But our Founder was not content with extolling chastity in words; he himself was an example of a priest who lived his evangelical celibacy to the full. His truest witness lies precisely in his life spent totally for God and for the service of the young, for whom he was ready to sacrifice everything: "*da mihi animas, cetera tolle!*" His saying: "I love you, my dear boys, and I am ready to give my life for you", repeated so often and in so many different ways, is a sign of the love he felt in his heart, the love of a father for his sons. This surely is the deepest aspect of Don Bosco's chastity, made manifest in the gift of "spiritual fatherhood". But we must remember that to reach this goal of unalloyed love Don Bosco made use of the means of christian ascetics, gradually building a personality totally of Christ. In this light we can understand the testimony given by Fr Cerruti in the beatification process: "I think I may say that in the great purity of mind, heart and body that he practised with a dedication not just rare but unique, lay the secret of his greatness as a christian. In his demeanour, his gaze, the very way he walked, his words, his characteristic traits, there was never the slightest shadow of anything that could be contrary to the beautiful virtue, as he called it".⁸

From all this we can see why Don Bosco pointed to the virtue of chastity as something which must characterize the life and mission of the Congregation: "What must distinguish us from all others and be the hallmark of our Congregation is the virtue of chastity... Chastity must be the pivot on which all our actions revolve... Nowadays sterling modesty and chastity are a must... This will be the triumph of our Congregation".⁹

The text of the Constitutions which we are at present examining, sums up the thought of our Founder by presenting chastity as "*a distinctive mark of the Salesian Society*", saying that the salesian educator must cultivate it with predilection to attain the fullness of pastoral charity. For this reason the text written by Don Bosco himself in the Constitutions of 1875 is quoted: "Anyone devoting his life to destitute youth

⁴ MB IX, 706

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ BM XII, 617

⁷ BM IX, 180

⁸ D. CERRUTI, Testimony at beatification process, "*Summarium super virtutibus*", p. 870

⁹ Cf. BM XII, 163. Don Bosco has another significant expression: "Chastity must be the outstanding trait of our Society, just as poverty and obedience are respectively the hallmarks of the Franciscans and of the Jesuits" (BM X, 29)

should certainly strive to enrich himself with every virtue, but the virtue he should specially cultivate is chastity".¹⁰

Chastity in the educative mission of the salesian

The second paragraph explains more fully the statements of the first part of the article, making clearer how consecrated chastity enters into the mission of the salesian and characterizes it.

In the first place the opening phrase summarizes what we have heard from the words of Don Bosco himself: the exceptional importance he attached to chastity for us Salesians derives not only from its being a sign of the love of God, but also from its strict connection with our task as educators. By practising chastity in its most genuine significance, we are able to behave as Christian and salesian educators. Chastity, in fact, enables us to bring to the young a special message through an education according to God's plan. In the words of the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò: "In Don Bosco's spirit there is a strong *message of purity*; salesian tradition and the witness of our origins make this abundantly clear. We are concerned with a special message which we might call 'a partiality for purity': a typical message for the young".¹¹

From this point of view the chastity of the salesian is called "resplendent". This adjective (Italian "irradiante") was deliberately chosen by the SGC to indicate the capacity of the chaste salesian to spread around himself the gospel message of purity, i.e. of transmitting to the young the richness and beauty of the pure love the Spirit gives them. This is an evident reference to the quite exceptional "splendour" that Don Bosco had seen attached to this diamond in his dream.¹² It was a characteristic so outstanding in Don Bosco that many attributed to the splendour of his chastity much of the fascination he had for young people and his skill in leading them to God. The salesian too by the splendour of his chaste life must be able to inculcate the love of God in the young.

The remainder of the article analyses from three different standpoints how consecrated chastity allows us to pass on a real message for the education of youth.

— It is said in the first place that "*Through it we bear witness to the predilection of Christ for the young*". These words take us back at once to art. 2 of the Constitutions, which presents the profound nature of the salesian apostolic project in the Church: Jesus sends us among youth, asking us to take them his saving love and reveal to them God's fatherly countenance. Such a task is clearly impossible for our weak human love; what is necessary is that we be so united to Christ that he manifests himself through us, poor and imperfect though we be. Chastity lived to the

¹⁰ Costituzioni 1875, V, 1 (cf. F MOTTO, p. 109)

¹¹ E. VIGANO, *Un progetto evangelico di vita attiva*, LDC Turin 1982, p. 178

¹² In the dream of the ten diamonds Don Bosco said of the diamond chastity "It had a dazzling splendour all its own that caught and held the attention as a magnet attracts iron" ("*Dream of Don Bosco-- Critical edition*", Turin 1978); cf. ASC 300 (1981), p. 38

full in evangelical celibacy, conforming us to Christ and immersing us totally in his Love, gives us a powerful help to fulfil this task.

That this was wonderfully realized in Don Bosco we may glean from the testimony of Don Albera: "His every word and action showed for the holiness of union with God, which is perfect charity. He attracted us to himself by the fullness of the supernatural love which blazed in his heart and which by its flames absorbed and united the little sparks of the same love struck in our own hearts by God's love. We were his because each of us was certain that he was truly the man of God, 'homo Dei', in the most comprehensive sense of the word. It was this singular attraction that enabled him to conquer our hearts".¹³

— *"It allows us to love them in an open and uncomplicated way, so that they 'know they are loved'"* By quoting an expression used by Don Bosco himself in his Letter from Rome of 1884, the text illustrates how the witness of chastity contributes to the building of that personal relationship between educator and pupil characteristic of the preventive system, that Don Bosco called "loving kindness" and in which the "heart" of the educator is revealed.

Already art. 15, dealing with the salesian spirit, had connected loving kindness with chastity as two aspects of a single attitude of life. It is a case of realizing the paradox of a true love and deep affection (that of a "father, brother and friend"), which becomes mutual ("able to draw out friendship in return"); but at the same time rejecting every temptation to draw people to oneself with a captivating or possessive love, every preference for one individual rather than another: it means loving a youngster only for himself and for God!

Once again it is a question of manifesting in human form God's fatherly character, and it is clear that in this consecrated chastity has an important role to play: It is nothing else but authentic and total love!

— *"It enables us to educate them to love and to purity":* the Rule speaks of our message of chastity in relation to the educational task itself.

As an educator the salesian is called to open youngsters to the sense of true freedom, to form them to a genuine and generous love, to help them to understand the mysteries of life, inculcating in them a sense of delicacy as regards women to prepare them for their future mission as married people, as parents, or as individuals consecrated to God. The witness of love lived in chastity is a great help to the salesian educator in accompanying young people through this process: in him they can discover the significance of Christian love which is faithful and sacrificing.

¹³ D. ALBERA, *Circular Letters*, p. 374

*Lord Jesus, grant to us,
as you did to our Founder Don Bosco
an enthusiastic and resplendent chastity,
sustained by your grace and our efforts at perseverance.
Unite us closely to yourself
so that we may be bearers of your Love.
Make us able to guide young people
in the difficult way of purity.
Allow us to love them with a true and sincere affection
which will open their eyes to their vocation
as children in you of the Father.
We ask you this with trust and humility.*

ART. 82 CHASTITY AND HUMAN MATURITY

The educational and pastoral demands of our mission and the fact that the observance of perfect continence touches some of the deepest drives of human nature,¹ require of the salesian psychological balance and affective maturity.

Don Bosco used to warn: Whoever has not a well-grounded hope of being able with divine help, to preserve the virtue of chastity in word, in deed and in thought, should not make profession in this Society, for he would often find himself in danger.²

¹ cf. PC. 12

² cf. C 1875, V, 2

This article is linked with the preceding one, of which it continues the theme and draws certain consequences: chastity, so important for our mission as educators but also so delicate because of our own weakness, has need of mature personalities for its development.

The sources of the text are easily recognizable: it comes from an article which Don Bosco had included in the Constitutions of 1875,¹ and a passage taken from the documents of Vatican II.

Don Bosco's phrase emphasizes the importance for the salesian of a strong and clear chastity, matured in a climate of grace but also through an adequate human formation, in view of the specific mission to young people who are "poor, abandoned and in danger". The expression reflects Don Bosco's preoccupation lest there should be lacking in his sons a sufficient human and religious maturity to enable them to live a perfect and resplendent chastity; the latter is more necessary than ever when dealing with youngsters suffering from greater lack of affection, or who have sometimes had negative experiences, and who must be guided at one of the most delicate periods of their growth. The "danger" of which Don Bosco speaks was explained by him in an article of the Constitutions of 1875 as follows: "Upon words and looks, ever when indifferent, a bad interpretation is oftentimes put by youths who have already been victims of human passions".² Unruffled prudence is a virtue of educators!

It could be asked where the "well-grounded hope" of preserving chastity, of which Don Bosco speaks, can come from; i.e, what are the signs of sufficient maturity for the salesian mission. Following salesian tradition, the signs which give rise to such hope can be detected in the experience of an irreproachable earlier life, but especially in the successful outcome of a practical test of salesian life, in formation to a life of strong piety, and in the judgement of experienced councillors.³

¹ *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 2 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 109)

² *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 3 (ibid)

³ In "*Criteria and norms for salesian vocation discernment*" (Rome 1985) are indicated elements of discernment as regards affective equilibrium. On the positive side are listed: the ability to love those with whom one lives; a serene

To the first motive, based on the "educational and pastoral demands of our mission", a second can be added which arises from the part played by sexuality in personal development. The formulation is taken almost literally from the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis" on the religious life, which says of chastity: "The observance of perfect continence touches intimately the deeper inclinations of human nature. For this reason candidates ought not to go forward, nor should they be admitted, to the profession of chastity except after really adequate testing, and unless they are sufficiently mature, psychologically and affectively".⁴

As the SGC explains, recognizing the function of sexuality in human growth, the Council emphasizes the need for a slow and progressive maturing process — parallel to the psychological process for developing personality — which will make possible a mature choice of evangelical celibacy lived in a fully conscious way as a total self-giving to God.⁵ The words of John Paul II also, in the Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris consortio" on the need for a clear and Christian education in sexuality, may be thought specially applicable to us Salesians: "Faced with a culture that largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure, educational service... must aim firmly at a training in the area of sex that is truly and fully personal, for sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person — body, emotions and soul — and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love... Education for chastity is absolutely essential, for it is a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the 'nuptial meaning' of the body. Indeed, christian parents (and educators), discerning the signs of God's call, will devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality".⁶

What is needed therefore is a formation which leads to interior solidity in a person who lives in undisturbed fashion his sexuality which he has integrated as part of himself and who, while recognizing all the value of human love and christian marriage, has fully understood and accepted celibacy as an authentic life-plan and as a precious benefit for the development of his own person, "so as to become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself" (Eph 4,13).

All this interior work, with the help of a spiritual guide and above all with the powerful support of the Holy Spirit, leads to the attainment of that level-headed mentality through which on the one hand affective needs and reactions, freely perceived without inhibitions or interior defences, are consciously placed in relationship with one's own salesian religious life-plan, and on the other hand the love of Jesus Christ develops the ability for true personal love, so characteristic of the

attitude towards women; good psychological and emotional balance; and a normal capacity for self-control which makes the choice of celibacy possible (cf. n. 44). On the negative side some contraindications of a psychological and moral order are indicated, which should be kept in mind (cf. nn. 47-49)

⁴ PC 12

⁵ SGC, 562-563

⁶ FC 37; on education to chastity cf. also OT 10, and the document "A guide to formation in priestly celibacy", Rome 1974, nn. 18 ff.

overcome successfully the inevitable trials (as will be said in art. 84) and bear joyful witness to the grandeur of living totally for Jesus Christ and his Kingdom.

*Father of light,
you know of what we are made.
Kindle in us the fire and strength of your Spirit,
so that with the love that binds us to you
as our one secure foundation,
we may make our life a pure and total donation
for the good of the young you have entrusted to us.
Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.*

ART. 83 CHASTITY AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Consecrated chastity, a "sign and stimulus of love",¹ frees and enables us to become all things to all men. It develops in us a christian sense of personal relationships, encourages true friendships, and helps to make the community a family.

In its turn the community's fraternal atmosphere helps us to live our celibacy because of the Kingdom with joy, and sustained by its love and understanding to come safely through difficult times.

¹ LG 42

In art. 61 it was said that "the profession of the counsels helps us to live a life of fellowship with our brothers in the religious community". This truth is now referred particularly to consecrated chastity, highlighting also the correlative relationship between community and chastity: not only does chastity contribute to the building of a genuine religious community, but the very life of religious communion is of great help in the joyful living of evangelical celibacy.

It may be noted that this is a new theme as far as the text of the Constitutions prior to 1972 is concerned. Its introduction was due to the analysis of religious chastity made by the Council, and is the result of experience which shows that not a few cases of crisis and abandonment are brought about by loneliness resulting from the lack of a concrete atmosphere of charity in the community.

Chastity contributes to the building of the community

The article begins with a quotation from the Constitution "Lumen gentium" which, speaking of consecrated chastity, calls it "*a sign and stimulus of love*".¹ This expression links up with that of art. 80 of the Rule, where the choice of celibacy for the Kingdom is defined as "an intensely evangelical way of loving God and our neighbour with undivided heart". The SGC, dealing with chastity in the light of its relationship with Christ's Passover, explains that religious chastity, by the power it draws upon from its relation to the paschal mystery, brings us to the perfection of charity to God and to our brothers. It cannot remain in isolation or be closed in on itself, but needs to reach out to others in prayer, in action and in service. It is the sacrament of charity, the sign of brotherhood and service.² In this sense, as the text says, it "frees and enables us to become all things to all men".

"This vital force", adds the SGC, "shows clearly the community dimension of religious chastity".³ Every salesian, in fact, to the extent in which he unites himself

¹ LG 42

² Cf. SGC, 569

³ SGC, *ibid.*

with Christ and penetrates into his love, becomes the more imbued with divine charity and so is able to love as He loves, with a love that is totally sacrificing. And this love, set free and given power by the Spirit, generates, nourishes and builds the fraternal community. It helps to give strength to that communion in which individuals meet each other and love each other deeply in Christ.

The text goes on to list some aspects of this vital force of charity inherent in virginal love.

— It *"develops in us a Christian sense of personal relationships"*, i.e. it informs our personal relations with other confreres, and instils in them a delicate and sincere brotherhood (love of communion) and fosters the growth of the spirit of mutual service (love of self-giving): in this connection we may recall the attitudes recommended by the Apostle Paul, and quoted in art. 51.

— Love lived in consecrated chastity also *"encourages true friendships"*, i.e. those friendships which are not coercive or limiting, but develop the ability for self-donation and are a valuable mutual help among the members to enable each one to become fully himself in the Lord. They are friendships which are neither closed nor sentimental, but transparent and open to the common good, productive of an atmosphere in which each one feels that he is appreciated and loved with sincere affection. We know how our Father Don Bosco cultivated deep friendships (we recall in particular those with Luigi Comollo and with Don Cafasso), which helped him a great deal to make progress in virtue; and in addition he often invited his boys to become "friends of Don Bosco". It is precisely this atmosphere of brotherly friendship, which must distinguish the community, that is referred to in art. 51 and through which the Lord makes felt his living presence.⁴

— It is easy to see *where all this leads to: consecrated chastity* "helps to make the community a family", i.e. it leads to a growth in the family atmosphere (already referred to when dealing with the salesian spirit and fraternal community), in which each member is welcomed, esteemed and loved for what he is, and where he is able to make his specific contributions.

The community is a help to the joyful living of chastity

The second paragraph continues the theme of the relation between chastity and community, developing the complementary aspect to that spoken of above: if it is true that chastity generates fraternal charity, it is equally true that fraternal charity sustains chastity and makes it fruitful. This truth comes directly from Vatican II which emphasized the importance of brotherhood as a guard for chastity: "Let all, and

⁴ On Don Bosco's invitation to be friends cf. BM III, 111, 140; VI, 210-212; VII, 386; X, 17; XI, 215. Cf. also the supernatural motive: to be friends so as to be united heart and soul in loving God (BM V, 354). Concerning friendship in the fraternal community, the document *"A guide to formation in priestly celibacy"* (CEC 1974) says: "Voluntary celibacy makes sense when it is viewed in a context of relationships with others lived in a fraternal community where one can 'reach' others without 'having' them, i.e. when it is an exercise in non-possessiveness. It is a sign of celibacy rightly assumed when one can create and maintain worthwhile inter-personal relationships while experiencing the presence of friends even in their absence, refusing to impose oneself on them, and showing that need of them is limited" (n. 49)

members live a common life in true brotherly love".⁵

The text in turn says that "the community's fraternal atmosphere helps us to live our celibacy because of the Kingdom with joy". By his profession the religious has given himself totally to God and lives in the Lord's love and service. But he needs to feel this experience of God's love manifested in the love of the brothers God has put beside him in the community. When this love is felt, it becomes easier for him to face up to the renunciations and overcome the difficulties associated with celibacy. Thanks to his brothers he finds himself happy in the community and can live his celibacy more easily "in joy", and in this way provides an efficacious testimony for the young to a true chastity, in which the sense of gift prevails over that of renunciation.

Finally, the article dwells on the particular contribution the fraternal community can make in "difficult times". These are moments of temptation, of doubt and of trial, which are never lacking (as we shall see in the next article), but occasionally become more violent. It is precisely at these times that the understanding and affection of the other members of the community is seen to be truly important. At such times one may say that every member has the duty in one way or another of supporting his confreres in the struggle which has broken out in their hearts.

Those words of Scripture, dear to the heart of Don Bosco: "*O quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum*", when realized in a fraternal community, are indeed a great help for tasting the joy of consecrated love in chastity.

*Lord our God,
grant that we may live in all its fullness
our consecrated chastity,
as a full and unselfish opening
to you and to our brothers.*

*May it cause to flourish in our communities
the family spirit
and that true and sincere friendship,
which will help us to walk together in joy
towards you, our highest Good, and
strengthen us in moments of trial
Through Christ our Lord*

ART. 84 ATTITUDES AND MEANS FOR GROWING IN CHASTITY

Our chastity is not a conquest made once for all time. It has its moments of peace and moments of trial. It is a gift which because of human weakness demands a daily pledge of fidelity.

For this reason the salesian, faithful to the Constitutions, lives a life of work and temperance, practises mortification and the custody of the senses, makes discreet and prudent use of the means of social communication, and does not neglect the natural means which contribute to physical and mental health.

Above all, he implores God's help and lives in his presence; he nourishes his love for Christ at the table of the Word and the Eucharist, and humbly purifies it in the sacrament of Reconciliation; he entrusts himself with simplicity to a spiritual director.

He turns with filial trust to Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians, who helps him to love as Don Bosco did.

It is well known that in presenting the virtue of chastity Don Bosco, while on the one hand singing its praises in inspired fashion, on the other made many recommendations for its preservation, suggesting well balanced ascetical means prompted by a deep spiritual life. The same kind of presentation is found also in the constitutional text he wrote and in his Introduction to the Constitutions, which is an authoritative and fatherly commentary on them.

In our text too a significant space has been given to the "attitudes and means for growing in chastity; the theme is dealt with not only in the light of our traditions, but also in that of the rich conciliar doctrine and present salesian reflection on the mystery of consecrated chastity.

Chastity is a reality lived in continuous development

The first paragraph of art. 84 contains an important idea which has its foundation in various statements of the preceding articles and which, in a certain way, overrides a fairly widespread mentality of the past.

The Rule, which requires of the salesian "psychological balance and affective maturity" (C 82), now tells us that "*chastity is not a conquest made once for all time*": i.e. chastity is not a treasure won once and for ever on the day of profession and which afterwards needs simply to be "preserved" intact. The SGC explains: "to open oneself to receive this singular gift of celibacy is to accept a task which never ends".¹

Chastity is indeed a quality inscribed simultaneously by the grace of God and freedom of choice in a living person, and is therefore linked with the history of that person and his building to full maturity: it is therefore a value that has to be

¹SGC, 564

continuously reactivated in changing situations and circumstances. This is the sense of the expression: "a task which never ends", a long period of growth which is never completed.

In this process chastity "has its moments of peace and moments of trial". The great majority of people, and consecrated persons are no exception, experience difficulties at times: we may think of the Apostle Paul who was not ashamed to confess to his brethren his own temptations and weaknesses, over which triumphed the victorious grace of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4,7-12; 12,7-10); we may think even of Don Bosco himself who was not exempt from temptations and inclinations of the flesh, as he confided to some of those who were close to him.²

We can understand the reasons for these difficulties. "We carry this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4,7) says St Paul of God's gifts. And Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelica testificatio" says of chastity that it is a "fragile and vulnerable gift because of human weakness".³ It is easy to understand that times of difficulty can occur for all, when we remember that the religious remains a sexual being and has to live his life following the normal lines of human existence and in the concrete circumstances of time and place in which he is called upon to live. There can be moments when there is awakened in him the desire for marriage or for physical fatherhood; there can be times when he feels lonely and temptation makes headway.

Consequently chastity "*demand*s a daily pledge of fidelity": "daily" because the salesian responds anew every day to the call of the Lord and, with the support of his grace, adapts his strength to the difficulties which arise from various circumstances. In this way he "grows" in his response of love.

Natural and supernatural means

Speaking of the means for preserving chastity, Don Bosco indicated in the first place prudence in relations with young people and with the World;⁴ then he pointed to the directly supernatural means of prayer and the sacraments.⁵ The order here is that of wisdom and experience: even the most fervent prayers have little effect in one who does not at the same time practise a certain austerity and mortification in his personal life. The text of this article follows a similar order, with an obvious reference to the directives of the Council when it speaks of religious chastity.⁶ The last three paragraphs present various means for keeping the gift of chastity alive and ensuring its growth.

² We have some witnesses concerning the difficulties experienced by Don Bosco. Don Rua testified: "With regard to temptations against this virtue, I think that he did experience them, judging by some of the things he was heard to say when he was recommending temperance in drink". This testimony agrees with that of Don Lemoyne: "That he had had temptations against purity he once confided to the members of the Chapter, among whom I was present, explaining why he preferred vegetables to meat". (cf. P BROCARDI, *Don Bosco profondamente uomo, profondamente santo*, LAS Rome 1985, p. 111-112)

³ ET 15

⁴ Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 4. 5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 111)

⁵ Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 6 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 112)

⁶ PC 12

chaste love, the Constitutions — in addition to the text of Don Bosco — draw on the decree "Perfectae caritatis", which declares: "Religious... should practise mortification and custody of the senses. Nor should they neglect the natural means which promote health of mind and body".⁷

In the matter of mortification, we know the recommendations of our Founder: "Keep the senses under control... I recommend to you special moderation in eating and drinking".⁸

There is no doubt that good physical balance helps to maintain affective level-headedness, while on the other hand nervous fatigue resulting from an overburdened life, constantly under pressure, leads sooner or later to a state of mental or physical depression which offers fertile ground to temptations. Don Bosco gave the first missionaries this advice: "Take care of your health. Work well, but only do as much as your strength will allow".⁹

But he also told them: "Shun idleness".¹⁰ Even while paying due attention to one's health, work is a great means for the practical manifestation of self-donation and for overcoming sexual instincts. This is why the Constitutions remind us of the importance of living "*a life of work and temperance*".

The article makes special reference to the "discreet and prudent use" of the instruments of social communication: they are the windows through which that world (in its sinful aspects) can enter, which we have renounced. Art. 44 of the General Regulations will take up this point again from the standpoint of community life.

In conclusion we may say that a means which sums up all the foregoing is *fidelity to the Constitutions*. Don Bosco always said as much: "The exact observance of our holy rules, and especially of the vows and the practices of piety, triumphs over every vice and is the faithful guardian of chastity."¹¹

The following paragraph begins with the adverbial phrase "*above all*". This is a clear indication of its priority and recalls what has been said all the way from art. 80, i.e. that chastity, a gift of the Father, can grow only in a climate of grace, and our own personal efforts will be unavailing unless they are sustained by the Father's grace. Virginity can exist only if not separated from its Source; it is a response to the call of Love, and hence it is clear that it cannot be maintained and developed unless our gaze is fixed on the countenance of this infinite Love.

And so the Rule proposes a series of fundamental means for fostering the love of Christ and intimate union with Him who is our highest Good, to whom we have handed over ourselves and our life, and once again we find that these means are precisely the ones recommended by our Founder.

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ D. BOSCO, *Introduction to Constitutions*, [Chastity. cf.](#) Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 234

⁹ D. BOSCO, *Souvenir for first missionaries*, cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 266

¹⁰ D. BOSCO, *Souvenir for first missionaries*, l.c. p. 265; cf. *Costituzioni 1875*. V. 6 (F. MOTTO. p. 112)

¹¹ D. BOSCO, *Introduction to constitutions*, l.c.

— The first one mentioned is *prayer*, prolonged in a life lived in God's presence: a person who has chosen to follow the virginal Christ lives in contact and living dialogue with him at every moment of life.

— In this dialogue with the Lord a special place is given to *the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist*: our love is continually purified in the sacrament of forgiveness, and is nourished each day at the table of the Lord's Body and Blood, from which it draws strength and grandeur.

— We are all aware of the importance of a good *spiritual guide* to accompany us on our way through life, helping us to discern God's will and enlightening us so that we can respond ever better to his love.

In conclusion the article lifts our gaze to *Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians*, to her who was Don Bosco's guide and who will guide us too in fidelity to our vocation.

From the earliest christian tradition Mary has been called "the Virgin", "the Most Holy Virgin", "the Virgin of Virgins". Mary's virginity is at the heart of her vocation and at the heart too of the redeeming mystery of the Incarnation. After Jesus, Mary is the one in whom is realized most completely christian and religious virginity. She is the model, the type and the example of the virginity of the church, and at the same time its active support; she is a virgin in spirit in the first place, because of the completeness of her acquiescence with the Father's designs, and also a virgin in body as the sign and first fruit, jointly with her Son, of the new virginal humanity.

To Mary therefore we betake ourselves with confidence, and to her we entrust our love, so that she may make it strong and generous for Christ and for the young. The Rule assures us that she will teach us to love in the way she taught Don Bosco.

We may note that this reference to Mary in the concluding article of the whole of Chapter VI on the evangelical counsels is an invitation to look to her as the model for a joyful and generous response of our whole life in the spirit of the counsels. She is a model of obedience to the Word of God ("*be it done unto me according to your Word*"), a model of poverty in spirit ("*he has looked with favour on his lowly servant*"), and a model of virginal love ("*I do not know man*"). By imitating Mary, we too can experience the great things which God works in his servants ("*the Almighty has done great things for me*").

*The Lord has called us to live,
in strength and fidelity
and with joyful trust,
the complete donation of ourselves
in the bond of perfect chastity.
Let us ask him for the gift of perseverance*

and to defend us against every danger.

*That the awareness of our fragility
may not cause us fear and discouragement,
but lead us to a secure trust
in the assistance of the Holy Spirit,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That day by day we may renew
our commitment to fidelity in prayer
for ourselves and our brothers,
and in dedication to our mission of education,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be faithful and diligent in
using the means suggested by Don Bosco
for the preservation and growth of chastity:
prayer and mortification,
work and temperance,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our love for God and our neighbour
may be constantly nourished
at the table of the Word of God
and of the Body and Blood of Christ,
and be constantly purified
in the sacrament of reconciliation,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*God, our Father,
you have consecrated us to your love
by calling us to celibacy for the Kingdom.
Fulfil in us the whole of your designs,
and by the example and intercession of the Virgin Mary,
of Don Bosco and of our glorified Brothers,
confirm us in the gift of ourselves,
and keep us joyful and chaste in your sight
to the day of Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

CHAPTER VII

IN DIALOGUE WITH THE LORD

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God And whatever you do, in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3, 16-17).

It is not easy to find a biblical text sufficiently far-reaching to provide inspiration for chapter VII. Only two texts are explicitly quoted in the chapter for motivation purposes: Mary's meditation on the Word of God (Lk 2,19.51) in art. 87 and the thanksgiving to God which is necessary in daily life (Eph 5,20) in art. 95. The emblematic passage from the Letter to the Colossians was eventually chosen, a passage which is dense in significance and practical renown.

It should be remembered first of all that the objective of the Letter to the Colossians is to emphasize as strongly as possible the central position, or rather the primacy, of Christ in the world and in human history. It is a primacy which puts to flight fear and the service of false gods, and at the same time reconciles every creature under the loving guidance of Christ (1,15 2,23).

This leads to a community life marked by this "mystery". The traditional liturgical, catechetical and behavioural formularies are here taken up again to be relieved in the joyful awareness of this "life hidden with Christ in God" (3,3), and in a wide ecumenical sense since "Christ is all, and in all" (3,11) sustained by the "hope of glory" which is "Christ among you" (1,27). A new humanity (3,5-11), a new community (3,12-17).

The new community, intimately sustained by the christian agape (3,12-13, the text which is quoted in C 51 in connection with the fraternal community) is characterized by diligent attention to the Word of Christ which is the fullness of the Word of God. This has pride of place, and it fits naturally into the community. It gives vitality, unity and thrust to the whole assembly. It becomes a living wisdom circulating among the members in words of correction and edification, and reaches its natural climax in choral celebration animated by the Spirit: psalms, hymns and 'spiritual' canticles (compositions from the Old Testament and the early christian communities used in prayer); a celebration marked by thanksgiving ('eucaristia') to God the Father through Jesus Christ. The vibrancy of tone of this celebration is indicated by the way Paul himself opens the letter with a magnificent hymn (1,13-20). But the force of the Word does not end here. It permeates the whole existence (words and deeds), as the place where the saving action of God takes effect, and hence where life becomes liturgy.

Listening to the Word, celebration (eucharist), communal edification, and mission in the world: these are a dynamic ensemble of experiences which form the content, climate and rhythm of "dialogue with the Lord" on the part of the Salesians, of which the articles of the Constitutions, at the wonderful school of Don Bosco, have become an exemplary expression.

* * *

1. The location of the chapter

A first point to be noted, and one that was already mentioned in the introduction to Part II is the new location of this chapter on the prayer of the salesian, which is now located in the large block formed by the second Part: "Sent to the young etc." to serve as *its conclusion*. It would be quite wrong to interpret this as any lessening of the importance given to prayer because it is treated "after" the themes of the mission (chap. IV), the community (chap. V), and the evangelical counsels (chap. VI). Quite the contrary! By placing prayer here at the conclusion, the GC22 wanted to make it clear that salesian consecrated an apostolic life, with all its various commitments among youth, with brotherhood lived in community, and with the demands of obedience, poverty and chastity, has a character so supernatural, so far above the capabilities of our good will, that it would not be practicable nor even possible without the Holy Spirit, without the grace of God which is continually offered and given in prayer and the sacraments. When the salesian or the salesian community prays and draws near to the sacramental sources of grace he is visibly acknowledging his dependence on God who has consecrated him and sent him. He puts himself in immediate contact with his Lord, so as to revive his "awareness of his intimate and living relationship with him" (as art. 85 puts it), and to be purified and enlivened by him and sent forth once again for a better service of his Kingdom.

It is suggested too that all the concrete commitments of the salesian's life and activity are destined to blossom out into prayer, and themselves become a deep communion with God, as will be well said in the final article of the chapter and of the second Part. In this way, from the very location of the chapter the necessity of "*dialogue with the Lord*" is evident.

2. The title of the chapter

The title of the chapter is substantially a definition of explicit prayer, and equally a specification of the basic spiritual attitude underlying the life of the professed salesian, already indicated in art. 12: the salesian "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". "The special Covenant that the Lord has made with us" (C 195) *requires that we live "in a state of dialogue with him"*.

3. The overall perspective of the chapter

The whole chapter is shaped by the perspective of the entire second part of the Constitutions: "Sent to the young in communities following Christ".

Our prayer is of the kind proper to "missionaries of the young"¹ who work together *animated by the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd*, enlightened by his Word, nourished by his Body and Blood, enlivened by his mysteries, purified by his forgiveness, stimulated by the example and intervention of his Mother. "Pastoral love"

¹ Cf. Message of John Paul II to GC22; GC22, 13

95), but there are references to it in many other articles: art. 85 considers the prayer of the community in the light of the "da mihi animas"; art. 86 speaks of "apostolic prayer"; art. 87 sees among the fruits of daily meditation on the Word that of "proclaiming it with zeal" (cf. also C 93); art. 88 says that we are led by the Eucharist to "renew our apostolic commitment", drawing from it "energy and endurance in our work for the young"; art. 90, speaking of the sacrament of Reconciliation, states that it "purifies our apostolic intentions"; Mary gives us "courage for the service of our brethren" (C 92); and in conclusion all our prayer is linked with our "tireless industry" (C 95).

The various expressions of the salesian's life of prayer converge therefore on the same objective: *to centre it more and more on the two inseparable poles of his life: the Lord who has chosen him as an instrument in His work of salvation, and youth to whom he takes this salvation in the Lord's name.*

4. Two major characteristics

In the fundamental aspect referred to above, the GC22 has met a double preoccupation that had been expressed also by provincial chapters: to make it clear that our prayer is at the same time *deeply ecclesial*, responding to the demands for liturgical renewal made by Vatican II, and *characteristically salesian*, in line with our specific mission in the Church.

a) The concern for a firmly ecclesial form of prayer appears especially in three points which lead to a better understanding of the broad and complex reality covered by the expression "prayer": it is a matter of welcoming the saving action of God and entering into a colloquy with him.

In the first place attention is drawn to the decisive initiating role of the *Word of God*: prayer is indeed a dialogue, but a dialogue in which it must be left to the principal participant, God, to take the initiative. The "life of prayer" is above all else a matter of listening and meditating. And the prayer itself is an adequate "response" to the Word that has been heard and understood. Chapter VII insists very opportunely on the dynamics of listening and response: explicit references to this are found in the opening biblical quotation, in articles 85 (invitation and response), 87 (the Word is heard, accepted, meditated on, brought to fruition and proclaimed), 88 (celebration of the Word), 90 (the Word which calls to conversion), and 91 (listening and discernment).

The chapter also emphasizes the *centrality of the Eucharist*: the celebration of the paschal mystery, seen as the summit and perfect source of union with Christ, of brotherly communion and of apostolic commitment. It is prepared by listening to the Word and is prolonged in the Liturgy of the Hours (C 88, 89).

Finally the text draws attention (C 89) to the liturgical dimension of *sanctified time* in its triple rhythm: daily (the Hours), weekly (the Sunday celebration), and yearly (the liturgical year). Also indicated is the movement of thanksgiving and praise which

is present all through the liturgy and gives to it its most characteristic feature: the biblical citation, art. 89 (praise of the Father), art. 92 (the joy of the Magnificat), art. 93 (gratitude to the Father), art. 95 (giving thanks in everything).

b) The other preoccupation evident in the constitutional text is that of emphasizing the *salesian style* of our prayer. Here again there are three particular points to note.

An entire article is given over to an indication of the characteristic qualities of our prayer, and the basis of the prayer experience of Don Bosco himself (C 86). The description is not meant to be exhaustive, and indeed some features of our style of prayer are to be found in other articles of the Constitutions, e.g. in those which insist on its sacramental and Marian components.

But there are two other aspects which deserve special notice. Salesian prayer, as appears from the text, is permeated by the *apostolic concept of the "da mihi animas"* (already noted in connection with the global perspective of this chapter). For this very reason salesian prayer *"is drawn from life experience and flows back into it"*(C 86), and becomes a "liturgy of life" (C 95). Don Bosco, in fact, saw no division between prayer and life: he gives us a wonderful example of an apostle who lives the "grace of unity", who is able to combine intense activity with a deep interior life, who prays to God with a heart full of anxiety over his youngsters and works among them with a heart aflame for God's glory.

5. Structure of the chapter

We are now in a better position to understand the structure of the chapter. It is composed of 11 articles, which can be easily gathered into four groups:

1. The overall significance and characteristics of our prayer:

- prayer is a response to God's initiative: *art. 85*
- it has a salesian style : *art. 86*

2. The more decisive elements of our liturgical life:

- the hearing and active acceptance of the Word: *art. 87*
- celebration of the Eucharist and eucharistic devotion: *art. 88*
- liturgical sanctification of time: *art. 89*

3. "Continual conversion" and its expressions:

- daily conversion and the sacrament of Reconciliation: *art. 90*
- conversion at specific "times of renewal": *art. 91*

4. Three particular elements:

- Mary: how we see and honour her: *art. 92*
- the personal prayer of the salesian: *art. 93*
- the remembrance of dead salesians: *art. 94*

5. *Conclusion: "life as prayer": art. 95*

6. Communal prayer and personal prayer

There is a further aspect that should be pointed out before we go on to examine the separate articles.

We must realize the need we have for personal as well as communal prayer. There is a simple but fundamental reason for this: in the Church and in the Congregation each of us is, before God, a unique individual different from all others, a son with distinctive features, but at the same time a member of the People of God and of the salesian community. In the Gospel Jesus speaks of two kinds of prayer and in fact he engaged in both. In practice the two kinds have a mutual influence on each other.

The question is sometimes asked: "Which of the two forms of prayer should be given priority?" At the level of principle the reply is clear: communal liturgical prayer is "the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed, and the fount from which all her power flows".² On the other hand there can be no communal prayer without personal prayer. In practice, since the supreme law of charity is realized in the full conformity to God's will, the salesian will respond to God who calls him to pray with the community or "in secret": through the Rule or through the circumstances of life or the apostolate.

Looking at chapter VII, we may note that the text, although speaking always of prayer in relation to the community, frequently insists on the need of the personal commitment of each individual. Various articles carry points applicable to the two aspects, and some make explicit reference to personal prayer: meetings with Christ in the tabernacle (C 88), Sunday as an enriching experience for the Salesian (C 89), commitment to conversion "on the part of each member" (C 90), retreats and spiritual exercises "for each salesian" (C 91), Marian devotion for a more convinced "personal imitation" (C 92), and finally the entire art. 95 is written from the point of view of the individual salesian.

The Constitutions therefore strictly unite communal prayer with personal prayer. There we can find the response to the concern expressed by the Rector Major: "How are we to explain the lack of interior life? I am becoming more and more convinced that it stems from a lack of application to 'personal prayer', or in other words to the contemplative dimension which is at the root of every religious heart. Personal prayer has this indispensable primacy of importance: it is at the foundation of a convinced and well fostered community prayer".³

² SC 10

³ E. VIGANO, GC22, RRM n. 284

ART. 85 THE GIFT OF PRAYER

The community expresses in a visible manner the mystery of the Church, which is not born of any human will but is the fruit of the Lord's death and resurrection. In the same way God brings our community together and keeps it united by his call, his Word, his love.

In praying, the salesian community responds to this call; it deepens its awareness of its intimate and living relationship with God, and of its saving mission, making its own Don Bosco's prayer: "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle".

The chapter begins with an article which sets out from the perspective of the community with the purpose of "locating" communal prayer. Why must the community pray, and what does it do when it prays? It is of the greatest importance that this be specified from the outset, so as to preclude a pietistic mentality and assign to prayer its basic and vital character.

The truth here given prominence is the supernatural foundation of the salesian community as a group of religious apostles whom God consecrates and sends out for his service (cf. C 3). The first paragraph recalls this divine initiative, which in this way is linked with the opening declaration of the Constitutions: We believe that (our) Society came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God" (C 1). The second paragraph draws the logical consequences from this: to pray is to go back consciously to one's Source, it means giving a response in "dialogue with the Lord".

God himself unites the community and keeps it united

To affirm the supernatural character of the community, the text recalls its ecclesial significance, connecting it in this way to chapter V on the community.

The Church is a "mystery" of "communion" (as was said in art. 15): it unites believers in brotherly fashion "in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit",¹ and hence in a unity which is divine in its source and is given to men through the paschal mystery of Christ; through his reconciling death and resurrection, Christ fulfilled the Covenant and gave rise to the saved Church, sending it the Sanctifying Spirit.

Of this mystery the community is the visible expression because, after the example of the first community of Jerusalem, it brings together to live in Jesus believers who have felt the same special invitation.²

¹LG 4

² Vatican II looked at religious life in this perspective, cf. LG 43-44; PC 12, and especially 15. J. AUBRY, *La vita religiosa nella sua dimensione ecclesiale*, in *"Teologia della vita religiosa"*, LDC Turin, 1980, p. 47-59

The fundamental truth, therefore, to be accepted in faith, is that notwithstanding the obvious weaknesses of our communities it is neither spontaneous fellow-feeling nor the desire to work together that unites us, or at least gives rise to our deeper unity, nor is it on our own initiative that we commit ourselves to apostolic work; it is *God himself who unites us and keeps us united*. God the Father "calls us to live in community" (C 50) by his Word, which in the Son never ceases to gather us together (C 87), and by his Love, the Holy Spirit, which he diffuses in our hearts.

Again it is the Father who sends us to work in his vineyard and the Risen Son who sends us his Pentecostal Spirit, so that we can go and rise up disciples: art. 55, speaking of the rector in the community, said that he "represents Christ who unites his followers in the service of the Father".

Our life of prayer is founded entirely on these convictions of faith. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "The moments of reunion in prayer of our 'little Church' are an expression of the great 'praying community' which is the universal Church".³

It is pleasant to call to mind the significant expression of our Father Don Bosco, who said that prayer was the foundation of his Oratory: "I have called this place an Oratory to make it strikingly clear that prayer is ultimately the only means on which we can rely".⁴

The community recognizes God's initiative

Evidently a community must seek a way of living permanently its "mystery" in communal relations and apostolic tasks. But it is absolutely necessary that it be directly aware of it, that it express it visibly and that it reactivate its power at certain times and in certain specific ways: this is the radical sense of its explicit prayer.

When a salesian community prays, it evidently attains all the purposes of Christian prayer, but it does more than that: it reasserts itself as a specific community within the bosom of the Church, it rediscovers its deep identity, it renews its ability to really live its fraternal communion and its apostolic service. A community which did not pray would gradually lose the sense of its own identity and destroy its own roots, through forgetting "its intimate and living relationship with God".⁵ Evidently it is not primarily a case of quantity, but of truth and quality.

In this way, in "dialogue with the Lord", as our prayer is defined in an overall manner, our own part is clearly specified: it is always a *response to God who never ceases to take the initiative by his presence and action*. And so prayer is both a gift (the "gift of prayer", in the words of the article's title) and also the loving response of sons.

To understand this is of truly fundamental importance: to the possible temptation to doubt whether the God we invoke really hears us and listens to us

³ Cf. SGC, 538

⁴ BM III, 73

⁵ Cf. SGC, 538-539

attentively, our faith immediately reacts: "How could he not hear us who has made us, who holds us in his hands and who sent us to serve him?"

The article ends by recalling the apostolic aspect of prayer: the praying community *"deepens its awareness of its saving mission"*. It is a salesian community which prays, but even in its moments of deepest contemplation it can never lose sight of youth to be saved! It was a happy idea to quote our motto at this point: it reminds us that it is in fact a prayer, and invocation by which we recognize the divine source of our zeal: *"Tu, Domine, da mihi animas — give me souls, O Lord, that I may be able to give them back to you!"* Prayer, for a salesian, means always the gaining of a new awareness being sent to young people by the Lord himself. The following article will develop this truth.

*God our Father,
in the power of the Risen Christ
you have brought our community together in unity
and keep it united by your Word and your Love.
Make the awareness of our bond with you
living and efficacious in us,
and grant that following the example of Don Bosco,
we may ask you every day:
"Give me souls: take all the rest away".
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 86 SALESIAN PRAYER

Docile to the Holy Spirit, Don Bosco lived an experience of humble, trusting and apostolic prayer in which praying and living were spontaneously united.

We learn from him to recognize the action of grace in the lives of the young; we pray for them so that the design of the Father may be fulfilled in each of them, and we pray with them that we may witness to our own faith and share the same hope of salvation.

Salesian prayer is joyful and creative, simple and profound. It lends itself to community participation, is drawn from life experience and flows back into it.

Our prayer draws its typically salesian characteristics from the fact that it is the prayer of apostles dedicated to the good of youth.

Chapter II on the "salesian spirit" has already described an important element of salesian piety: the continual union with God or spirit of prayer, even in activity, an aspect to which we shall return at the end of the present chapter. The present art. 86 outlines the overall style of our explicit prayer in three steps:

- Don Bosco is our model;
- the young have a place in our prayer;
- from these two facts derive the typical features of our prayer.

Don Bosco, our model in prayer

"We learn from him...": Don Bosco is generally put before us as a model of activity and less frequently as a model of prayer; it is therefore of great significance that the Constitutions refer us to his experience as a holy priest and educator, who prayed a lot more than would externally appear. This was the fact that inspired Don Ceria's book, "Don Bosco con Dio".

Many have borne witness to Don Bosco's spirit of prayer. It can be said, declared Don Barberis during the beatification process, "that he was always praying; I have seen him hundreds of times in prayer as he went up and down stairs. He prayed as he went from one place to another. On journeys, when he was not correcting printers' proofs, I saw him always praying".¹ And Don Rua added: "Many times I came upon him absorbed in prayer during his brief moments of respite".²

He considered prayer as a voluntary sharing by God of his omnipotence with human weakness, and he gave to it absolute priority: "Prayer is the most important thing", he used to say; "nothing is begun well unless it starts from heaven".

Prayer was for him the work par excellence, because "it obtains everything and triumphs over everything". It is like "water for the fish, air for the bird, running

¹D. BARBERIS, *Summarium super virtutibus*, Unione con Dio

²BM IV, 318

streams for the deer, warmth for the body". "Prayer does violence to the heart of God".³ "Woe to those who neglect prayer"⁴ he would repeat. "Prayer is ultimately the only means on which we can rely".⁵

With absolute truth Don Ceria was able to write: "In Don Bosco the spirit of prayer was what the martial spirit is to a good army officer, or the spirit of observation to a good artist or scientist: an habitual disposition of the soul, readily activated with constancy and great delight".⁶

Later we shall analyze in the second and third paragraphs the features of prayer as seen in Don Bosco. For the moment we merely take note of the fact. We shall find the right style for our prayer *by taking a long look at the Founder*. His style is, in fact, part of the charism we receive as a precious heritage. If we too are docile to the Spirit, our prayer will not only be imbued with the apostolic slant of the "da mihi animas", as was said at the end of the preceding article, but will also be expressed externally in forms suited to our youth ministry.

The young have a place in our prayer

How did Don Bosco pray? To sum up Don Bosco's way of praying, we could say that his prayer was that of a man of God who had no other aim than the salvation of youth: even in prayer he lived "the spiritual and educational experience" of the preventive system, as was said in art. 20 and 21.

From this fact the Constitutions deduce that *salesian prayer is that of an apostle and an educator* who has given his life to the Lord in a commitment to the salvation of the young. As was the case with Don Bosco, so also in the salesian, prayer is an indispensable factor which *precedes, accompanies, and follows up activity*. It *precedes* it, because it is in prayer that the apostle thinks out his activity in God and according to God, and directs it to the divine will and glory. It *accompanies* it, constantly referring it to the Lord with the request for grace and help, especially in moments of fatigue and difficulty. "Let us never lose heart in the face of dangers and difficulties", Don Bosco exhorts us; "if we pray with confidence to God he will give us his help". It *follows it up*, as an act of thanksgiving: "How good the Lord is!" "God's works are wonderful".⁷

In this prayer, marked by educational and apostolic experience, *young people are therefore present*. The Rule indicates the various ways in which this can happen.

In the first place they are *present spiritually*: "We pray for them". The young automatically enter our prayers and intentions: we pray for their happiness in time

³ Cf. BM III, 250; MB XII, 626; MB XV, 492; cf. also for a synthesis of the importance attributed to prayer by Don Bosco, P. BROCARDO, *Don Bosco, profondamente uomo-profondamente santo*. LAS Rome 1985, p. 99

⁴ BM IX, 98

⁵ BM III, 73

⁶ E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*. p. 105-106

⁷ Cf. P. BROCARDO, o.c., p. 100-101

488 and eternity, that they may be open to the mysterious action of grace so that our

efforts may bear fruit; synthetically, we pray for them "so that God's will may be fulfilled in each of them", an expression which reminds us to pray not only for "youth" in general, nor even for our own particular group, but indeed for each one individually. Every now and then the salesian will go into the chapel taking with him a list of all the boys of his class or oratory, and bring them one by one before our Lord or our Blessed Lady, recalling the name and appearance of each. He prays not only for them but in their name, and during this kind of prayer he will certainly not become bored!

But the *physical presence* of the youngsters is not ruled out: "*We pray with them*", in application of the principle of educational living together after the manner of a family. And how many consequences there are for our prayer! Two immediately come to mind. We cannot accept a style of prayer which is too high-flown, too intellectual and severe; it must be at their level. If youngsters find it hard to join in our prayer and find it neither revealing nor attractive, it means that it is not very salesian and needs "rejuvenating". We and they together must manage to "*share the same hope of salvation*".

A second consequence: "we pray with them *that we may witness to our own faith*". One of our tasks is that of educating young people to prayer. It would be just about the limit if the educators were not the first to pray and to be able to pray "in spirit and in truth"! A youngster in a group making a retreat once asked the preacher: "Father, you have said a lot of wonderful things about prayer; but now we would like you to tell us in just a few minutes how you pray yourself". Prayer is one of those things which is learned a little bit from words and a great deal by an initiation process. "We walk side by side with the young... we introduce them to an active participation in the liturgy... with them we celebrate...", say articles 34 and 36. Our prayer must be a *practical school of prayer* as well.

The salesian style of prayer

We have given a brief sketch of Don Bosco as a man of prayer and have spoken of the importance he attributed to it in the fulfilment of his mission. But the Constitutions also list some of the principal characteristics of his prayer and of that of the salesian: a prayer which is genuine and substantially complete, simple and straightforward in form, popular in content, joyful and festive in expression; a prayer within the capabilities of all, of children and humble folk in particular, and a prayer finally which is intrinsically geared to action.

Combining the first paragraph on the "prayer of Don Bosco" with the third on the "prayer of the salesian", we can detect no fewer than ten features of what can be called the "salesian style of prayer". Here we shall consider just three of them: *Simplicity*, *liveliness*, and *truth*, three qualities which appeal to youth and to ordinary people.

— *Simplicity*. Salesian prayer is called "simple, humble and trusting". It is simple in its gospel inspiration, in its quantity and in its external expression. The salesian

"experiences the fatherhood of God", and "prays in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy... with the Father whom he feels close at hand" (C 12). He rejects prayers that are too long and tiring, and which risk becoming boring (certainly there is nothing to prevent anyone who wants to pray longer from doing so). He is not fond either of high-flown formulas, complicated rites, and from too flashy or emotional external expression, and from anything that might in practice reserve prayer to a chosen few.

— *Liveliness*. For Don Bosco, "simple" was not the same thing as "passive". Salesian prayer is described in the article as joyful, creative and open to community participation. The salesian "radiates joy and is able to educate to a Christian and educative way of life: 'Let us serve the Lord in holy joy' (C17). Don Bosco always wanted the liturgy to be well carried out in an attractive manner, with singing and music, and with a certain balanced variety that held the attention, renewed interior joy, and made those present feel how wonderful it was to be with God!

— *Truth* or authenticity. Simple and joyful prayer did not mean for Don Bosco that it would be superficial. Salesian prayer should be deep or profound, in the sense that it spontaneously links prayer with life: it "is drawn from life experience and flows back into it". It starts from a sincere and piously animated heart, rejects conformity and formality and wants authentic formulas, dignified gestures and celebrations which have an incidence on life to transform it little by little into a "liturgy" and spiritual cult.

If we want to sum up the content of this article, we might go back to the text from St. Paul quoted at the beginning of the chapter: "Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God... and do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3, 16-17).

The SGC in outlining the "style of prayer" of the salesian, in addition to speaking of "simple and vital prayer", points out among its characteristics: "openness to the sacramental world, and special confidence in Mary".⁸ Later articles (cf. C 80, 90, 92) will deal specifically with these elements.

*Lord Jesus,
you taught your disciples to pray. Teach
us also to pray as Don Bosco prayed, with
the simplicity and trust of children, with
the joy and creativity of the young, and
with the burning zest of apostles.*

*Help us to prolong our prayer
into the whole of our life,
so that we may cooperate
with your designs of grace for young people
and in union with you contribute to their salvation.*

You live and reign for ever and ever.

⁸Cf. SGC, 103-105

ART. 87 THE COMMUNITY ATTENTIVE TO THE WORD

The people of God are gathered before all else by the Word of the living God.¹ For us the Word, listened to with faith, is a source of spiritual life, food for prayer, light to see God's will in the events of life, and strength to live out our vocation faithfully.

With the Sacred Scriptures daily in hand,² we welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our heart,³ so that it will bear fruit and we may proclaim it with zeal.

¹ cf. PO 4

² cf. PC 6

³ cf. Lk 2,19.51

Articles 87, 88 and 89 form a small block indicating the three major forms of the liturgical life and prayer of the community and individual salesian: listening to the Word, the celebration of the Eucharist, and the sanctification of time during the liturgical year through the divine Office.

The first attitude of the praying community is not that of speaking; as in the case of every believer, it must be silent and listen. In fact the "living God", who has brought the community together and who keeps it united, never ceases to speak: to humbly listen to him is the most meaningful way of acknowledging the primacy of his initiative.

One paragraph explains the benefits of listening to the Word in faith. A further paragraph speaks of the reactions of the community in this regard. We may note that everything said of the community applies equally to the individual salesian.

What the Word of God implies

The article's first and second paragraphs briefly recall the fundamental role of the Word of God in every christian community, and therefore with greater reason in every religious apostolic community,¹ whose members profess to obey the Word and have the mission of educating others to accept it in faith. The article draws largely on the conciliar texts for its formulation.

The Word of God is not just a simple literary expression nor an "empty" word. It is God himself who is speaking, and for this reason we can understand why and to what extent it can be efficacious. It is first of all a uniting force, because God addresses himself to men in the first place to "call them together" and implant in all of them the same response. The decree "Presbyterorum ordinis", quoted in the article is quite definite about this fact: the first task of priests is that of announcing the Good News "so as to set up and increase the people of God. For by the saving Word of God

¹ For clarification of this point, cf. SGC, 540; cf. also SGC, doc. III "Evangelization and catechesis", especially 283-288, 339-340

faith is aroused in the heart of unbelievers... and by this faith the congregation of the faithful begins and grows".²

In this "community of believers" the Word produces a series of benefits which the conciliar Constitution "Dei Verbum" describes as follows: "Such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve... the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and pure and lasting fount of spiritual life".³ And further on in the same document: "It should be remembered, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man".⁴ "*Strength*", "*food*", and "*Source of life*" (*robur, cibus, fons*) are all expressions included in our text.

The first expression emphasized in the article is rather like a synthesis of the whole content: the Word is in general a "source of spiritual life". Under this aspect it spreads its fertile influence in three directions: it gives rise to the response of prayer, it makes known the will of the Father, and it helps in its practical realization.

Hence to pray in truth, to know what it should do, to be able to bring to the Kingdom of God its own contribution, the salesian community must lend a willing ear. This is precisely what is said in the third paragraph, which puts the community face to face with the Word.

The community face to face with the Word

Through every saving even God speaks to us of his design of salvation centred in Jesus Christ. But his Word is found substantially and in writing in Sacred Scripture:⁵ and to this therefore the community is directed in a special way, as is explicitly stated in the decree "Perfectae caritatis" the Constitution "Dei Verbum".⁶ "*With the Sacred Scriptures in hand*" means, in the context, to read them (or hear them read) and meditate on them. "*Daily*" clearly implies that the reference is not to a merely occasional reading: the Bible is food for every day!. It is a matter of learning, especially from the Gospel, "the highest knowledge of Jesus Christ" (cf. C 34), which is a knowledge infinite in depth.

The conciliar text suggests various attitudes which the community and the individual should display before the Word of God. They should:

- *listen to it* with humility at suitable times and in various ways;
- *accept it* in heart with docility as the supreme criterion, and hence let themselves be judged by it: this is the act of faith,⁷ of which Mary is the perfect model;

² PO 4

³ DV 21

⁴ DV 25

⁵ DV 9-10

⁶ Cf. PC 6; DV 25

⁷ Cf. DV 5

- *Preserve it* in life, where it produces its fruit;
- *Proclaim it* with zeal in the apostolate.

There are radical commitments for a salesian community and for each of its members: the Word must enter our ears (we "listen" to it), descend into our hearts (we "welcome" it), pass into our hands (we "practise" it), and issue from our mouth (we "proclaim" it). This imposes four serious obligations on us: the duty of learning to be silent and listen, to acknowledge our radical poverty, to bear witness to the Word, and zealously to commit ourselves to spread it abroad. But it may be that in the first place this will give rise to an immediate practical problem: the members of the community must agree on the times and concrete ways in which they will listen in common to the Word of God.

As far as the individual salesian is concerned, here is applicable what art. 93 says about "personal prayer", understood as intimate meditation on the Word of God.

The SGC comes to the conclusion: The Word of God "is a concrete Word, which questions our community and each of us personally on the here and now of our existence: it is a 'living and effective Word' (Heb 4, 12), 'incessantly at work' (DV 8), and of necessity calling for a reply which will be expressed in our personal and community life".⁸ The Constitutions have given us the timely indication that the most significant moments of our community life, those of seeking and fulfilling the divine will, are indicated for us by the Word of God (cf. C 66).

*God our Father, grant us All docility
in listening to your Word.
May it be for us the source and food of life,
strength in fidelity, and light for our path,
so that by its daily meditation,
we may like Mary draw fruit from it for ourselves,
and proclaim it efficaciously to our fellow men.*

ART. 88 THE COMMUNITY MADE ONE BY THE EUCHARIST

The hearing of the Word finds its privileged place in the celebration of the Eucharist. This is the central act of every salesian community: it is a daily festive celebration in a living liturgy.

There the community celebrates the paschal mystery and unites itself to the immolated body of Christ, which it receives so as to build itself in him into a fraternal communion and renew its apostolic commitment.

Concelebration stresses the richness of this mystery: it expresses the triple unity of sacrifice, priesthood and community, a community whose members are all at the service of the same mission.

For us sons of Don Bosco the eucharistic presence in our houses is a reason for frequent encounters with Christ. From him we draw energy and endurance in our work for the young.

In the Church, the Word always reaches its climax in the Sacrament: what is proclaimed in the former is brought about in a mysterious manner in the latter. Hence the article on the Word leads quite logically to that of the Eucharist, which is at one and the same time the "privileged place" for the hearing of the Word and its living realization.

The article deals in its four paragraphs with two related themes: the communal eucharistic celebration (the first three paragraphs), and the eucharistic presence which gives rise to personal eucharistic devotion (final paragraph). As regards the first theme, the text considers both the significance of the Eucharist for the community, and the active participation in it of the celebrating community. We shall reflect separately on these various aspects.

It will be useful to keep in mind what Don Bosco has passed on to us, and to remember the essential role of the Eucharist in his own life. Reference has been already made, when speaking of our mission and educational method, to the central position of the Eucharist in Don Bosco's thought (cf. C 36), but it can also be said quite certainly that the Eucharist is one of the columns on which is built the whole edifice of the holiness of our Founder and of his sons.

To Don Bosco's burning love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament many passages in the "Biographical Memoirs" bear witness: When he preached on Our Lord's love for us", writes his biographer, "he would often weep and bring tears to the eyes of his hearers. Even during recreation time, if the conversation turned to the subject of the Holy Eucharist, his face would light up with holy ardour. He frequently said to the youngsters: 'My dear boys, if you want to be truly happy, love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with all your hearts'.¹

Although Don Bosco's eucharistic doctrine did not have the ecclesial breadth of Vatican II (it obviously depended on the theology of the time), we can see very well what a living reality the Eucharist was for him, the true and living presence of the

¹BM IV, 317

risen Christ under the sign of bread; and the eucharistic table and the tabernacle are still at the present day the places where one can have a real and vital meeting with him. Through communion Don Bosco lived a strong and tender concrete relationship with Christ, and wanted his boys to have the same love: "How happy I would be if I could kindle in you a spark of this great love for Mary and for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament... To do so I would be willing to crawl and lick the ground from here to Superga".²

With this brief look back to our Founder, we are now in a better position to understand the text of the article.

The action on the community of Christ in the Eucharist

The eucharistic celebration is called by the Council "the source and summit of all preaching of the Gospel... the centre of the assembly of the faithful", "the centre and culmination of the entire life of the christian community".³ "However, no christian community is built up which does not grow from and hinge on the celebration of the most holy Eucharist; from this all education for community spirit must begin".⁴

With all the more reason can these strong expressions be applied to a community of religious apostles. With the Eucharist the salesian community receives two fundamental benefits: it is rebuilt in Christ in fraternal communion, and it finds in him the enthusiasm for renewed apostolic commitment. Two brief explanatory phrases, but pregnant with meaning.

With the Eucharist the community "*Celebrates the paschal mystery*", the mystery which was said in art. 85 to have given rise to the Church itself. The death of Christ has destroyed all divisions, and his new life in the Spirit is the principle of deep unity among those who are saved. By celebrating the Eucharist the salesian community truly celebrates the Act of redeeming love which was and always remains the source of its unity.

Moreover, the community "*unites itself to the immolated body of Christ*": to be united to the eucharistic Body of Christ means to be inserted in his mystical Body, according to the great doctrine of St Paul⁵ union with Christ implies communion between ourselves in him. The concrete nature of the sacrament makes the assertion of art. 85 shine in all its splendour; God it is "who keeps our community united", and the Body of his Son continually rebuilds it, in the measure of the living faith of the participants, stimulated by fraternal charity.

² BM VII, 410; on the eucharistic doctrine of Don Bosco, cf. also J. AUBRY, *L'Eucaristia nella prassi salesiana in "Rinnovare la nostra vita salesiana"* LDC Turin 1981, vol I, p. 176

³ Cf. PO 5; CD 30. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Consilium* applies these expressions to the liturgy itself, of which the heart is the Eucharist: "The liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows: (SC 10), as is recalled in C 36

⁴ PO 6

⁵ "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is of one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10, 16-17)

constructing the community it is precisely the Eucharist that is the fundamental and decisive instrument, the 'sign and cause, of that unity, both the leaven and what unity demands. It is, in other words, the sign of that unity which is the goal of our life. It is this however in the measure in which in reality we already live and dedicate ourselves to the task of reaching communion with each other. Only to this extent is the sacrament also a 'cause' of unity".⁶

But in the celebration of the Eucharist, the salesian community *opens itself energetically to apostolic horizons* and nourishes, as well as fraternal charity, its pastoral charity too. The SGC says once again: "The Eucharist is the point of departure and point of arrival of all the community's apostolic activity".⁷ In offering the paschal mystery it takes into its own hands the concrete existence of youngsters and of the faithful in general, to transform them in the offering of Christ to the glory of the Father. Communicating in the Body of Christ, the members take to themselves the Good Shepherd who has given his life for his sheep, and prepare to immolate themselves for the good of the young, becoming themselves too in this way the bread which saves and gives life.⁸

Active participation of the community in the Eucharist

But the extent of these wonderful fruits is governed by the living faith of the "celebrants". This faith is already invoked indirectly in the first paragraph, where the Eucharist is spoken of as a "*daily festive celebration in a living liturgy*". Is there here, perhaps, a contradiction in terms? Can a feast remain a feast if it is celebrated every day? What is meant here is that the Eucharist must be celebrated as the festive moment of each day, in the conviction of its quite extraordinary value. It calls, therefore, for an intimate preparation, for an attentive and loving heart. Externally too it calls for a style of celebration which helps to stimulate faith. A 'living liturgy' is one which rejects routine, which every day finds space for creative freedom while always remaining faithful to the Church's rites, which allows every individual to participate actively. The time given to deep and intensive thanksgiving for the gift received is a sign of love and of the beginning of that constant contact with Christ which will be prolonged throughout the day.

In the community, united as a family around the Eucharist, particular significance attaches to *concelebration*, recommended by the Constitutions. This offers the possibility for a "living liturgy", directly linked to the communal aspect of the eucharistic mystery. Concelebration manifests, in fact, a triple unity: "*the unity of the sacrifice*", since the Masses celebrated by different priests are all the one sacrifice of Christ (the only thing multiplied is the sacramental rite); "*the unity of the priesthood*", since the different priests are nothing else than efficacious signs of the one High Priest

⁶SGC, 543

⁷ibid.

⁸"By being nourished with Christ's Body, priests share in the charity of him who gives himself as food to the faithful" (PO 13)

who offers his sacrifice (all that is multiplied is the sacramental re-actualization); and "*the unity of the community*", gathered around the same altar for one and the same celebration, in which each one plays the priestly role (ministerial or common) which is properly his.

This community may nevertheless be thought of at two levels: the salesian community alone, whose members all commit themselves anew to the same task and, better still, the community extended to include youngsters and others; around the altar the salesian community then appears as a body united for the service of a group of believers within a wider ecclesial community.

The eucharistic presence and the devotion to which it gives rise

The final paragraph touches on an aspect which is largely personal and no longer explicitly liturgical. It deals with "*the eucharistic presence in our houses*" and the devotion to which it gives rise. "*For us sons of Don Bosco*", "the chapel with the tabernacle is the living heart of the house and of the community. The "frequent encounters with Christ" refer to what salesian tradition calls "visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament". We know what great store Don Bosco set by this practice and how much he recommended it to both salesians and boys. The Council recommends it explicitly in the case of priests: "Priests should love to talk daily with Christ the Lord in their visit to the most Blessed Sacrament and in their personal devotion to it".⁹

It is well to recall the significance of this devotion, so well expressed in the Instruction "Eucharisticum mysterium".¹⁰ In the first place it remains strictly dependent on the eucharistic celebration: "This presence derives from the sacrifice and is directed towards both sacramental and spiritual communion", i.e. Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is always the Christ who is both Victim and Food. But on the other hand the devotion has a different objective: the Mass is the liturgical action of Christ and the assembly, offered to the Father; eucharistic devotion is addressed to the sacramental Christ in forms which are private in character. Its essential fruit is to stimulate faith and love towards Christ the redeemer. The article of the Constitutions well says: "*from him we draw energy and endurance in our work for the young*".

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⁹ PO 18

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the divine breast, like a baby in its mother's arms? We should feel a similar joy when we visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament".¹¹

*God our Father,
in the Eucharist you enable us to relive
the paschal mystery of your Son,
in our communion with his Body and Blood.
By the strength of this sacrament of love
consolidate our unity as brothers,
and give fresh life
to our dedication as apostles.*

*Grant that we may celebrate the Eucharist
as a daily feast",
and that from frequent meetings with the Lord Jesus
we may derive energy for our mission among youth,
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ART. 88 THE COMMUNITY MADE ONE BY THE EUCHARIST

The hearing of the Word finds its privileged place in the celebration of the Eucharist. This is the central act of every salesian community: it is a daily festive celebration in a living liturgy.

There the community celebrates the paschal mystery and unites itself to the immolated body of Christ, which it receives so as to build itself in him into a fraternal communion and renew its apostolic commitment.

Concelebration stresses the richness of this mystery: it expresses the triple unity of sacrifice, priesthood and community, a community whose members are all at the service of the same mission.

For us sons of Don Bosco the eucharistic presence in our houses is a reason for frequent encounters with Christ. From him we draw energy and endurance in our work for the young.

In the Church, the Word always reaches its climax in the Sacrament: what is proclaimed in the former is brought about in a mysterious manner in the latter. Hence the article on the Word leads quite logically to that of the Eucharist, which is at one and the same time the "privileged place" for the hearing of the Word and its living realization.

The article deals in its four paragraphs with two related themes: the communal eucharistic celebration (the first three paragraphs), and the eucharistic presence which gives rise to personal eucharistic devotion (final paragraph). As regards the first theme, the text considers both the significance of the Eucharist for the community, and the active participation in it of the celebrating community. We shall reflect separately on these various aspects.

It will be useful to keep in mind what Don Bosco has passed on to us, and to remember the essential role of the Eucharist in his own life. Reference has been already made, when speaking of our mission and educational method, to the central position of the Eucharist in Don Bosco's thought (cf. C 36), but it can also be said quite certainly that the Eucharist is one of the columns on which is built the whole edifice of the holiness of our Founder and of his sons.

To Don Bosco's burning love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament many passages in the "Biographical Memoirs" bear witness: When he preached on Our Lord's love for us", writes his biographer, "he would often weep and bring tears to the eyes of his hearers. Even during recreation time, if the conversation turned to the subject of the Holy Eucharist, his face would light up with holy ardour. He frequently said to the youngsters: 'My dear boys, if you want to be truly happy, love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with all your hearts'."¹

Although Don Bosco's eucharistic doctrine did not have the ecclesial breadth of Vatican II (it obviously depended on the theology of the time), we can see very well what a living reality the Eucharist was for him, the true and living presence of the

¹BM IV, 317

risen Christ under the sign of bread; and the eucharistic table and the tabernacle are still at the present day the places where one can have a real and vital meeting with him. Through communion Don Bosco lived a strong and tender concrete relationship with Christ, and wanted his boys to have the same love: "How happy I would be if I could kindle in you a spark of this great love for Mary and for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament... To do so I would be willing to crawl and lick the ground from here to Superga".²

With this brief look back to our Founder, we are now in a better position to understand the text of the article.

The action on the community of Christ in the Eucharist

The eucharistic celebration is called by the Council "the source and summit of all preaching of the Gospel... the centre of the assembly of the faithful", "the centre and culmination of the entire life of the christian community".³ "However, no christian community is built up which does not grow from and hinge on the celebration of the most holy Eucharist; from this all education for community spirit must begin".⁴

With all the more reason can these strong expressions be applied to a community of religious apostles. With the Eucharist the salesian community receives two fundamental benefits: it is rebuilt in Christ in fraternal communion, and it finds in him the enthusiasm for renewed apostolic commitment. Two brief explanatory phrases, but pregnant with meaning.

With the Eucharist the community "*Celebrates the paschal mystery*", the mystery which was said in art. 85 to have given rise to the Church itself. The death of Christ has destroyed all divisions, and his new life in the Spirit is the principle of deep unity among those who are saved. By celebrating the Eucharist the salesian community truly celebrates the Act of redeeming love which was and always remains the source of its unity.

Moreover, the community "*unites itself to the immolated body of Christ*": to be united to the eucharistic Body of Christ means to be inserted in his mystical Body, according to the great doctrine of St Paul⁵ union with Christ implies communion between ourselves in him. The concrete nature of the sacrament makes the assertion of art. 85 shine in all its splendour; God it is "who keeps our community united", and the Body of his Son continually rebuilds it, in the measure of the living faith of the participants, stimulated by fraternal charity.

² BM VII, 410; on the eucharistic doctrine of Don Bosco, cf. also J. AUBRY, *L'Eucaristia nella prassi salesiana in "Rinnovare la nostra vita salesiana"* LDC Turin 1981, vol I, p. 176

³ Cf. PO 5; CD 30. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Consilium* applies these expressions to the liturgy itself, of which the heart is the Eucharist: "The liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows: (SC 10), as is recalled in C 36

⁴ PO 6

⁵ "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is of one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10, 16-17)

constructing the community it is precisely the Eucharist that is the fundamental and decisive instrument, the 'sign and cause, of that unity, both the leaven and what unity demands. It is, in other words, the sign of that unity which is the goal of our life. It is this however in the measure in which in reality we already live and dedicate ourselves to the task of reaching communion with each other. Only to this extent is the sacrament also a 'cause' of unity".⁶

But in the celebration of the Eucharist, the salesian community *opens itself energetically to apostolic horizons* and nourishes, as well as fraternal charity, its pastoral charity too. The SGC says once again: "The Eucharist is the point of departure and point of arrival of all the community's apostolic activity".⁷ In offering the paschal mystery it takes into its own hands the concrete existence of youngsters and of the faithful in general, to transform them in the offering of Christ to the glory of the Father. Communicating in the Body of Christ, the members take to themselves the Good Shepherd who has given his life for his sheep, and prepare to immolate themselves for the good of the young, becoming themselves too in this way the bread which saves and gives life.⁸

Active participation of the community in the Eucharist

But the extent of these wonderful fruits is governed by the living faith of the "celebrants". This faith is already invoked indirectly in the first paragraph, where the Eucharist is spoken of as a *"daily festive celebration in a living liturgy"*. Is there here, perhaps, a contradiction in terms? Can a feast remain a feast if it is celebrated every day? What is meant here is that the Eucharist must be celebrated as the festive moment of each day, in the conviction of its quite extraordinary value. It calls, therefore, for an intimate preparation, for an attentive and loving heart. Externally too it calls for a style of celebration which helps to stimulate faith. A 'living liturgy' is one which rejects routine, which every day finds space for creative freedom while always remaining faithful to the Church's rites, which allows every individual to participate actively. The time given to deep and intensive thanksgiving for the gift received is a sign of love and of the beginning of that constant contact with Christ which will be prolonged throughout the day.

In the community, united as a family around the Eucharist, particular significance attaches to *concelebration*, recommended by the Constitutions. This offers the possibility for a "living liturgy", directly linked to the communal aspect of the eucharistic mystery. Concelebration manifests, in fact, a triple unity: *"the unity of the sacrifice"*, since the Masses celebrated by different priests are all the one sacrifice of Christ (the only thing multiplied is the sacramental rite); *"the unity of the priesthood"*, since the different priests are nothing else than efficacious signs of the one High Priest

⁶SGC, 543

⁷ibid.

⁸"By being nourished with Christ's Body, priests share in the charity of him who gives himself as food to the faithful" (PO 13)

who offers his sacrifice (all that is multiplied is the sacramental re-actualization); and "*the unity of the community*", gathered around the same altar for one and the same celebration, in which each one plays the priestly role (ministerial or common) which is properly his.

This community may nevertheless be thought of at two levels: the salesian community alone, whose members all commit themselves anew to the same task and, better still, the community extended to include youngsters and others; around the altar the salesian community then appears as a body united for the service of a group of believers within a wider ecclesial community.

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ART. 89 THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST IN TIME

The Liturgy of the Hours extends the grace of the eucharistic mystery throughout the day.¹

The community, united to Christ and to the Church, praises and makes supplication to the Father, nourishes its union with him² and maintains an attentive attitude to the divine will. Without prejudice to the obligations assumed by clerics at their ordination,³ the community celebrates Lauds as morning prayer and Vespers as evening prayer with the dignity and fervour that Don Bosco recommended.

Sunday is the day of Easter joy. Lived in apostolic activity, piety and cheerfulness, it reinvigorates the salesian's confidence and optimism.

The commemoration of the mysteries of the Lord, as they occur in the liturgical year, makes of our life a time of salvation in hope.⁴

¹ cf. IGLH 10,12

² cf. LG 3

³ cf. CIC, can. 1174,1

⁴ cf. SC 102

Art. 89 sets out the manner in which the salesian community takes part in the liturgical life of the Church according to the daily, weekly and yearly rhythms. The whole of cosmic time and history is sanctified in this way, i.e. is offered to the glory of the Father and used to communicate to us Christ's salvation.

Daily rhythm: the Liturgy of the Hours

The opening phrase serves to connect this article with the preceding one, and shows how the Liturgy of the Hours is linked with the central mystery of the Eucharist. The phrase is taken from a Council text¹ and from an expression in the "General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours": "The Liturgy of the Hours extends to the different hours of the day the praise and prayer, the memorial of the mysteries of salvation and the foretaste of heavenly glory, which are offered to us in the eucharistic mystery, the centre and culmination of the whole life of the Christian community".² But the Instruction makes clear that it is in itself also an excellent preparation for the fruitful celebration of the Eucharist.

The salesian community, deeply inserted as it is in the Church of which it is a living part, by the visible expression of the mystery of its total consecration to God (cf. C 85), enters quite naturally into the liturgical prayer of the divine Office, and endeavours to understand in faith its divine grandeur: "it is the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father".³ The spiritual advantage that derives

¹ PO 5

² "Instructio Generalis Liturgiae Horarum" (IGLH), 25 March 1971, n. 12

³ SC 84

from this "praise and supplication to the Father" consists in progress in a loving communion with him⁴ and in active fidelity to his will.

One thing should be very clear: the Liturgy of the Hours is not something reserved to priests or contemplatives. It is the official prayer of all the People of God. We need only note (as indeed the article itself does with regard to clerics) that some members of the Church receive an explicit mandate to celebrate it in the name of all: they are deacons, priests, and orders of canons, monks and nuns who are bound by law or their constitutions to choral office;⁵ but this does not mean that they pray *instead* of all others. "The prayer of the Hours is proposed to all the faithful, even to those who are not bound by law to recite it".⁶ In the case of religious, the Council is precise: "Any religious who in virtue of their constitutions recite parts of the divine office, are thereby joining in the public prayer of the Church".⁷ Finally it should be noted that "although the private prayer of members of the Church is always necessary,... community prayer has a special dignity (Mt 18,20)". "Celebration in common shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of the Liturgy of the Hours. ... Therefore whenever possible communal celebration is to be preferred to individual and quasi-private celebration".⁸

These notes will be useful for a full understanding of the constitutional norms (made more specific in art. 70 of the General Regulations): "Without prejudice to the obligations assumed by clerics at their ordination, the community celebrates Lauds as morning prayer and Vespers as evening prayer". Why Lauds and Vespers? Because "by the venerable tradition of the universal Church, Lauds and Vespers are the two hinges on which the daily office turns and are to be celebrated as such".⁹

The verb used both here and in the Regulations should be noted. The Hours are "*celebrated*" and not simply "recited": even though there may be only rarely a "*celebrant*" who presides, they are always celebrated because of their character as "prayer of the Church".

The concluding phrase of the paragraph is an encouragement to carry out the celebration with "dignity and fervour", even when there is no special solemnity. We know that Don Bosco wanted prayer to be "complete", i.e. that it should have the double characteristics of external dignity and internal fervour: each of these should contribute to the other. But Don Bosco's recommendation referred to here was in fact more precise: in an article of the first Constitutions he asked for a "clear, devout and distinct pronounciation of the words of the divine office", and he presented this as a salesian characteristic.¹⁰

⁴ Union with the Father rather than with Christ, as the note suggests which refers us to LG3, where union with Christ is presented as a fruit of the Eucharist

⁵ Cf. SC 95-96; IGLH 28-32

⁶ Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Laudis canticum*, 1 Nov. 1970, n. 8; cf. SC 100 (participation of the laity) and IGLH 32

⁷ SC 98

⁸ IGLH 9, 33; cf. IGLH 20-27

⁹ SC 89 and IGLH 37-40 explain at length the precise and rich significance of Lauds and Vespers

¹⁰ Cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, XIII, 2 (cf. F. MOTTO, p.183)

In this context it may be helpful to recall that art. 70 of the Regulations adds: "Other prayers may be substituted according to circumstances". Far from being a contradiction of the general norm expressed above, this specification emphasizes the importance of daily prayer also for those in particular circumstances (for instance those who are sick) who are not able to celebrate Lauds and Vespers; with other forms of prayer they unite themselves with the praying community offering with them their own sacrifice of praise.

Weekly and yearly rhythm: Sundays and the liturgical year

The third paragraph invites the salesian to celebrate fervently *Sunday*, "*the day of Easter joy*", because it is the day of Christ's resurrection and of the Christian assembly, "the original feast day", as the Council calls it.¹¹ For the salesian it is usually a day of heavy work, often different from his ordinary work during the week; deeply "apostolic" work in contact with the young and the people. Here, in the manner of celebrating Sunday, is an appropriate place for the application of the typically salesian trilogy: "*Work, piety, cheerfulness*", and we can understand how Sunday, lived in such a climate, can give us a taste of the fruits of Christ's paschal mystery, and can contribute especially to the fostering in our heart of the optimism and joy described in the chapter on the salesian spirit (cf. C 17).

The final paragraph broadens the horizon to the entire *liturgical year* and refers us to the Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican II. The best commentary on the constitutional article is the text of the Council itself: "In the course of the year, Holy Mother Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ ... By recalling the mysteries of the redemption, she opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with saving grace".¹²

We may say in conclusion that the salesian will live his liturgical life fervently and efficaciously, be it daily, weekly or yearly, to the extent that he is conscious of his role of initiating the young to this same life, as art. 36 of the Constitutions reminds us: "With them we celebrate the encounter with Christ".

¹¹ SC 106

¹² SC 102

*God our Father;
may the praise of your holy name fill our
days, and mark the rhythm of our whole
existence, in union with your holy Church
spread throughout time and space.*

*Grant that as seasons and years go by
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ART. 90 THE COMMUNITY IN CONTINUAL CONVERSION

The Word of God calls us to continual conversion.

Aware of our weakness, we respond by vigilance and sincere repentance, brotherly correction, mutual forgiveness and the calm acceptance of our daily cross.

This commitment to conversion on the part of each member and of the whole community is brought to its fulfilment by the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Prepared by the daily examination of conscience and received frequently according to the Church's directives, this sacrament gives us the joy of the Father's pardon, rebuilds brotherly communion, and purifies our apostolic intentions.

We have reached the third group of articles in this chapter. Articles 90 and 91 concentrate on a characteristic aspect of Christian and religious life, enlightened by the Word and sanctified by living contact with the Person and mysteries of the Saviour: conversion. This is presented as a permanent requirement, which is nevertheless expressed with particular emphasis in the sacramental act and at certain other times in functions organized for the purpose. In this way we find repeated to a certain extent, for conversion, the tripartite scheme of articles 87-89: Word, Sacrament, History.

The Word "*Conversion*" is used in both these articles. What exactly does it mean? It might be thought that a generally faithful religious is already converted, and needs only to make progress. But Scripture, the Church, and human experience itself, tell him that sin still finds its way into his life: he needs purification and penance for the purpose of attaining a greater and more authentic love. An expression of the conciliar decree "*Presbyterorum ordinis*", which partly underlies the article, may be enlightening as regards this process: "The repeated sacramental act of penance, prepared for by a daily examination of conscience, is a powerful incentive to the essential turning of the heart to the love of the Father of mercies".¹ It is a matter of *turning towards the love* of God and one's fellow men, of passing from a negative to a positive attitude, and maybe still more of passing from an uncertain, meagre and insufficient kind of love to one that is firmer and more generous: a task that never comes to an end!

The Constitutions outline a programme of the efforts needed for this kind of penitential process, and indicate its main recurring points. Some practices are needed continually, some "daily", others "frequently", still others (as will be said in the following article) "monthly" and "annually".

Art. 90 has four paragraphs and two parts: the first two paragraphs define the permanent "commitment to conversion", while the third and fourth refer to the sacramental act of Reconciliation.

¹ PO 18

Through his Word, God calls man to continual conversion, as is well explained in the "Ordo Paenitentiae".² At the same time this Word appraises us and never ceases to make us aware of our responsibility and our sin, to invite us to conversion and penance, and to reveal the mercy of God who is always ready to forgive us and set us off once again on the road of reconciliation and love.

To this Word "we respond", both individually in the knowledge of our own weakness, and as a community before the sometimes frightening demands of the common life (patience, mutual tolerance and forgiveness, the struggle against individualism, as was said in speaking of articles 51 and 52). It is a matter of the daily rebuilding of what is destroyed by our selfishness and forgetfulness.

Five points are recommended as elements of an attitude for continual conversion:³

- *vigilance* (already mentioned in connection with art. 18 as a guard for the heart and for self-mastery), which presupposes awareness of one's innate weakness and leads to trusting abandonment in the hands of the Father;
- sincere *repentance*, implying the will to correct oneself;
- acceptance of one's *daily cross*, a delicately salesian means of expiation in the line of "work and temperance" according to the expression of art. 18: "he accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life";
- *mutual forgiveness and brotherly correction*, which are also indicated by art. 51 and 52 as means for the continual rebuilding of communion;
- *communal penance* on Fridays and during Lent, following art. 73 of the General Regulations.

This ensemble of elements is more than enough for ensuring that the individual salesian and the community are able to undertake a very efficacious penitential process.

The sacrament of Reconciliation

The expression used in the text should be noted: all this penitential commitment is "brought to fulfilment" by the sacrament, just as is brought to fulfilment the enlightening and transforming action of God started by the Word. Through his mystery and in the name of his Father, Christ the Saviour intervenes visibly to lift up and purify the penitent disciple, who on his side expresses the full

² "The sacrament of Penance should begin with a hearing of God's word, because through his word God calls men to repentance and leads them to a true conversion of heart" ("*Ordo Paenitentiae*", n. 24; cf. also n. 1)

³ The "*Ordo Paenitentiae*" speaks of penitential attitudes in the life of the Church in these terms: "The people of God accomplish and perfect this continual repentance in many different ways. They share in the sufferings of Christ by enduring their own difficulties, carry out works of mercy and charity, and adopt ever more fully the outlook of the gospel message; thus they become in the world a sign of conversion to God" (n. 4)

awareness of his sin, his desire for conversion to a more realistic love, and his welcoming acceptance of reconciliation with God and with his brothers. On the level of endeavour for conversion, the sacrament has the quality of "source" and "summit" that was attributed to the Eucharist on the level of overall Christian life.

From this perspective follow two fundamental and complementary truths. On the one hand the "sacrament of penance" will have little sense or efficacy in a life that is not repentant; and on the other a penitent life which never or rarely makes use of the sacrament will have little support or strength for its relaunching. The two aspects are mutually dependent on each other.

The expression: "this commitment to conversion on the part of each member and whole community", not only emphasizes the communal dimension of the penitential process, but also fits in well with the two forms of the celebration of Reconciliation, individual and communal, with appropriate frequency.

The text points particularly to the fruits resulting from the sacrament; there are three main ones and they touch on the salesian's triple relationship with God and Father, with his brothers, and with the young.

The first, as is only appropriate, is "*the joy of the Father's pardon*", the unfathomable experience of his infinitely patient and merciful love. The cheerfulness to which the salesian bears witness and which he spreads around him (cf. C 17) has its firm foundation in the sacramental encounter with the Father.

The second is the *rebuilding of brotherly communion*, because "those who approach the sacrament of Penance... are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins;⁴ they are therefore disposed for forgiveness and for growth in brotherly love.

And the third is the *purification of our apostolic intentions*: by self-detachment, so as to be converted to the Father, the penitent salesian is ready for a better service of God's glory in a more authentic service of the young; the gift of reconciliation impels him along the road of a more living and loving apostolate!

Finally the Rule tells us that this sacrament should be "*received frequently according to the Church's directives*". A decree of the Congregation for Religious interpreted this as "twice a month", keeping in mind however the "due freedom" asked for by the Council.⁵ In deciding the frequency each one will take into account the amplitude of the penitential area in which he is involved; he will therefore have a programme appropriate to his own spiritual endeavour and the asceticism of his daily life, and will give importance to spiritual direction; but at the same time he will be awake to the teaching and example of Don Bosco and the living tradition he has left us.

We cannot conclude without a further reference to our Founder, for whom the process of continual conversion, the effort to defeat sin and be ever more closely

⁴ LG 11

⁵ Cf. *Dum canonicarum legum*, CRIS 8.12.1970, AAS 63 (1971), p. 318

confirmed to the divine model, were essential features not only of his own holiness, but also of the kind of holiness he proposed to his boys.

We have already seen, in commenting on various articles of the Constitutions, the ascetical commitment lived and proposed by Don Bosco: the asceticism of work and temperance (cf. C 18), the asceticism imposed by a poor life in imitation of Jesus Christ (cf. C 72 and 75), and especially the asceticism connected with obedience and the daily fulfilment of one's duty (cf. C 18, 71).

But it is in the sacrament of Penance, in the encounter with the forgiving Lord, that all penitential efforts find their fulfilment. Don Bosco can be called a true apostle of Confession as a divine means for the salvation of souls. We recall how often he spoke about this sacrament (it was a very frequent topic of the so-called "word in the ear" which he used to say to his boys), but especially we remember the example of his priestly life dedicated to the ministry of hearing confessions.⁶

For Don Bosco, Penance with the Eucharist formed one of the columns on which his preventive system was based⁷, and the sure way to holiness. "*Do you want to become saints?*", he once asked a group of boys; "*here is the secret. Confession is the lock; confidence in your confessor is the key. This is how you open heavens gates*".⁸ The biographies he wrote of some of the Oratory boys, Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone, are all a hymn of praise to Confession as a road to holiness.⁹

With regard to the frequency of the meeting with our Lord in the sacrament of Penance, we may recall what Don Bosco once said in a Good Night: "If you care but little for your soul, go once a month; if you want to save your soul but are not too eager about it, go every other week; if you want to aim at perfection, go every week. Do not go more often than that unless your conscience bothers you".¹⁰

⁶ Don Bosco's biographer emphasizes that the ministry of hearing confessions was one of the things he never renounced at the Oratory; cf. BM XIV, 86. On Don Bosco as a confessor, cf. also E. CERIA, "*Don Bosco con Dio*", chap. X

⁷ Cf. D. BOSCO, *The preventive system in the education of the young*, II (Appendix 1984 Constitutions, p. 249); cf. also BM II 412, 119 ff.

⁸ BM VII, 37

⁹ At the end of his life of Dominic Savio we read: "Do not fail to imitate him by frequent confession, because this was his mainstay in his constant practice of virtue, and it led him securely to such a glorious end. While we live let us approach this healing bath often and with proper dispositions" (cf. OE XI, p. 286)

¹⁰ BM XII, 415

*God our Father,
we carry the inestimable treasure of your life in earthenware vessels,
marked as we are by weakness and sin.*

*Help us to hear your voice
calling us to continual conversion,
and grant that we may respond with vigilance,
sincere repentance,
and generous brotherly forgiveness.*

*Reconciled to you through the Passion of Christ
by means of the sacrament of Penance,
may we grow in purity and holiness
and, together with our young people
be welcomed to your fatherly embrace.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 91 OPPORTUNE TIMES FOR RENEWAL

Our will for conversion is strengthened in the monthly recollection and in the annual retreat. These are occasions of spiritual renewal which Don Bosco considered the fundamental part and the synthesis of all the practices of piety.¹

For the community and for every salesian these are privileged moments for listening to the Word of God, discerning his will and purifying our hearts.

These times of grace restore to our spirit a deep unity in the Lord Jesus and keep alive in us the expectation of his return.

¹ cf. C 1875, (Introduction). p. xxxiv

This article is directly connected with the previous one and presents a third element in the penitential process: they are the significant times for spiritual renewal each month and each year, i.e. the monthly and annual retreats.

It should be noticed that the Constitutions deal with these in connection with the personal and community efforts at "continual conversion", as special times of spiritual revival or renewal, and as particular "times of grace".

The life of the salesian, like that of every apostle immersed in daily activity, is subject to the risk of superficiality and the ravages of time: it is easy to let oneself get over-involved in mechanical activity and never find the necessary time for a pause for deeper thought and contemplation. Every month on the day of retreat, and every year in the spiritual exercises, the community provides time for a spiritual pause, for the purpose of recharging the batteries of the spirit and relaunching it in apostolic service. It is the Lord who invites his followers to "come away by themselves and rest awhile" (cf. Mk 6,31) in greater intimacy with him.

The Rule invites us to give importance to these significant times of the spirit; any temptation to convert them into days of study or discussion must be resisted. Their purpose could not be clearer: it consists first and foremost in *listening (as individuals and as a community) to the Word of God* (cf. C 87), which enables the Lord's will to be discerned for the present moment and his call to conversion to be heard, and consequently in accepting this conversion, i.e. in the *purification of the heart*, made especially through a carefully prepared confession made with living faith. It will be remembered that the previous article ended with a reference to the purifying effect of Reconciliation.

The importance of the monthly and annual retreats was strongly emphasized by Don Bosco. The article refers explicitly to the text of the Introduction to the Constitutions where our Founder says: "The fundamental practice of piety which in some way embraces them all, consists in making the spiritual retreat each year and the Exercise for a Happy Death every month... It is my belief that the salvation of a religious may justly be said to be assured, if he approaches the sacraments every month and puts his conscience in order as if he were really about to leave this life for

eternity".¹ Don Bosco repeated the same thing in other circumstances too. For instance, he once wrote to a cleric: "Never omit the exercise for a happy death once a month, to examine *quid sit addendum, quid corrigendum, quid tollendum, ut sis bonus miles Christi* (what needs to be added, what corrected, what taken away to be a good soldier of Christ)".² Very striking is Don Bosco's insistent recommendation to missionaries to be faithful to this exercise, because in their busy life they have great need of a periodic pause for verification and renewal. In a letter to Don Cagliero in 1876 he wrote: "When you make contact with the confreres, recommend them to never omit the monthly exercise for a happy death. It is the key to everything".³

The annual retreat too takes on special importance for the spiritual progress of the individual and the community. Don Bosco did not hesitate to say: "The spiritual exercises can be called the support of religious congregations and the treasure of those who take part in them".⁴ In the first draft of the Regulations for Retreats he had written: "Our own humble society is indebted to them for its great development, and many of its members acknowledge some retreat as being the beginning of a better life".⁵

The article concludes by recalling that the finest fruit of these retreats is the possibility they offer the salesian for unequivocal renewal of his "fundamental option" by putting once again at the centre of his life and whole being the Lord Jesus and His service, and finding in Him with greater vigour the deep unity of his own spirit. In this light can be well understood two further points of Don Bosco: the most decisive act of both the monthly and the annual retreat is the meeting with Christ the Saviour in the two sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist; and secondly the perspective which stimulates the fervour of the salesian is that of the passage of time (*the monthly retreat is called "exercise for a happy death"*):⁶ death will be for each one the Lord's return and the full and definitive meeting with him.

Let us make the best possible use of the time that remains to us to love and serve him with all our strength!

¹ *Introduction to Constitutions* cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 240

² Letter to cleric Thomas Pentore, 15 August 1878, cf. *Collected letters*, Vol III, 381

³ Letter to D. Cagliero, 1 August 1876, *Collected letters*, III, 81; cf. also Souvenir to first missionaries and letters to Don Remotti (IV, 9-10), and to clerics Joseph Quaranta (IV. 10) and Bartholomew Pannaro (IV, 12)

⁴ Regulations for Retreat, approved by GC3, Introduction

⁵ SCA, ms. 23223 (*Fondo Don Bosco*, n. 1942)

⁶ In living salesian tradition, the monthly pause was always called "exercise for a happy death". Don Bosco presented it under this title and so it was called in the first edition of the Constitutions; in the approved text of 1875, however it appears under the simple name of "spiritual retreat" (cf. F. Motto, p. 187). The GC22 chose the current modern terminology ("monthly retreat"), which recalls Christ's invitation to draw aside to spend some time with him. It is clear however that new name covers the substance of all that Don Bosco included in the "exercise for a happy death"

*In your mercy, Father,
you continually renew for us times and moments
in which to meet your Word and Love.
Help us to accept them as times of grace
for deepening our contact with you,
for a better discernment of your will,
and to purify our minds and hearts
as we attentively await the return of your Christ.
He lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

ART. 92 MARY IN THE LIFE AND PRAYER OF THE SALESIAN

Mary, Mother of God, holds a unique place in the history of salvation.

She is a model of prayer and pastoral love, the teacher of wisdom and guide of our Family.

We contemplate and imitate her faith, her concern for the needy, her fidelity at the hour of the cross, and her joy at the wonders wrought by the Father.

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.

We develop a strong filial devotion to her. We recite the rosary each day and celebrate her feasts to encourage a more convinced and personal imitation.

The Constitutions have already spoken of the special presence of Mary in the life and mission of the Society (cf. especially C 1, 8, 9). In the present article Mary is presented in the prayer-life of the salesian. She is not only the object of our devotion, but she teaches us how to pray and how to live our apostolic consecration to the full.

The article should be read in the light of the Constitution of Vatican II on the Sacred Liturgy, which says: "In considering the annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, Holy Church honours the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, with a special love. She is inseparably linked with her son's saving work. In her the Church admires and exalts the most excellent fruit of redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be".¹ This text, so dense and wonderful, lets us understand how the mystery of Mary is intimately linked with the mystery of Christ. The presence of Mary in our life is a fact which forms part of our Christian vocation, and our devotion is a permanent attitude, even though it reaches a peak on her feasts.

Art. 92 has to be tied in with all our christian and salesian history. Our devotion to Mary does not depend on sentimental feelings, but on the lucidity of our faith. It is a recognition of objective facts (dealt with in the first three paragraphs of the article), and the response we make to them (the last two paragraphs).

Mary's initiative and significance as an example

The first three paragraphs bring together those aspects of the figure of Mary which attract us most as christians and salesians, and constitute the foundation of our devotion to her.

As christians we recognize that Mary, through God's good pleasure, "holds a unique place in the history of salvation" and in the building of the Church through the centuries, a place perfectly described in synthesis in the final chapter of the Constitution "Lumen gentium". In her quality as the first of the redeemed and the first

¹SC 103

christian, Mary is presented to us as the most perfect model after Christ himself, and hence we find in her the most effective model of sanctity.

In a synthesis which follows the principal events in Mary's life, the Constitutions put forward the attitudes which we must "contemplate" and "imitate" in her:

- *her faith* (cf. C 34), i.e. the way in which she "welcomed the Word and pondered it in her heart (already pointed out in art. 87): this truth takes us to the Annunciation and the "fiat" of the "handmaid of the Lord";
- *her "joy at the wonders wrought by the Father"*, which takes us to the "Magnificate";
- *her "concern for the needy"*: we think of her at the Visitation and at the marriage at Cana;
- *her "fidelity at the hour of the cross"*, the decisive moment of her participation in the salvation of the world: "Standing by the cross of Jesus was his Mother" (1925).

As *Salesians*, we recognize in Mary other features more explicitly linked with our vocation.

- she is the *teacher of wisdom and guide of our Family*: here we go back to Don Bosco's dream at the age of nine ("I will give you a Teacher under whose guidance you will learn to be wise")², and to the content of art. 8;
- she is the *model of prayer and of pastoral charity* who invites us to realize in ourselves the "tireless industry, made holy by prayer and union with God" which is one of our characteristics, as will be said in art. 95; she is in fact the mother of a family and an active disciple of her Son;
- we remember too what was said in art. 34: "The Virgin Mary is present as a mother" in the journey of our youngsters towards Christ; she "helps and infuses hope".

All this forms part of Don Bosco's spiritual experience. As we have already said in the commentary on art. 8, Don Bosco felt the presence of the Virgin Mary in his life and work as *a living motherly presence, and a powerful helper*.

That Mary most Holy was for Don Bosco a living presence is repeatedly borne out in the Biographical Memoirs. From his dream at the age of nine to the complete realization of all he had seen in that dream, Mary was at Don Bosco's side. She showed him the way to prepare himself for his mission,³ she guided his steps in the early stages of his work,⁴ she pointed out exactly the spot where the work would find a permanent site;⁵ she revealed to him the way in which the work would develop,⁶ she showed him how to find collaborators,⁷ and also how to ensure that they stayed with

²BM I, 95

³Cf. BM I, 96

⁴Cf. BM. II, 190-191

⁵Cf. BM. II, 335

⁶Cf. BM. II, 232-234

⁷Cf. BM. II, 190-191

him;⁸ she again it was who showed him the style and method of a formation which prepared them for the mission among youth⁹ and at the same time let him see the immense field of work destined for the zeal of his sons.¹⁰ Don Bosco's conviction of the living presence of Mary in the Oratory and in every house of the salesians and FMA is shown by the moving words he repeated insistently to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in his last visit to Nizza Monferrato: "The Madonna is really here, here in your midst! She walks around in this house and covers it with her mantle"¹¹

This presence of Mary in Don Bosco's house was perceived as the *presence of a Mother*. She was the Mother of the Oratory and of all the boys there: this is how she was always invoked. Don Bosco's biographies of some of the youngsters, and of Dominic Savio in particular, make this very clear. Significant too is the prayer which arose spontaneously from his heart after the death of Mamma Margaret, when he poured out his grief at the feet of the Blessed Virgin in the Sanctuary of the Consolata: "Most compassionate Virgin, my sons and I are without a mother! Please be our mother from now on".¹² Even on his deathbed Don Bosco invoked Mary under her name of Mother: "Mother, Mother... Mary most Holy, Mary, Mary...".¹³

Finally it can never be forgotten that Mary is presented as a *Mother most Powerful, Helper of the Church* and of every Christian in his pilgrimage towards the Lord. In this way devotion to Mary becomes, together with the Eucharist, one of the two columns on which the Church and the world can rely: "Believe me, my dear sons, I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that frequent Communion is a solid column upon which one pole of the world rests; devotion to Our Lady is the column which supports the other pole".¹⁴

The response of our devotion

Our response to Mary is an ample one: it is a matter of accepting her presence in our life, of taking this Mother "into our own home", as did the apostle John: it is an integral part, says the Rector Major, of the "Salesian phenomenon in the Church", "an essential part of our charism".¹⁵

From the contemplation of Mary in the two mysteries most frequently referred to in our traditions ("*Mary Immaculate*" and "*Mary Help of Christians*"), we draw two series of benefits. Because she is Immaculate, consecrated by God and completely docile to him, "she leads us to the fullness of our offering to the Lord", especially by means of the evangelical counsels. As Queen of the apostles and *Help of Christians*, at the service of the extension of the Kingdom of her Son, she is a stimulus to us too to

⁸ Cf. BM. II, 232-234

⁹ Cf. BM III, 25-27

¹⁰ Cf. MB XVIII, 73-74

¹¹ MB XVII, 557

¹² BM V, 374

¹³ Cf. MB XVIII, 537; cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, LAS Rome 1969, p. 175

¹⁴ BM VII, 352; cf. BM VII, 354

¹⁵ E. VIGANO *Mary renews the Salesian Family*, ASC 289 (1978), p. 29

fulfil our apostolic mission in favour of our fellow men. Our love for Mary therefore is not a kind of emotional compensation, nor is it an encouragement to the practice of hidden virtues; it is deeply inherent in our vocation as apostles and an element of our zeal in regard to the young people who are her children.

Our devotion to Mary, solidly based on these motives we have set out, is also manifested in acts and attitudes which express joy at having received from the Lord the gift of his Mother. The Constitutions specify that our devotion to her is "strong" and "filial", which not only implies our tenderness to her who is the "Mother most amiable", but also our courage in imitating her in her complete dedication to the will of God.

But external expressions of devotion must not be overlooked, at either individual or community level. The text recalls some of these.

The Marian feasts occurring in the liturgy are excellent occasions for showing our love for Mary¹⁶ and for "making her known and loved" (C 34). Art. 74 of the Regulations recalls some salesian practices: the commemoration of the 24th of the month, the concluding prayer to the daily meditation, and the frequent use of the Blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

On the personal level each one has his own way of responding according to his spiritual sensitivity, using the forms he likes best, which however should always lead to a convinced imitation of Mary's virtues.

To this end the daily recital of the Rosary is of special value, because in it "Mary teaches her sons how to unite themselves with the mysteries of Christ". This has always been a precious family tradition in Don Bosco's houses.¹⁷

*Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church,
we believe that you hold a unique place
in the history of salvation,
and that you are the teacher and guide of our Family.*

*We contemplate with joy and want to imitate
your faith and docility to the Lord
your gratitude for the wonders wrought by the Father,
your pastoral charity
and your fidelity at the hour of the cross.*

¹⁶ Cf. LG 67

¹⁷ Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, 1974, 42-55. After emphasizing the "gospel inspiration" of the Rosary, its "christological orientation" and its contemplative dimension, tilt: Pope speaks of the relationship between the liturgy and the Rosary. About the family aspect of this prayer, he says: "We like to think, and sincerely hope, that when the family gathering becomes a time of prayer the Rosary is a frequent and favoured manner of prayer" (n. 54)

*We entrust ourselves to you with filial love:
as the Immaculate Conception
you educate us to the fullness of self-donation,
as the Help of Christians
you give us courage and confidence
in the service of the people of God.*

*We ask you O Holy Virgin,
to continue to protect each one of us,
our congregation and the entire Salesian Family,
and the young people you entrust to our care.*

Art. 93 PERSONAL PRAYER

We can form praying communities only if individually we become men of prayer.

Each one needs to express his own personal and heartfelt way of being a son of God, expressing his gratitude, telling him about his yearnings and his concerns in the apostolate.

For us mental prayer is essential. It strengthens our intimate union with God, saves us from routine, keeps our heart free and fosters our dedication to others. For Don Bosco it is a guarantee of joyous perseverance in our vocation.

In the Introduction to chap. VII of the commentary on the Constitutions it was pointed out that, in developing the content of prayer, there should be present both the communal and personal dimensions.¹ Many of the articles already examined have indicated a certain number of forms of personal prayer, and especially the attitudes that the salesian should cultivate in his own prayer. But this article, and in particular, the first paragraph, emphasizes that the importance of communal prayer, on which in general the previous articles have been insisting, must not cause the need for personal prayer to be overlooked. The two forms are, in fact, mutually dependent on each other. The value of communal prayer renders urgent the fostering of personal prayer, on which the quality of the communal prayer depends: how, indeed, could a group of dead members celebrate a living liturgy? The opening phrase of the article is significant: *"We can form praying communities only if individually we become men of prayer"*.

Nevertheless personal prayer cannot be considered solely in connection with the prayer of the community. It has its own specific importance, which is explained in the second paragraph, while the third deals with one of its essential forms, mental prayer.

The sense of personal prayer

Personal prayer is a response to a need which every salesian, as a man of faith and a religious who has given himself to God, feels deep within himself: the need to go into his own room, shut the door, and pray to his Father in the secrecy of that hidden place, which is nevertheless well known to the Father. These are expressions of Christ himself (cf. Mt 6,6), and have been included in the Council's documents.²

Communal and personal prayer respond to our two aspects as men and sons of God (referred to at the beginning of this chapter). Before our Father in heaven we together form the ecclesial community which he himself has constituted, which he keeps united and which he sends on a mission (cf. C 85); but each of us is one of his sons, unique in a certain sense, a son personally called and loved (cf. C 22), and bearer of a precise responsibility. To pray "in secret" means to express this personal

¹ Cf. Introduction to chap. VII, 6: "Communal prayer and personal prayer", p. 665-666

² Cf. SC 12

way of being a son of God", thanking him for the many gifts he has bestowed; it also means "telling him about the yearnings, and the concerns in the apostolate" which everyone feels within himself in the course of his experiences, successes and failures. The text of the Rule refers, in an incisive manner suitable for an apostle, to the fundamental expressions of christian prayer: *adoration* ("he expresses his own personal way of being a son of God"), *praise and thanksgiving* ("expressing his gratitude"), and *petition* ("telling him about his yearnings and his concerns in the apostolate").

Prayer of this kind is completely spontaneous, and could be called imaginative as well, even though it is true that even personal prayer should be inspired by a liturgical spirit.³

We think of Don Bosco and the simple and spontaneous way in which he prayed, a way he had been taught by Mamma Margaret. With true christian wisdom she saw in creation and daily events the presence of God and this she taught to her sons: "One beautiful starry night, she pointed to the sky and told her children: 'God created the world and adorned it with all those stars; if the sky is so beautiful, what must heaven be like?'. In springtime at the sight of the radiant countryside, a flower-strewn meadow or a rosy dawn, she would exclaim: 'How many beautiful things the Lord has created for us!'. When the harvest was good and abundant, she would say: 'Let us give thanks to the Lord! How good he has been in giving us our daily bread.'⁴ Don Bosco never forgot this style of prayer, and this is what he taught his boys. On the other hand the same Mamma Margaret, speaking to her son who was now a priest, recommended to him the simple prayers of a good christian, saying: "By all means study your Latin and learn your theology, but your mother knows something more than that: she knows you must pray".⁵

If a salesian did not pray in this more personal way, it would mean that he had lost the sense of the deepest mystery in his life: "Lord I know that you love me, that your are calling me, and that I can talk to you". Deep in this prayer there lies the practice of faith, hope and charity.

Mental prayer. Meditation

The third paragraph speaks of *mental prayer*, a form of prayer which has always been held in high esteem throughout the history of christian spirituality: the believer applies his heart and spirit to the mystery of God, and enters into conversation with him, meditating on his Word and contemplating his love; in this way mental prayer becomes an expression of contemplative prayer.

³ Cf. SC 12, 13, 90

⁴ MB I, 35

⁵ MB I, 37

We know that there are many forms of mental prayer, and each individual can find many ways of personal dialogue with God; the "frequent encounters with Christ" present in the Tabernacle, referred to in art. 88, are one example.

Nevertheless, the Rule asks from us a daily form of mental prayer, called by the traditional name of "*meditation*". This is the name it has in art. 71 of the General Regulations, and it corresponds to a form of the "*lectio divina*", to use the expression characteristic of monastic life.

For us Salesians this form of prayer is well and truly based on the example and teaching of Don Bosco. From the words of our Founder, which he wrote himself in the "Memoirs of the Oratory", we can deduce the value he attributed to meditation for his own personal spiritual growth. While still a boy he had been encouraged by Don Calosso to begin meditation, after he had told him of his desire to become a priest: "He recommended me to go frequently to confession and communion, and he taught me how to make a short meditation each day, or better a little spiritual reading".⁶ When he received the cassock, we find among the resolutions in the little rule of life that he drew up on that occasion: "in addition to the ordinary practices of piety, I will never omit a short meditation and some spiritual reading".⁷ Again, among the resolutions he made at his priestly ordination, one was: "I shall set aside some time every day for meditation and spiritual reading".⁸ That Don Bosco later remained faithful to these resolutions in his life of intense priestly activity we do not know from his own hand, but it is quite clear from the evidence of many witnesses, especially in the processes for beatification and canonization, who testified to the habit of mental prayer which had become second nature to him.⁹

We can deduce the importance for his sons that Don Bosco attached to meditation from various passages in the "Biographical Memoirs". For Don Rua, who had been appointed Rector of the College of Mirabello in 1863, he wrote a series of recommendations, among which was: "Every morning a little meditation, and during the day a visit to the Blessed Sacrament".¹⁰ When these recommendations developed into the "Confidential advice to Rectors", Don Bosco wrote more strongly: "Never omit the morning meditation".¹¹ On 26 September 1868, at the conclusion of a retreat, he spoke of the practices of piety and said: "Our daily practices of piety are meditation, spiritual reading, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament and the examination of conscience"; then he went on: "I recommend mental prayer... I assure you that the man of faith who visits the Blessed Sacrament and makes a daily meditation with sincerity of heart will not fall into sin".¹² In a handwritten note containing some retreat schemes, we read some considerations of Don Bosco on the importance of meditation: "Be it long or short, always make it. With a book if possible. Let it be a mirror (says St

⁶ MO, 36

⁷ MO, 88

⁸ MO, 115, note; cf. BM L 385

⁹ Cf. the chapter on prayer in P. BROCARDI, *Don Bosco, profondamente uomo-- profondamente santo*, LAS ROME 1985, p. 96-106

¹⁰ *Collected letters*, vol 1, p. 288

¹¹ cf. BM X, 447 ff.

¹² BM IX, 166f

Niño) in which we can see our vices or lack of virtue... But never omit it. A man without prayer is a man who is lost (St Teresa). It is for the soul what warmth is for the body. Vocal prayer without mental prayer is like a body without a soul".¹³

For his youngsters too Don Bosco suggested a form of meditation suited to their age and condition.¹⁴

From all these indications we can understand why meditation is for us, sons of Don Bosco, an indispensable form of prayer. We must understand well, in the complexity of its content, the significance of that "half an hour" the Rule asks of us (cf. R 71). On the one hand it is true "meditation", which usually begins from a text of Scripture or the day's liturgy: in which case the paragraph can be interpreted as a natural complement to art. 87, where it was said: "With the Sacred Scriptures daily in hand, we welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our heart".¹⁵ Meditation, however, is not limited to reflecting on some Christian truth; even an atheist could get as far as doing that! But because meditation is on the Word of God, it provokes a response from us and becomes *mental prayer*: a prayer without any explicit words, but in intimate dialogue with the heart of God.

It may be thought surprising that while meditation is proposed in an article of the Constitutions entitled "personal prayer", the corresponding article of the Regulations asks us to make it in common (R 71). In reality it is a question of prayer which always remains personal, but which takes place in a communal setting. This is in line with our tradition: in the majority of our communities the daily timetable is arranged to ensure that the confreres have the necessary space for this "essential" prayer by the provision of a suitable place and time. This is a norm dictated by practical salesian common sense. On the other hand it should be remembered that meditation is not the only form of personal mental prayer.

The text also includes a description of some of the purposes and advantages of this kind of prayer. It mentions three of them.

The first and most obvious one concerns our relationship with Christ and with the Father: "*It strengthens our intimate union with God*". Here can be directly applied everything that has been said about personal prayer in general. All authentic love needs periods of close intimacy, and this is impossible unless a certain amount of time is available.

¹³ MB IX, 007

¹⁴ On this point, cf. "*Quaderni di spiritualità salesiana*", n. 2 "Meditation", Institute of Spirituality UPS, September 1985, p. 17 ff.

¹⁵ It should be kept in mind that the "Word of God" is found not only in the Bible, but also in the authentic magisterium of the Church and of the Congregation, in the works of the Fathers and Masters of the spiritual life, whose books foster spiritual growth. Underlying all these is the inspiration of the Word of God. But for this Word to be life-giving it must be absorbed interiorly through the process which the masters of the spiritual life expressed in the following terms which are strictly linked with one another: *lectio, meditatio* or '*ruminatio*' *oratio, contemplatio*; i.e. what is needed is a meditated reading of a text followed by its interior assimilation: this leads to its expression in prayer, and (often) contemplation

prayer *"fosters our dedication to others"*. Deep love in fact blossoms out into dedication to others: one who converses with the Lord is always more docile and available for his service.

Between these two effects, the text inserts another, which it puts second and concerns our state of mind and style of life: prayer keeps us alive. The two expressions used (*"saves us from routine"*, *"keeps our heart free"*) help us to be aware of a great danger that exists. In the course of the day, under the pressure of work and fatigue, our heart can lose its enthusiasm, love can become weaker, and we can drift into mechanical habits; and from that point it is a short step to mediocrity. Personal prayer gives us a breathing space and arouses us again; it enables us to go ahead once more in creative freedom. Anyone who has once understood this will never again want to leave it aside!

To all this we can add a fatherly and practical thong from Don Bosco: meditation faithfully practised enables us to press on with joy, and so becomes a guarantee of our perseverance.

But one of the most characteristic sayings of our Founder on this point, as also the famous art. 155 of the former Constitutions (on how to make up for it if one is unable to make the meditation), enables us to understand another of our Founder's convictions; meditation opens the salesian to the spirit of prayer which should pervade his entire day and animate all his work, encouraging him to work only for the glory of God. This is the perspective for the third kind of salesian prayer: alongside vocal and mental prayer there are ejaculatory prayers, which help to transform the whole of life into prayer, as will be said in the last article of the chapter (C 95).¹⁶

*I ask you, Father,
to incite in me a deep desire
to speak personally with you
through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.
Help me to express in my words
the joy of being your son,
and grant that I may find in meeting with you
support for my apostolic life,
so as to keep always alive
my love for you and for my brothers,
and strengthen my dedication to the young
I ask you this through Christ our Lord.*

¹⁶ *"Ejaculatory" prayers were called by* St Augustine "rapid messages sent off to God". Don Bosco was of the same idea: he saw ejaculations as a concentrated sort of prayer: "Ejaculations sum up vocal and mental prayer... they speed to God from the heart; they are like fiery darts which carry the feelings of the heart to God, and which wound the enemies of the soul, like temptations and vices" (MB IX, 997). For Don Bosco they could substitute for meditation in the case of one unable to make the latter: "If you cannot make a normal meditation because of travel or some other urgent duty, do at least what businessmen do; no matter where they are, their thoughts are always on business" (BM IX, 167)

ART. 94 THE MEMORY OF OUR DEAD CONFRERES

Faith in the risen Christ sustains our hope and keeps alive our communion with our brothers who rest in Christ's peace. They have spent their lives in the Congregation, and not a few have suffered even to the point of martyrdom for love of the Lord.

United with them in an exchange of spiritual benefits, we gratefully offer for them the prescribed suffrages.

Their remembrance is an incentive to continue faithfully in our mission.

Art. 92, which is complementary to art. 8, reminded us of the presence in our midst of our heavenly Mother. In the first part of the Constitutions, art. 9 told us that "as members of the pilgrim Church, we are conscious of our fellowship with our brothers in the heavenly Kingdom". In turn art. 54, which dealt with the death of the salesian, stated that "the memory of departed confreres unites, in a love that will not pass away, those who are still pilgrims with those who are already resting in Christ". The Constitutions therefore invite us to invoke our heavenly Protectors and ask for their intercession, and at the same time ask us to pray to the Father for our confreres who now form part of the Church suffering. With all of them we live the wonderful mystery of the communion of saints.

The present article has to be read against this background, enlightened by "faith in the risen Christ" and the hope raised in us by baptism. It insists on "memory" (cf. the title) and "remembrance" (third paragraph): our memory is very short! Explicit and frequent prayer for the dead, stimulated by the daily communal reading of the necrology (cf. R 47) is a family way of "keeping alive" our communion with these confreres.

As we have said, the whole text is a synthesis of the Christian doctrine of the communion of saints. Christ, "the first fruit of those who have died", has associated his brothers with his death so as to make them sharers in his resurrection; for this reason we feel that they are living in Christ and are still united with us in a real interchange of spiritual benefits. Obvious here is the reference to Don Bosco's faith in Paradise, where he wanted to gather together all his sons. Don Rua declared: "He assured us that he had asked for and obtained from our Lord, through the intercession of Mary most holy, a place in heaven for hundreds of thousands of his sons. Incessantly he raised his pupils' minds to heaven, instilling into them a most firm hope of one day being there with him."¹

We have two reasons for not forgetting, and for intensifying our prayers: *gratitude*, because the Congregation in which we find so many good things was built up through the labours of our departed brothers ("they have spent their lives"), and by their "sufferings"; and also *responsibility for the present and the future*, because we are called to continue the work they began, in fidelity to the same vocation. In this we are

¹BM VIII, 200

stimulated by their example which sometimes took them even "to the point of martyrdom for love of the Lord". The article delicately proposes our dead members as a model for our imitation: in the giving of themselves to God, in their work, in their hope, we find the road of salesian sanctity marked out before us; if they have followed it, why should we not succeed in doing the same?²

Art. 76 of the Regulations, which specifies the forms of suffrage for the dead confreres, draws our attention to the fact that our gaze must be broadened to embrace the whole Salesian Family: "for deceased parents", "for deceased benefactors and members of the Salesian Family".

*God, our Father,
you have passed on to us
the gift of our vocation and mission
also through the work of our dead confreres.
Grant that we may live in communion with them,
by faithfully continuing their work
and following their example.
Bestow quickly on them
the fullness of the beatific vision,
and allow us to share it with them in Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

²This is the well-known expression of St Augustine: "*si isti et illi, cur non ego?*" (if they can do it, why shouldn't I?)

ART. 95 LIFE AS PRAYER

Immersed in the world and in the cares of the pastoral life, the salesian learns to meet God through those to whom he is sent.

Discovering the fruits of the Spirit¹ in the lives of men, especially the young, he gives thanks for everything;² as he shares their problems and sufferings, he invokes upon them the light and strength of God's presence.

He draws on the love of the Good Shepherd, whose witness he wants to be, and shares in the spiritual riches offered him by the community.

His need of God, keenly felt in his apostolic commitment, leads him to celebrate the liturgy of life, attaining that "tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God"³ that should be the characteristic of the sons of St John Bosco.

¹ cf. Gal 5,22

² cf. Eph 5,20

³ R 1924, art. 291

This is the article which concludes both the present chapter on our prayer and also the whole of the second part of the Constitutions on our life of consecrated apostles. And it concludes by passing from the communal aspect to the personal aspect ("the salesian...") and saying what we have been pointing out from the beginning of the chapter: the salesian's "life of prayer" must blossom into a "prayer that is lived", into the "liturgy of life". In particular, apostolic work must be transformed into a sanctifying encounter with God.

Art. 95 is linked in this way with art. 12 on union with God in activity, and develops its content. It also has links with art. 18, where it was said that the salesian, in giving himself to his mission "with tireless energy", knows that he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom, and he is therefore carrying out a work which allows him to be united with them.

Prayer lived by the salesian

The article has four paragraphs, all of which develop the same thought, and describe some features of apostolic spirituality which distinguish the life of the salesian and characterize the way he prays.

The salesian, a man of faith and aware that he must witness to the Good Shepherd, embarks on his activity animated by the "pastoral charity" of Christ and sustained by the spiritual values lived in the community. These are the two sources on which the apostle continually draws, as is well expressed in the third paragraph. It is fitting at this point to recall each one's obligation to verify constantly that he is remaining faithful to these two indispensable points of reference, but it is also important to emphasize the duty of the community to offer to each member the possibility of an encounter with God. For this reason the General Regulations indicate

the responsibility of the community for drawing up a suitable programme for its life of prayer (cf. R 69).

Immersed in apostolic activity, but with these two powerful supports, the salesian learns to meet God, and feels continually prompted to pray to him in his heart. In the persons of those to whom he is sent, and especially in the young, he discovers God who is working there, he becomes aware of "the fruits of the Spirit" and can give thanks to the Father as did Jesus himself, who "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" and said: "I thank thee, Father...!" (Lk 10,21), and like Don Bosco who was amazed at the work of grace in the soul of Dominic Savio or of Michael Magone. He empathizes with the young in their problems and sufferings and is moved to pray for them asking that they be given divine light and strength.

It may be noted how the Constitutions enumerate the different forms of prayer (praise, thanksgiving, petition) which are reflected in the salesian's life. It is an immediate, spontaneous and cordial prayer, not needing a place set apart, expressed frequently in short formulas or ejaculations: it is the prayer of life, consciously and attentively lived in God's presence in daily occupations; it is the prayer of an apostle who lives with Jesus and works for him.

The liturgy of life offered by the Salesian

In this way the salesian realizes the "grace of unity"¹ of his vocation. The Rule says that he celebrates the "*liturgy of life*", a felicitous expression which the Constitution "Laudis canticum" applies to Christians who "offer themselves in loving service to God and men, adhering to the action of Christ".² This is the practical way in which the salesian, be he priest or brother, puts into effect Christ's teaching to "pray always and never lose heart" (cf. Lk 18,1), or the invitation of the apostle Paul: "Think of God's mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God" (Rom 12,1). "Never say or do anything except in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3,17). St Augustine re-echoes the scriptural texts when he says: "Sing to God not only with the tongue, but within hand the psalter of good works".³

Don Bosco followed perfectly this line of thought and action. Confirmation of this is found in the article he himself wrote for the Constitutions in which he placed a strict linkage between "good works" and prayer properly so called: "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".⁴ The whole of his apostolic life, which is an expression of pastoral charity,

¹ Cf. SGC, 127

² PAUL VI, Apostolic Constitution *Laudis canticum*, Rome 1970, n. 8

³ "*Non tantum lingua cantata sed etiam assumpto bonorum operum psalterio*" (St Augustine)

⁴ *Costituzioni 1875*, X111, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 183)

520 becomes for the salesian a true source of prayer, and a wonderful ever-present

opportunity for exercising his own baptismal priesthood. The salesian acts in complete apostolic integrity, as a servant, as a son, as a priest: not for himself but solely for the glory of the Father, offering to him his work, his exertions, and each and every youngster in whose midst he works.

In this perspective, and in no other, can be understood the deep union between work and prayer. In Don Bosco's life this union was so intense that his biographers have said that in him work was in fact prayer. Don Ceria declared: "The thing that is distinctive about salesian piety is that it can make a prayer out of work", a statement that was taken up and endorsed by Pius XI: "This is one of the most wonderful characteristics of Don Bosco, that he was available to everyone, continually busy about so many problems, beset by anxieties, facing endless requests and consultations, and yet his spirit was always raised on high where he was always at peace, where his tranquillity was never disturbed, so that work effectively became prayer for him and in him was verified the great principle of christian life: *qui laborat orat*".⁵

Work is prayer, not because it takes the place of prayer (indeed, an apostle of Christ feels the absolute need for prayer), but because it is lived in a love of charity and is a synthesis of the life of the Trinity which gives unity and consistency to the whole life of a christian. Work and prayer are in fact two aspects of one and the same love, so that they can be said in a certain way to become identified with each other. This is the sense of the *"tireless industry sanctified by prayer and by union with God"*, which Don Rinaldi said is "the characteristic of the sons of Don Bosco".

The moments of explicit prayer of the salesian are the visible expression of the offering he has made of himself in Jesus to the Father, and at the same time the source of the reactivation of that offering. In this perspective the central role of the eucharistic celebration is seen even more clearly: in it the salesian victim offers himself, and is offered, with the perfect Victim: "May he make us an everlasting gift to you... Through him, with him, in him, all glory is yours, almighty Father!".

Chapter VII "In dialogue with the Lord" opened with the declaration that the community has God as its Source (C 85), and it closes by saying that through each of its members it lives for God as its last end, in fidelity to the salesian ideal of "seeking souls and serving God alone".⁶

⁵Cf. P. BROCARDO, *Don Bosco, profondamente uomo—profondamente santo*, LAS Rome 1985, p. 105

⁶Collect of the Mass in honour of St. John Bosco; cf. C 10

*Lord Jesus, in your life on earth
you were unceasingly united to the Father.
Grant that I may meet you and the Father
in everything and every event,
and especially in my brothers and youngsters.*

*May my apostolic work be an occasion
for living in greater union with you; may
my every thought, word and deed
become a sacrifice pleasing to the
Father, in communion with your perfect
sacrifice, for the salvation of all men.*

You live and reign for ever and ever.