

THIRD PART

FORMED FOR THE MISSION OF PASTORS AND EDUCATORS

1. A general view

The entire third part of the Constitutions is dedicated to formation and is entitled: FORMED FOR THE MISSION OF PASTORS AND EDUCATORS". It comprises two chapters: VIII (which has two sections) and IX, with a total of twenty-four articles between them.

They are complemented by the second part of the General Regulations, itself made up of two chapters, with a total of twenty-five articles.

We take a rapid look at the individual chapters and sections so as to understand from the outset the overall structure.

1.1 Chap. VIII presents the "GENERAL ASPECTS OF OUR FORMATION" and is divided into *two sections*.

a) *The first section (art. 96-101)* refers to the totality of SALESIAN FORMATION, and indicates its underlying theological principles, model, agents and method.

The theological principle is the Lord who calls certain people to live Don Bosco's project in the Church (*art. 96*). *The model*, with whom the members primarily identify, is Don Bosco the founder, a secure guide (*art. 97*). *The chief agent*, after the Lord, is the salesian. In his community the latter develops the attitudes and uses the means to "learn by experience the meaning of the salesian vocation" (*art. 98*), living and working for the common mission (*art. 99*), which is *the method* suggested.

In this undertaking the *provincial community* has its own particular role and obligations (cf. C 58), because it must follow closely the process of formation to see that it is adapted to the local culture (*art. 100-101*).

This ensemble of general aspects is located in the context of a biblical quotation which links their source and purpose with the person of Christ: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4,15).

b) In the *second section (art. 102-108)* are presented the GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE INITIAL FORMATION. These do not exclude what was said in the first section, but rather presuppose it and make it more specific with regard to the special requirements of this first period of formation.

The attitudes to be cultivated are especially those of *listening and of docility*: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears!" (1 Sam 3,9).

In face of the complexity of the objectives to be achieved and to be brought into harmony within the vital union of the individual (*art. 102*), the need is pointed out for *formation guides*, "instruments through whom the Lord works" (*art. 104; R 78*), and for *formation communities* "specifically designed for the purpose" (*art. 103; R 78. 80. 81*).

In settings of this kind, where there are true and authentic relationships, this *period of dialogue* between God, who has taken the initiative and called, and the salesian, who has freely accepted the call and gives a faithful response, becomes formationally efficacious (*art. 105*).

1.2 Chap. IX describes THE FORMATIVE PROCESS.

It is a real progressive process which has both a *beginning and an end*: He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1,6). The process begins when the confrere, feeling within himself that he has a call from God, sets about verifying whether it is authentic and whether he has the necessary suitability (*art. 109*), and it ends when with the help of divine grace he brings his consecrated life to its highest fulfilment (cf. C 54).

It is a process in which there are *specifically distinct periods* (immediate preparation for the novitiate, the novitiate itself, the period of temporary profession) each with its own particular *objectives*, passage from one phase to another being by *admissions*, which are occasions for assessing whether the necessary degree of maturity has been attained.

Perpetual profession does not mark the end of an individual's formation. What it does is recognize the existence of a level of spiritual and salesian maturity sufficient for "acquiring the ability to learn from life's experiences" (*art. 119*), so that he can live his future life in such a way as to use situations, from the simplest to the most difficult, as means of further formation.

2. Some points of interest

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2.1 In the overall plan of the Constitutions, why has "Formation" been assigned to the THIRD PART?

2.2 On what basic principle has this vast amount of material been organized and given a particular order?

2.3 Why is so much emphasis placed on initial formation?

2.4 What are the reasons that make formation so important in the Congregation?

2.1 Significance of Formation as the third part

The third part of the Constitutions, dedicated to formation, follows the first and second parts, which presented the essential features of the physiognomy of the Society of St Francis de Sales and the plan of life which is proper to it as "Don Bosco's living

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The Congregation, when faced by problems or difficulties,² always hopes to resolve them in a positive manner. But it links this hope and optimism with the knowledge and acceptance of the plan of life it must preserve and pass on, and which was lived by Don Bosco in the first place (the FIRST and SECOND PART); it asks that this plan be rendered, real in individual members and in communities through a process called "formation" (the THIRD PART); and for this purpose uses the charisma of authority which it possesses and exercises "in imitation of Christ and in his name" (C 121). It organizes and provides necessary disciplinary norms only for what it lives (the FOURTH PART).

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2.2 Ongoing Formation, the basic attitude and principle

As we read Part Three of the Constitutions, we soon discover that the text takes the concept of *ongoing formation* as one of the unifying criteria for the whole of the formative process.

Ongoing formation is "first of all *a personal attitude*" which, because of its innate dynamism and extension, becomes "an *organizing principle* which inspires and orientates formation along the whole arc of life.⁵ The GC22 rapidly arrived at a happy consensus on this point, which had already received the support of the GC21, the FSDB/ 1981, and numerous provincial chapters!⁶

This personal attitude implies on the part of the individual the willingness and concrete commitment to make of his own being an "historical, free and responsible response"⁷ to God's invitation.

The dialogue between God who takes the initiative, and the salesian who freely responds, takes place:

- in the context of a Covenant. The Lord's invitation, in fact, is to an act which "recalls and endorses the mystery of the baptismal covenant by giving it a deeper and fuller expression" (C 23). It is a Covenant which is perceived and experienced as a divine principle seated deep in the heart, which moves, shapes and influences the whole of life from inside.⁸
- within a project which was that of Don Bosco and which, by a grace analogous to his, is also ours. A description of this project is furnished by the main titles running through the Constitutions: *Sent to the young—in fraternal and apostolic communities — following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ — in dialogue with him*. It is a characteristic project, a vocational experience understood as the "sequela Christi" lived in Don Bosco's spirit, always open to the just demands of new innovations discernible in the life of the Church and in the changing cultures, especially those of youth and the humbler classes of people.

⁴ BM VII, 199. Don Bosco used this phrase when relating a dream in which he was laboriously climbing a high mountain with his collaborators. As some of his fellow travellers began to fall by the wayside, Don Bosco reflected: "I know now what I must do. I can rely only on those I have trained myself. Therefore I shall now go down again to the foot of the mountain. I will gather many boys, win their affection and train them to face hardships and sacrifices bravely. They will gladly obey me, and together we shall climb the Lord's mountain"

⁵ GC21, 308

⁶ Cf. GC21, 308; FSDB/1981, 415; GC22 *Schemi precapitolari* I, 1168, 1187; II 387 388

⁷ SGC, 661

⁸ Cf. Jer 31,31-34; Ezek 36, 26-27

It is a plan which, for those who are faithful to it, leads to the commitment to an adequate ongoing formation which lasts all through life and in every circumstance, because on it depends the "quality and fruitfulness of our apostolic religious life" (C 118). This personal attitude to ongoing formation is so tied in with vocation itself, and so comprehensive as regards its lifelong significance and obligations, that it spontaneously suggests itself as the *organizational principle* for the whole formation process.

It underlies, in fact, the various *criteria* which shape the formative process itself in all its complexity.

Because it is the individual who must respond to God's call, formation must be *personalized*, i.e. it must be based on the nature of the individual, maintaining a proper balance between his own formation and that of the group, and between the time foreseen for each phase and its adaptation to each individual case.

Because each one has to be followed up individually and his progress fostered in a process in which every part of him is involved, this procedure must be:

- *one and only*, in the sense that in every phase must be present the various aspects of salesian formation, blended in a vital unity: human maturity, deeper understanding of the religious life, intellectual preparation and insertion into apostolic work;
- *progressive and gradual*, since each phase must be a continuation of the preceding one and a preparation for the one which follows, without prejudice to the emphasis which must be laid on the specific items of each.

It is the individual who is called by the Lord and inspired and led on by him, and so it is the individual who must be the chief agent in this process; the central position of his personal experience becomes the criterion which sets the whole process in motion and demands consistency between methods, settings, conditions and the corresponding instruments.

This therefore is how the personal attitude to ongoing formation becomes the organizing principle behind the whole process through which it is carried out.

2.3 Initial formation

The Constitutions, in the section dealing with formation, are set out against the background of ongoing formation. But at the same time they give particular prominence to initial formation.

This was the approach also of the GC21: "We direct our attention principally to the initial stages of formation, since these reflect the problems highlighted by the provincial chapters, and also because they present special formative characteristics which do not recur".⁹

⁹ GC21, 243

The GC22 endorsed this arrangement by dedicating to initial formation 7 of the 13 articles of chap. VIII and 8 of the 11 of chap. IX of the Constitutions, together with 11 articles of the 15 of chap. IX of the General Regulations.

The reasons seem evident. Initial formation needs to be given special attention, because:

- it is at the root of the sense of belonging, and ensures a common spirit and feelings in the light of which all that follows is desired, undertaken and realized;
- it is at the service of the mission, because it gives rise to the ability to make integral critical judgements according to criteria of science and faith. Without this ability there would be a tendency to the mechanical repetition of the past or to the uncritical acceptance of preformulated judgements according to the mood of the moments.
- it is at the service of the individual in so far as it gives rise to the personal conditions which enable the confrere to carry out pastoral work efficaciously so that it becomes a natural daily setting for further formation.

2.4 Importance of Formation

To conclude this overall presentation of the third part of the Constitutions, it will be well to reflect for a moment on the significance of formation in the salesian life and mission.

The SGC declared: "*The importance of formation is fundamental. On it depends, to a large extent, the personal realization of every salesian and the unity of spirit of the whole Congregation*".¹⁰ After thirteen years and a verification of the life of the Congregation, the same point is made once again with equal decision and conviction in the closing address at the GC22: "In the vast cultural transition in which we feel ourselves involved, the formation of members emerges as an indispensable priority for the future".¹¹

Formation, in fact:

- continues the work of the *founder* and his *spiritual fatherhood*;
- fosters fidelity to the *unity* of the charism and commitment to its *development*; — places in proper relationship in the community the gifts of nature and grace of the individual members with the charisma of the Institute, so that both can grow "towards the perfect love of God and men".¹²

2.4.1 Formation prolongs the work of the Founder and his spiritual fatherhood

¹⁰ SGC, 659

¹¹ GC22, 87

¹² C 24; cf. PC 1

revealed the particular form of life and mission his Society was called upon to realize in the Church.

In reading his life one is impressed by the awareness he had of being chosen as God's *instrument*: "God is my master. He is who inspires and sustains my undertakings; Don Bosco is but his instrument",¹³ inspired and led by a new way he did not know, the direction of which he came to decipher only gradually. Conscious of the responsibility that had been entrusted to him by our Lord and our Blessed Lady, he once said: "The Virgin Mary had revealed to me in a vision the field of my labours. I had, therefore, a complete course of action planned in advance. I could not and absolutely would not alter it. I clearly saw the path I was to follow and the means I was to use to attain my purpose... I had to look for young companions and then select, instruct and form them as I had been shown in my dreams".¹⁴

Don Bosco expressed very strongly, and sometimes with trepidation, *the desire to pass on his experience* and to take care himself of this transmission: "We are now beginning to appoint as rectors confreres who have spent little time at Don Bosco's side, and there is danger that cordial relations between confreres in different houses will be lessened",¹⁵ and it will be "difficult and burdensome to shape so many into one soul and spirit".¹⁶ He made use of writings and conversations, but most of all the Rule itself, as means for passing on the charisma. "I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place".¹⁷ They gather together, as far as it can be done in words, an experience of the Spirit destined to promote another experience, that of the Founder who dialogues with his disciples to promote in them his own longings and desires, and form them to his own way of doing things.

In this sense *the Founder is a father*: he generates a new dimension of life and communicates what he has received, but after making it his own and transmitting it as such. He is therefore also a *formation guide and teacher of formation* in so far as he provides vital communication, involves others in accordance with God's plan, teaches, points the way and guides his followers along it.

Don Bosco understood two very important points:

- that apostolic formation demands a *high degree of identification*: i.e. it calls for the commitment of all the aptitudes and gifts of grace of the salesian (cf. C 99, 102) and this for the whole of life (cf. C 98); otherwise he will never be an apostle of youth;
- that this progressive identification cannot be achieved except *through mediation and models* which help to convert the feelings of joy experienced in their company

¹³ BM IV, 175

¹⁴ BM III, 171

¹⁵ BM XIII, 692

¹⁶ BM IX, 284

¹⁷ *Constitutions 1984* Foreword; cf. D. RUA, *Circular letters*, p. 498

into a challenge to become like them by the personal assimilation of the same values, which then have to be passed on in turn (cf. C 104).

The Spirit who pours out his grace in us, a grace like that he gave to the *Founder*, acts through various mediations: his own, first of all (cf. C 96) and that of the *religious family* which preserves the charisma, keeps it alive and active, manifests it in its own existence and responds to the demands it makes. The Congregation makes use of *all suitable formative elements*, so that the experience of the Founder which lives in it may be made real and personal in each of its members. In this way it carries on the original process of spiritual generation.

2.4.2 Vocational identity, the individual and formation

There is a strict linkage between vocational identity, the individual and the future of both. The vocational project, if properly understood, accepted and translated into the existence of the individual, calls in question the salesian's commitment and responsibility, his freedom and creativity and, above all, his docility. The project becomes a continual challenge to him with its questions and demands.

Formation can provide answers to these questions and satisfy the demands. It accompanies his passage from the "theoretical" salesian proposed as an ideal (first and second parts) to the salesian "in ongoing formation", as he moves towards the fulfilment of himself (third part).

Indications of this dynamic movement are provided by the very terms themselves used in the third part in connection with formation and its setting: "dialogue" (C 105), "call" and "response" (C 96), "process" and "experience" (C 98), "responsibility" and "growth" (C 99), process of growing responsibility" (C 105).

Vocational identity, its unity and development, are to some extent originated and always accompanied and ensured by formation. The latter makes possible and stimulates a "fidelity capable of restoring to the present life and mission of each institute the ardour with which the Founders were inflamed by the original inspirations of the Spirit",¹⁸ the same charismatic authenticity, alive and ingenious in its initiatives, which was present in Don Bosco.¹⁹

¹⁸ Cf. Religious and human promotion, CRIS Rome 1980, 30 2

¹⁹ Cf. MR 23(f); PC 1-2; ET 11

CHAPTER VIII

GENERAL ASPECTS OF OUR FORMATION

Formation is a permanent obligation, a constant collaboration with the Holy Spirit for a greater conformity to Christ, a process carried out in response to God's invitation.

Chapter VIII presents the "*General aspects of our formation*", i.e. the principles, criteria and conditions which define and make possible the formative plan offered by the Congregation to those who feel called to the salesian life.

The *first section* of the chapter comprises 6 articles (96-101), and deals with the general aspects of salesian formation in a wide and comprehensive sense; the second section has 7 articles which are concerned with general aspects of the initial formation.

The following are the important points from the first section, which must be verified throughout life to ensure formative experience and vocational growth.

1. Commitment to formation is the first responsible expression of a response to God's call, or (to put it the other way round) to the call there corresponds a reply, and this reply (taken seriously) is called formation. It is the primary vocational demand. Hence *art. 96* sets out the basic *theological principle* underlying formation: God's call.
2. Called by the Lord (vocation), we commit ourselves to the salesians (formation). It is vocational identity that determines the specific orientation of formation. *Art. 97* indicates its *charismatic principle*.
3. *Art. 98* answers the question: What is formation and in what does it consist? *It is a lifelong process and consists in learning by experience the values of the salesian vocation.* *Art. 99* will add that this experience is gained by living and working for the common mission. This is a very clear indication of the *methodological principle*.
4. *The confrere* himself is the one primarily responsible for his own vocation and therefore for his own formation, a responsibility which is referred to several times in the Constitutions. *The community* which preserves and manifests the presence of the charisma by its life and work, is the natural setting for this experience, and hence itself becomes the subject of formation: it must continually progress and be renewed (*art. 99*).
5. Salesian formation in the world is both one and diversified at the same time. This perspective is presented in *art. 100* which refers back to its origin: the charismatic identity. Because of the latter, formation is one in its specific and permanent content; its fertility, on the other hand, generates diversity in its practical expression: it is a case of one and the same salesian heart behind many different facades, one spirit with many ways of responding to needs.

6. The perspective of art. 100 gives the fundamental reason for the unavoidable obligation and principal *responsibility of the provinces* which, on this account, have a recognized autonomy with suitable organisms and the possibility of concrete realization. This is dealt with in *art. 101*.

In addition to these elements in the first section, the second section considers the "specific" general aspect to be attended to in order to ensure a real experience of initial formation. They are the following:

1. The *objectives and basic perspective* are the different aspects (human maturing and deepening of the consecrated life), blended into a vital unity, referred to in *art. 102*.
2. The *setting*: communities specifically structured for the purpose, dealt with in *art. 103*.
3. *Those responsible*, i.e the formation personnel and the confrere himself who is in this stage of initial formation; *art. 104, 105 are dedicated to them*.
4. The *formative process (art. 106-108)*: a curriculum with similar content and goals at corresponding levels, distributed over the different periods and successive phases, and characterized by assimilation into a growing obligation of discernment.

Section I

SALESIAN FORMATION

"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4,15)

Because of the historical background of the Covenant, Scripture provides motives for growth, for religious improvement, for faith, by analogy with human development. It will be useful to sum up their specific features in the light of the New Testament: the act of justification by baptism is the beginning of salvation, but not yet its fulfilment; for the latter it is necessary to pass beyond the infant stage and becomes spiritual men (cf. 1 Cor 3, 1f, Heb 5, 12 ff.); in other words *christian life* subject to a law of progress; perfection is a goal surpassing human possibilities; it is strictly eschatological and the fruit of grace (Phil 2,12 ff.); growth has an ultimate aim which serves also as a model: it is the relationship with Christ.

In the Gospels it is easy to discern the influence of Jesus on the growth of his disciples. The quotations from Mk 3,14 and Jn 16,13 in art. 96 of the Constitutions are very appropriate, but there is another text of the NT which is perhaps a more complete expression of the significance of christian maturity and the maturing process: Eph 4,7-16, of which the opening verse forms a part.

This part of the Letter to the Ephesians has as its theme "the building up of the Body of Christ" (4,12). by means of many charismata and services. The source and objective of these process in the "perfect man", i.e. Christ in his fullness, the Son of God (4, 13). On the negative side this implies a state of watchfulness against spurious models (4,14). Positively it means following out a process of growth by living the truth and bearing witness to it through charity, i.e. the Gospel heard and put into practice in the style of a Church marked out by brotherly love.

But "growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" does not mean that christian growth is to be bottled up in a sterile and inward-looking concentration on what is sacred. If anything, it means that, recognizing (as does Paul' letter) that Christ represents the plenitude of the universe and its destiny, every type of growth needed for the historical development of humanity should be pursued, and at the same time proportioned, purified, directed and lived in reference to Jesus Christ and the cause of his Gospel.

From this standpoint the work of formation, which is a characteristically educative theme pervading all this part of the Constitutions dealing with formation, readily takes on the responsibility for pursuing the dynamic process naturally called for by progress in human sciences, linking it with the still more radical responsibility of seeing that it is inspired, sustained and directed to its objective by the "grace of Christ". This is what the Constitutions say elsewhere (C 31), when they speak of our educative and pastoral service being "directed to Christ, the perfect Man".

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2.2 Ongoing Formation, the basic attitude and principle

As we read Part Three of the Constitutions, we soon discover that the text takes the concept of *ongoing formation* as one of the unifying criteria for the whole of the formative process.

Ongoing formation is "first of all *a personal attitude*" which, because of its innate dynamism and extension, becomes "an *organizing principle* which inspires and orientates formation along the whole arc of life.⁵ The GC22 rapidly arrived at a happy consensus on this point, which had already received the support of the GC21, the FSDB/ 1981, and numerous provincial chapters!⁶

This personal attitude implies on the part of the individual the willingness and concrete commitment to make of his own being an "historical, free and responsible response"⁷ to God's invitation.

The dialogue between God who takes the initiative, and the salesian who freely responds, takes place:

- in the context of a Covenant. The Lord's invitation, in fact, is to an act which "recalls and endorses the mystery of the baptismal covenant by giving it a deeper and fuller expression" (C 23). It is a Covenant which is perceived and experienced as a divine principle seated deep in the heart, which moves, shapes and influences the whole of life from inside.⁸
- within a project which was that of Don Bosco and which, by a grace analogous to his, is also ours. A description of this project is furnished by the main titles running through the Constitutions: *Sent to the young—in fraternal and apostolic communities — following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ — in dialogue with him*. It is a characteristic project, a vocational experience understood as the "sequela Christi" lived in Don Bosco's spirit, always open to the just demands of new innovations discernible in the life of the Church and in the changing cultures, especially those of youth and the humbler classes of people.

⁴ BM VII, 199. Don Bosco used this phrase when relating a dream in which he was laboriously climbing a high mountain with his collaborators. As some of his fellow travellers began to fall by the wayside, Don Bosco reflected: "I know now what I must do. I can rely only on those I have trained myself. Therefore I shall now go down again to the foot of the mountain. I will gather many boys, win their affection and train them to face hardships and sacrifices bravely. They will gladly obey me, and together we shall climb the Lord's mountain"

⁵ GC21, 308

⁶ Cf. GC21, 308; FSDB/1981, 415; GC22 *Schemi precapitolari* I, 1168, 1187; II 387 388

⁷ SGC, 661

⁸ Cf. Jer 31,31-34; Ezek 36, 26-27

It is a plan which, for those who are faithful to it, leads to the commitment to an adequate ongoing formation which lasts all through life and in every circumstance, because on it depends the "quality and fruitfulness of our apostolic religious life" (C 118). This personal attitude to ongoing formation is so tied in with vocation itself, and so comprehensive as regards its lifelong significance and obligations, that it spontaneously suggests itself as the *organizational principle* for the whole formation process.

It underlies, in fact, the various *criteria* which shape the formative process itself in all its complexity.

Because it is the individual who must respond to God's call, formation must be *personalized*, i.e. it must be based on the nature of the individual, maintaining a proper balance between his own formation and that of the group, and between the time foreseen for each phase and its adaptation to each individual case.

Because each one has to be followed up individually and his progress fostered in a process in which every part of him is involved, this procedure must be:

- *one and only*, in the sense that in every phase must be present the various aspects of salesian formation, blended in a vital unity: human maturity, deeper understanding of the religious life, intellectual preparation and insertion into apostolic work;
- *progressive and gradual*, since each phase must be a continuation of the preceding one and a preparation for the one which follows, without prejudice to the emphasis which must be laid on the specific items of each.

It is the individual who is called by the Lord and inspired and led on by him, and so it is the individual who must be the chief agent in this process; the central position of his personal experience becomes the criterion which sets the whole process in motion and demands consistency between methods, settings, conditions and the corresponding instruments.

This therefore is how the personal attitude to ongoing formation becomes the organizing principle behind the whole process through which it is carried out.

2.3 Initial formation

The Constitutions, in the section dealing with formation, are set out against the background of ongoing formation. But at the same time they give particular prominence to initial formation.

This was the approach also of the GC21: "We direct our attention principally to the initial stages of formation, since these reflect the problems highlighted by the provincial chapters, and also because they present special formative characteristics which do not recur".⁹

⁹ GC21, 243

The GC22 endorsed this arrangement by dedicating to initial formation 7 of the 13 articles of chap. VIII and 8 of the 11 of chap. IX of the Constitutions, together with 11 articles of the 15 of chap. IX of the General Regulations.

The reasons seem evident. Initial formation needs to be given special attention, because:

- it is at the root of the sense of belonging, and ensures a common spirit and feelings in the light of which all that follows is desired, undertaken and realized;
- it is at the service of the mission, because it gives rise to the ability to make integral critical judgements according to criteria of science and faith. Without this ability there would be a tendency to the mechanical repetition of the past or to the uncritical acceptance of preformulated judgements according to the mood of the moments.
- it is at the service of the individual in so far as it gives rise to the personal conditions which enable the confrere to carry out pastoral work efficaciously so that it becomes a natural daily setting for further formation.

2.4 Importance of Formation

To conclude this overall presentation of the third part of the Constitutions, it will be well to reflect for a moment on the significance of formation in the salesian life and mission.

The SGC declared: "*The importance of formation is fundamental. On it depends, to a large extent, the personal realization of every salesian and the unity of spirit of the whole Congregation*".¹⁰ After thirteen years and a verification of the life of the Congregation, the same point is made once again with equal decision and conviction in the closing address at the GC22: "In the vast cultural transition in which we feel ourselves involved, the formation of members emerges as an indispensable priority for the future".¹¹

Formation, in fact:

- continues the work of the *founder* and his *spiritual fatherhood*;
- fosters fidelity to the *unity* of the charism and commitment to its *development*; — places in proper relationship in the community the gifts of nature and grace of the individual members with the charisma of the Institute, so that both can grow "towards the perfect love of God and men".¹²

2.4.1 Formation prolongs the work of the Founder and his spiritual fatherhood

¹⁰ SGC, 659

¹¹ GC22, 87

¹² C 24; cf. PC 1

revealed the particular form of life and mission his Society was called upon to realize in the Church.

In reading his life one is impressed by the awareness he had of being chosen as God's *instrument*: "God is my master. He is who inspires and sustains my undertakings; Don Bosco is but his instrument",¹³ inspired and led by a new way he did not know, the direction of which he came to decipher only gradually. Conscious of the responsibility that had been entrusted to him by our Lord and our Blessed Lady, he once said: "The Virgin Mary had revealed to me in a vision the field of my labours. I had, therefore, a complete course of action planned in advance. I could not and absolutely would not alter it. I clearly saw the path I was to follow and the means I was to use to attain my purpose... I had to look for young companions and then select, instruct and form them as I had been shown in my dreams".¹⁴

Don Bosco expressed very strongly, and sometimes with trepidation, *the desire to pass on his experience* and to take care himself of this transmission: "We are now beginning to appoint as rectors confreres who have spent little time at Don Bosco's side, and there is danger that cordial relations between confreres in different houses will be lessened",¹⁵ and it will be "difficult and burdensome to shape so many into one soul and spirit".¹⁶ He made use of writings and conversations, but most of all the Rule itself, as means for passing on the charisma. "I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place".¹⁷ They gather together, as far as it can be done in words, an experience of the Spirit destined to promote another experience, that of the Founder who dialogues with his disciples to promote in them his own longings and desires, and form them to his own way of doing things.

In this sense *the Founder is a father*: he generates a new dimension of life and communicates what he has received, but after making it his own and transmitting it as such. He is therefore also a *formation guide and teacher of formation* in so far as he provides vital communication, involves others in accordance with God's plan, teaches, points the way and guides his followers along it.

Don Bosco understood two very important points:

- that apostolic formation demands a *high degree of identification*: i.e. it calls for the commitment of all the aptitudes and gifts of grace of the salesian (cf. C 99, 102) and this for the whole of life (cf. C 98); otherwise he will never be an apostle of youth;
- that this progressive identification cannot be achieved except *through mediation and models* which help to convert the feelings of joy experienced in their company

¹³ BM IV, 175

¹⁴ BM III, 171

¹⁵ BM XIII, 692

¹⁶ BM IX, 284

¹⁷ *Constitutions 1984* Foreword; cf. D. RUA, *Circular letters*, p. 498

into a challenge to become like them by the personal assimilation of the same values, which then have to be passed on in turn (cf. C 104).

The Spirit who pours out his grace in us, a grace like that he gave to the *Founder*, acts through various mediations: his own, first of all (cf. C 96) and that of the *religious family* which preserves the charisma, keeps it alive and active, manifests it in its own existence and responds to the demands it makes. The Congregation makes use of *all suitable formative elements*, so that the experience of the Founder which lives in it may be made real and personal in each of its members. In this way it carries on the original process of spiritual generation.

2.4.2 Vocational identity, the individual and formation

There is a strict linkage between vocational identity, the individual and the future of both. The vocational project, if properly understood, accepted and translated into the existence of the individual, calls in question the salesian's commitment and responsibility, his freedom and creativity and, above all, his docility. The project becomes a continual challenge to him with its questions and demands.

Formation can provide answers to these questions and satisfy the demands. It accompanies his passage from the "theoretical" salesian proposed as an ideal (first and second parts) to the salesian "in ongoing formation", as he moves towards the fulfilment of himself (third part).

Indications of this dynamic movement are provided by the very terms themselves used in the third part in connection with formation and its setting: "dialogue" (C 105), "call" and "response" (C 96), "process" and "experience" (C 98), "responsibility" and "growth" (C 99), process of growing responsibility" (C 105).

Vocational identity, its unity and development, are to some extent originated and always accompanied and ensured by formation. The latter makes possible and stimulates a "fidelity capable of restoring to the present life and mission of each institute the ardour with which the Founders were inflamed by the original inspirations of the Spirit",¹⁸ the same charismatic authenticity, alive and ingenious in its initiatives, which was present in Don Bosco.¹⁹

¹⁸ Cf. Religious and human promotion, CRIS Rome 1980, 30 2

¹⁹ Cf. MR 23(f); PC 1-2; ET 11

CHAPTER VIII

GENERAL ASPECTS OF OUR FORMATION

Formation is a permanent obligation, a constant collaboration with the Holy Spirit for a greater conformity to Christ, a process carried out in response to God's invitation.

Chapter VIII presents the "*General aspects of our formation*", i.e. the principles, criteria and conditions which define and make possible the formative plan offered by the Congregation to those who feel called to the salesian life.

The *first section* of the chapter comprises 6 articles (96-101), and deals with the general aspects of salesian formation in a wide and comprehensive sense; the second section has 7 articles which are concerned with general aspects of the initial formation.

The following are the important points from the first section, which must be verified throughout life to ensure formative experience and vocational growth.

1. Commitment to formation is the first responsible expression of a response to God's call, or (to put it the other way round) to the call there corresponds a reply, and this reply (taken seriously) is called formation. It is the primary vocational demand. Hence *art. 96* sets out the basic *theological principle* underlying formation: God's call.
2. Called by the Lord (vocation), we commit ourselves to the salesians (formation). It is vocational identity that determines the specific orientation of formation. *Art. 97* indicates its *charismatic principle*.
3. *Art. 98* answers the question: What is formation and in what does it consist? *It is a lifelong process and consists in learning by experience the values of the salesian vocation.* *Art. 99* will add that this experience is gained by living and working for the common mission. This is a very clear indication of the *methodological principle*.
4. *The confrere* himself is the one primarily responsible for his own vocation and therefore for his own formation, a responsibility which is referred to several times in the Constitutions. *The community* which preserves and manifests the presence of the charisma by its life and work, is the natural setting for this experience, and hence itself becomes the subject of formation: it must continually progress and be renewed (*art. 99*).
5. Salesian formation in the world is both one and diversified at the same time. This perspective is presented in *art. 100* which refers back to its origin: the charismatic identity. Because of the latter, formation is one in its specific and permanent content; its fertility, on the other hand, generates diversity in its practical expression: it is a case of one and the same salesian heart behind many different facades, one spirit with many ways of responding to needs.

6. The perspective of art. 100 gives the fundamental reason for the unavoidable obligation and principal *responsibility of the provinces* which, on this account, have a recognized autonomy with suitable organisms and the possibility of concrete realization. This is dealt with in *art. 101*.

In addition to these elements in the first section, the second section considers the "specific" general aspect to be attended to in order to ensure a real experience of initial formation. They are the following:

1. The *objectives and basic perspective* are the different aspects (human maturing and deepening of the consecrated life), blended into a vital unity, referred to in *art. 102*.
2. The *setting*: communities specifically structured for the purpose, dealt with in *art. 103*.
3. *Those responsible*, i.e the formation personnel and the confrere himself who is in this stage of initial formation; *art. 104, 105 are dedicated to them*.
4. The *formative process (art. 106-108)*: a curriculum with similar content and goals at corresponding levels, distributed over the different periods and successive phases, and characterized by assimilation into a growing obligation of discernment.

Section I

SALESIAN FORMATION

"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4,15)

Because of the historical background of the Covenant, Scripture provides motives for growth, for religious improvement, for faith, by analogy with human development. It will be useful to sum up their specific features in the light of the New Testament: the act of justification by baptism is the beginning of salvation, but not yet its fulfilment; for the latter it is necessary to pass beyond the infant stage and becomes spiritual men (cf. 1 Cor 3, 1f, Heb 5, 12 ff.); in other words *christian life* subject to a law of progress; perfection is a goal surpassing human possibilities; it is strictly eschatological and the fruit of grace (Phil 2,12 ff.); growth has an ultimate aim which serves also as a model: it is the relationship with Christ.

In the Gospels it is easy to discern the influence of Jesus on the growth of his disciples. The quotations from Mk 3,14 and Jn 16,13 in art. 96 of the Constitutions are very appropriate, but there is another text of the NT which is perhaps a more complete expression of the significance of christian maturity and the maturing process: Eph 4,7-16, of which the opening verse forms a part.

This part of the Letter to the Ephesians has as its theme "the building up of the Body of Christ" (4,12). by means of many charismata and services. The source and objective of these process in the "perfect man", i.e. Christ in his fullness, the Son of God (4, 13). On the negative side this implies a state of watchfulness against spurious models (4,14). Positively it means following out a process of growth by living the truth and bearing witness to it through charity, i.e. the Gospel heard and put into practice in the style of a Church marked out by brotherly love.

But "growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" does not mean that christian growth is to be bottled up in a sterile and inward-looking concentration on what is sacred. If anything, it means that, recognizing (as does Paul' letter) that Christ represents the plenitude of the universe and its destiny, every type of growth needed for the historical development of humanity should be pursued, and at the same time proportioned, purified, directed and lived in reference to Jesus Christ and the cause of his Gospel.

From this standpoint the work of formation, which is a characteristically educative theme pervading all this part of the Constitutions dealing with formation, readily takes on the responsibility for pursuing the dynamic process naturally called for by progress in human sciences, linking it with the still more radical responsibility of seeing that it is inspired, sustained and directed to its objective by the "grace of Christ". This is what the Constitutions say elsewhere (C 31), when they speak of our educative and pastoral service being "directed to Christ, the perfect Man".

* * *

ART. 96 VOCATION AND FORMATION

Jesus called his Apostles individually to be with him, and to be sent forth to preach the Gospel.¹ Patiently and lovingly he prepared them and gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them into the fullness of Truth.²

He calls us too to live out in the Church our founder's project as apostles of the young.

We respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation, for which the Lord daily gives us his grace.

¹ cf. Mk 3,14

² cf. Jn 16,13

Against a gospel background we have here a very fundamental statement: *To respond to God's call means to live in an attitude of "formation", of attention to the Spirit and to life.*

Jesus calls and forms

The first reference in the Part of the Constitutions dealing with formation is to the Christian baptismal vocation, to our following of Christ (C 3), and it is made by recalling the model of every apostolic vocation, that of the Twelve. It is an echo of what was said in the first articles of our Rule of life: we belong to the baptized, we are disciples of Jesus and consecrated apostles (C 2,3), formed by the action of Jesus and his Spirit.

"Jesus called his Apostles... he prepared them": two moments of the same act, not separated or following on each other but simultaneous and complementary, which indicate certain perspectives for every salesian. We shall be able to understand them quite easily if we reflect on the different statements which make up the article.

— "*Jesus called his Apostles individually*": the vocation was a personal matter, and therefore one calling for personalized formation.

Art. 22 begins: "Each one of us is called by God". The accent is not so much on the manner of the invitation, but rather on the fact that the call is a personal one to each individual, and on the formative process to be undertaken. The Apostles, the first salesians, and we ourselves with our individual history behind us, are so many living expressions of God's individual calling, which requires the response of a formation which takes account of and reaches the reality of the individual.

— "*To be with him*": formation is the sharing of an experience.

We recall what was said before the election of Mathias in the Acts of the Apostles (1,21-22): "We must therefore choose someone who has been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was travelling around with us". This expression, simple but packed with meaning, recalls another one which for us is nearer home and was so familiar to the first Salesians: "*To stay with Don Bosco*". The invitations of our

Father are well known: "I'd like to make a deal with you... Would you be willing to remain here at the Oratory and stay with Don Bosco for good?"¹ In art. 97 we read that the first salesians lived at the very heart of his community in action: Don Bosco, following the example of Jesus, formed his followers by sharing his life with them.

"Staying with" him meant that they were more available for his teaching; they could share his vicissitudes, his commitments, his internal experience, his criteria and style and spirit. And sharing meant formation.

— "*And to be sent forth to preach the Gospel*", to enable them to live as consecrated persons, apostles of the Father, evangelizers.

The nature of the vocation determines the specific orientation of formation (cf. C 97), its objectives, content, methods, roles and instruments, and even its demands and choice of an intellectual setting (cf. R 82).

The ideas of being sent, of being "fishers of men", of proclaiming the Kingdom, were all concepts that Jesus kept frequently before the minds of his Apostles and towards which he helped them to mature.

Don Bosco too often talked to his youngsters, to the novices and to the confreres about the perspectives of his mission; they served as a stimulus and met a need in providing a formative criterion. We read in the Biographical Memoirs: "Don Bosco constantly strove to kindle his pupils interest in anything concerning the Oratory, because he wanted them to consider it as their own home. He kept them informed on matters which he believed they should know. He followed the same policy even after establishing the Society of St Francis de Sales, hoping that many of his pupils would see in it their ideal of Christian life, the goal of their studies, the safe harbour of their vocation, and their opportunity to share in the undertakings and glorious destiny promised by the Madonna".²

— "*He prepared them and gave them the Holy Spirit*". Jesus prepared his followers so that they would learn to carry out the mission he was going to entrust to them, and especially to become docile to the Spirit.

This is a reference to two points in the formative process:

- to initial formation as a specific time of preparation. It is not just a period of waiting but a time of work and holiness (cf. C 105); it leads to well defined objectives and commitments by means of a process which includes discernment, maturing and the making of motivated choices (cf. C 102, 109).
- to formation as a permanent attitude of docility to the Spirit, the first formative agent and the one Teacher, whose action is for the professed member "a lasting source of grace and a support for his daily efforts" (C 25).

The evidence of the New Testament, and especially of the Acts of the Apostles, read in this way and taken as a model by Don Bosco, shows us the process of ongoing

¹ BM VI, 246; also BM XI, 268; MB XV, 569; MB XVI, 301

² BM IX, 265

reference to Christ's teaching, in research made together in common, and frequently rendered difficult by the need to respond to widely differing religious and cultural situation. It took place at a time when a dramatic transition was taking place from the Old to the New Testament, between the people of Israel and the Church, and all this accompanied by a patient and progressive effort to understand their vocation and ministry.

The Spirit accompanied the Apostles so that they would never lose their ability and the gift of "learning from life's experiences" (C 119).

— *"Patiently and lovingly"*: this indicates the attitude of one who understands those with whom he is dealing and makes demand on them in proportion to their degree of maturity; he is able to wait and put pressure on them a little at a time, he is able to challenge them while still encouraging them, he can put great ideals before them and also confront them with the cross. This was the kind of pedagogy frequently used by Jesus in providing formative experience for the Apostles, both individually and in groups. St Mark tells us: "Lastly he showed himself to the Eleven themselves while they were at table. He reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. And he said to them: `Go Out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation'" (Mk 16, 14- 15).

Don Bosco too on more than one occasion spoke of his own experience so as to encourage his followers in fulfilling what the Lord had indicated he should do. From this point of view we can better understand what he wrote in the introduction to the "Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales": "It will serve as a norm for meeting future difficulties by learning from past experience; it will show how God himself arranged everything in his own good time".³

Our response: commitment to formation

In line with the initiative and formative action of Christ, the second part of the article deals with our reply, which is made practical in commitment to formation.

Like the Apostles we too have been called, individually and in different ways, "to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom" (C 3); like the Apostles we prepare ourselves through the initiatives and action of the community and of those who are in a special way "instruments through whom the Lord is working" (C 104).

The particular nature of Don Bosco's plan, with its charismatic depth and practical implications, for which we share responsibility, demands that *"we respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation"*.

³ MO, P. 16; cf. BM VIII, 396 (Don Rua begins to gather together a chronicle of the Oratory "for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls")

For this task *"the Lord daily gives us his grace"*. He himself "patiently and lovingly" accompanies us in the process, and each day gives us the grace of his

Spirit to help us along (cf. C 25). Although the formation process calls for personal responsibility (cf. C 99), generosity and fidelity on the part of the salesian, the chief agent is the Holy Spirit who inspires and guides it, sustains it and brings it to fruition.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you called your Apostles
and prepared them with patient love
for their evangelical mission,
by the witness of your internal experience
and the strength given by the Holy Spirit.
You have called us too in the same Spirit
to continue the work you inspired in Don Bosco
for the benefit especially of poor youth.
We praise and bless you for this great gift.
We ask you to support us daily by your grace
in the constant task of our formation,
that we may fully correspond to your call.*

ART. 97 SALESIAN ORIENTATION OF FORMATION

The first salesians found their true guide in Don Bosco. Living at the very heart of his community in action, they learned to model their own lives on his.

We too find in him our model. The religious and apostolic nature of the salesian calling dictates the specific direction our formation must take, a direction necessary for the life and unity of the Congregation.

In the commentary on art. 96 the strict relationship was noted that exists between vocation and formation, and the consequent need for formation itself. Art. 97 contains a second fundamental principle, comprising two statements.

1. Don Bosco is the model and constant point of reference in the formation process. In him the salesian identity is embodied, internalized and made an active presence which makes an appeal to others and is open to communion.
2. "The religious and apostolic nature of the salesian calling dictates the specific direction our formation must take". This is the charismatic criterion of formation: our vocation is salesian, and so our formation must be salesian too.

Don Bosco the Founder: "model" and "true guide"

The relationship with Don Bosco is considered here from the standpoint of formation.

He is *a presence* who lives the values of the vocation, with a wonderful capacity for radiating them around him. The GC2 1 expressed this idea in convincing fashion: "For us Don Bosco is not just a memory of the past, but a charismatic and living presence, active and stretching out to the future. In him we reach a better understanding of ourselves and we find the true sense of what it means to belong to the Congregation".¹

The discovery of the vocational identity begins with the discovery of the Founder himself as the living depositary of the original nucleus of the Institute's charisma. We, who are called to share his spiritual experience and his style of life and activity centred on "da mihi animas", find in him the expression at a specific point in history of a certain form of heart and mind, of evangelical sensitivity and of pastoral outlook. In this sense he has been given to us as a "*model*", as an efficacious sign of our vocation and formation. Those who have received the Spirit have received him as light, and they therefore give rise to a certain attraction, a shared feeling, an intimate awareness of values and ideals.

Art. 97 emphasizes this handing on of the charisma through the Founder *by recalling our tradition*.

¹GC21, 163

— Alongside the supreme example of the Apostles who were formed by the Lord himself (cf. C 96), is recalled the familiar example of the *first salesians* who enjoyed the unique good fortune of having the Founder with them as the living salesian identity and their formation guide: the "model" says the article, and their "true guide". We find vivid evidence for this in the Biographical Memoirs: "During those years when Don Bosco was constantly at the Oratory, because as yet there were no other salesian houses, we lived a family life. Our love for him, our desire to please him, and the hold he exercised over us — unforgettable but indescribable — made us vie with one another in the practice of virtue... The way we looked up to him and the regard we had for his authority, saintliness and learning — to us he was the symbol of moral perfection...".²

— Don Bosco was not a remote and isolated model of static perfection, separated from his followers and not communicating with them. He involved the salesians and youngsters in his own experience. Both boys and confreres felt that they shared the responsibility for a missionary plan worldwide in its extent. Communion in activity and life led to comparisons, to a common kind of outlook, and to imitation. Living and working with him led to understanding and appreciation, to the desire to stay with him, to pass on to others what they experienced at "the heart of his community in action". An indication of this conviction is the subtitle given by Fr Joseph Vespignani to his book "A year at the school of Don Bosco", quoting the first Letter of St John: "This is what we proclaim to you: what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched" (1 Jn 1-2).

Applying all this to present-day conditions, art. 97 inclines us:

- to go back to Don Bosco, because he is "the point of reference in a new understanding (according to his spirit) of Christ's Gospel in response to the new challenges of modern times".³
- to become participants in a "living" community which, at its various levels (local, provincial, worldwide), permits and promotes contacts, knowledge, commitments and their communication. When this takes place in true and authentic fashion, the community (with its many models available) becomes the natural setting for formation, a manner of living which stimulates a vital knowledge and assimilation of vocational values.

Vocational identity as the criterion for the orientation of the formative process

The first part of art. 97 has described from a historical standpoint how the salesian identity, personified in Don Bosco, is assimilated through a living experience in an active community. In the second part this fact is formally proposed as the *criterion for the direction formation should take*: "the religious and apostolic nature of the salesian calling dictates the specific direction our formation must take". This is the general norm applicable to the whole of our formation.

² BM V, 486

³ GC22, RRM, n. 305

The gift we have received must become our spiritual physiognomy, the 'talent' entrusted to us must be developed in such a way as to overcome any generic meaning it might otherwise have, because "every Institute exists for the Church and is bound to enrich her with its distinctive characteristics according to its specific spirit and particular mission".⁴

This gift and this talent are like the target at which we aim, the goal recognized as ours, which shapes and directs by virtue of its truth and charity the whole formation process and our own commitment to it.

And so while "aside from legitimate social and cultural differences, vocational identity constitutes the essential unity and most profound reality of the Congregation",⁵ formation, which has the function of developing this identity, is "*necessary for the life and unity of the Congregation*" (C 97).

This statement cannot be overemphasized: formation, which fosters the growth of both individuals and communities in accordance with the single vocational model of Don Bosco and his apostolic project contained in the Constitutions, is an essential foundation for the unity of the entire Congregation. The "Ratio fundamentalis" (FSDB), which aims at "safeguarding the unity of its essential content in the diversity of its concrete expressions", which it does "by an experience of vocation understood as 'sequela Christi' lived according to the spirit of Don Bosco",⁶ is the document which codifies the above-mentioned criterion and the requirements connected with it.

*Spirit of God,
you never cease to raise up in the Church
believers who in various ways
manifest the living Christ and collaborate with him
for the building of the Kingdom.
We recognize the gift you have given to us and the Church
in Don Bosco, our Father and Teacher,
in his predilection for the young,
and in his witness of holiness.*

*Grant that every salesian may find in the
Founder the model for his own vocation, and
may continue his presence and activity
among youth of the present day,
moved by the zeal of the "da mihi animas"
of his oratorian heart.*

⁴ MR 14b

⁵ GC21, 242; cf. ASC 272, (1973), p. 6

⁶ Cf. FSDB,1

ART. 98 THE FORMATION EXPERIENCE

Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit, the salesian commits himself to a formation process which will last all his life and will keep pace with his maturing in other ways. He learns by experience the meaning of the salesian vocation at the various moments of his life and accepts the ascetical demands it makes on him.

With the help of Mary, his Mother and Teacher, he gradually becomes a pastor and educator of the young in the lay or priestly state which he has embraced.

What does formation mean in actual practice? What does it consist in, and what is it aiming at?

Art. 98 offers a first response to these questions, and condenses it into three statements: formation is a process; it consists in experiencing vocational values; its objective is the specific vocation of the salesian.

Formation is a lifelong process

It is a matter of following a route or process, which will differ in rhythm for one phase to another but which goes on through ought life; it has a constant point of reference in the person of Jesus Christ, perceived with the spiritual sensitivity of Don Bosco.

The reality of the individual, of Christian life and of vocation is seen in a dynamic perspective: it is a process, the following of a route which gives a permanent response to the Father in following Christ and in collaboration with the Spirit.

This, however, is not to be understood in such a way as to imply a state of continual change which would deny any real consistency to a definitive form of life indicated by perpetual profession.

It is rather a way of looking at the matter, an attitude that follows naturally from the nature of the vocation and its authenticity, "constantly open to the just demands of the innovations observable in the life of the Church and in the history of cultures, especially in the sectors of the young and the poor".¹ Formation goes ahead like a story, with particular internal things happening in the context of external events.

The article calls it a "process", i.e. an ensemble of elements and formalities which characterize and influence the development of the individual and his relationship with the continually changing realities which surround him.

The text is quite specific about the duration of this process: it lasts *all through life*: a clear reference to the fact that formation is of its nature "permanent" or ongoing,

¹FSDB, 1

in the sense already pointed out in the introduction to chap. VIII,² in such a way that ongoing formation is the organizational principle of the whole formation process, and everything that the Constitutions will say will be stated against the background of life, the whole of life.

Experiencing vocational values

The first two articles of this third part of the Constitutions (C 96, 97) look back to the formative experience of the Apostles with Christ, and the experience of the first Salesians in the Oratory community with Don Bosco, and they enable us to understand in a concrete manner *what it means to "experience vocational values"*.

It is the acquiring of a characteristic interior knowledge which is gained by contact with persons and reality. It is the result of that "being with him" of the Apostles. The sharing of life in all sorts of different situations, interpersonal relationships, the challenges and reflection prompted by Jesus with regard to ideals, hopes and expectations and the way indicated by the Father for achieving them, all these things combined to inculcate in the Apostles the heart and mentality of Christ himself, to let them experience the unprecedented values he was putting to them.

In Don Bosco's case too the formative experience which he offered to those who were willing to stay with him was an experience lived in a setting rich in human and gospel values, a setting of communication, of contacts and commitments.

The document "Mutuae relationes" describes in existential terms the "charism of the Founders" as "an experience of the Spirit transmitted to their followers to be lived by them, to be preserved, deepened and constantly developed".³

The experience of the first Oratory was lived in a spontaneous and almost improvised form, but was attentively followed by Don Bosco with his pedagogical wisdom and became progressively converted into a unified organic process.

Today the constitutional text, when it speaks of salesian vocation, indicates the contents to be assimilated, the aptitudes to be acquired and possessed, and the attitudes to be lived. It is a matter of changing these from something theoretical to something practical, from values which are understood to values which are lived by the salesian "*as he lives and works for the common mission*" (C 99). This is the *method*. Work and, in and through work, *relationships* (i.e. multiple direct contacts of a constant and not just occasional kind) with people and real situations, associated with activities and daily events, combine to free the individual's capabilities and give rise to an active and energetic response.

The vocational response is first and foremost *sustained by the action of the Spirit* and the Lord's daily grace (cf. C 25, 96), but it also requires an *ascetical effort*.

² Cf. Introduction to chap. VIII, 2.2, p. 731-733

³ MR 11

and continuously involved, and where the lived relationship can never be taken for granted; it is neither obvious nor prompted by spontaneous instinct. It requires of the salesian an ascetical effort which, however, must be integrated with grace in order to become an effective virtuous experience. Nothing but the strength of grace can succeed in rooting out and deeply renewing our fallen nature, instead of just superimposing on it an external veneer.

There is therefore a reciprocal integration between the ascetical life and the life of the Spirit, a point frequently recalled by the Rule. The spiritual life very much wants to impress its transcendent values on ascetical efforts, and at the same time the purpose of ascesis is to render the salesian fully docile to the Spirit's gift.

On the ascetical path there stands the *cross*. The salesian, in fact, follows Christ, and stays with him for the building of the Kingdom (cf. C 3). Now the "Kingdom of God" is the supreme fruit of Christ's paschal experience; it is the fruit of his love, which is manifested in decisive form on the cross.

The salesian therefore, who forms himself ever better at the school of Jesus and follows Don Bosco's example, knows what the paschal experience demands of him. How could he forget the goal he must reach already here on earth as a result of willingly accepting the cross in his life? The evangelical counsels", we are told by the Constitutions in art. 63, "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' (Rev 21,1), awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise."

The objective of formative experience is the specific vocation

"*A pastor and educator of the young*": this is a typical expression which sums up Don Bosco's charismatic experience, the salesian vocational plan, and our identity in the Church.

The response to God's call lies in the effort to be educators and pastors of the young, and to live this task in a continually renewed form. This intention determines the validity and consistency of the experience of values.

The question is not therefore one of forming monks, ascetics or great professors, but of producing able educators and "good shepherds" imbued with salesian spirit.

This is a unique perspective of capital importance, which was without any doubt that of Don Bosco himself. As the Council points out in connection with the specific formation of future priests,⁴ such a perspective involves not only unity in the

⁴The decree *Optatum totius*, speaking of the formation of future priests as "shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd", says: "Hence, all the elements of their training, spiritual, intellectual and disciplinary, should be coordinated with this pastoral aim in view, and all superiors and teachers should zealously

content of formation so that all its aspects are in complete harmony and directed to the educative and pastoral objective, but also unity among those responsible for the formation: rector, director of novices, confessors, teachers, must all be in agreement so that their different activities are all directed in the same sense: to form salesians committed to the principle of "da mihi animas" and competent in their educational and pastoral service.

The constitutional expression recalls at one and the same time the single vocation and single objective referred to, and the different forms in which it is realized. The Salesian Society is composed of clerics and laymen who live the same vocation in complementary fashion as brothers.

Never at any time does a generic salesian exist, and the different forms of the one vocation constitute a permanent perspective which determines the experience of the values of the vocation itself in its various aspects.

The mission, community life, practice of the counsels, prayer, and hence the formative experience, are lived by each one in line with the dimension proper to him.

Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit and... with help of Mary, Mother and Teacher

Of these two expressions, inserted in the text as parentheses, the first points to the living Christ, the centre of formation, and the second to Mary, who is the *teacher in all formation*. Her life, so deeply docile to the Spirit, predisposed her to conceive Jesus in virtue of the same Spirit (Lk 1,35), to bring him up and let herself be educated by him in turn, according to the Father's will. The Marian dimension pervades the whole text, because Mary was always at Don Bosco's side as he went ahead through personal commitment, ascetical ability, and especially through the grace of God, this too manifested through Mary's presence.

She steers us to Christ, because the *living Christ is at the centre of formation*. One cannot overemphasize this perspective of faith, nor the advantages that derive from giving to it a concrete, vital and personal aspect, avoiding all dry abstractions. In this we are perfectly in line with the mystery of vocation. It is a matter of fixing one's gaze on a Person, on the perfect Model, on Christ consecrated to the Father through his mission.

But a look at Christ of the past, so as to be enlightened by him, would be insufficient. We have to be *enlivened* by the glorified Christ of the present day, and so live in close touch with him through the Holy Spirit.

This implies the affirmation of a mystery of grace: Christ himself continues in the Church to form his own disciples and apostles through his Spirit. Formation must be maintained at this depth, cost what it may: "Without me you can do nothing" On

cooperate to carry out this programme" (OT 4). This perspective, with the nuances that are proper to us and taking into account the presence in our communities of both clerics and lay confreres, can be applied also to us as regards the unity of the formation process

15,5). It is an appeal to all, both those in formation and their guides, to maintain an attitude of listening and docility to Christ's Spirit.

To live according to the spirit of Don Bosco is to assimilate Christ in a salesian manner, if one may put it that way. Is it not the same thing to draw one's inspiration from Christ, and to become a good salesian shepherd or pastor? We recall what was said in art. 2 of the Rule: our vocation is that of being "signs and bearers" of the love of Christ, the Good Shepherd, for the young and especially those who are poor.

If a salesian has been well formed, he is able to do this. The most characteristic comment on this perspective is art. 11, which explains that pastoral charity, the centre and synthesis of the salesian spirit (cf. C 10), "finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father". Like Don Bosco, in "reading the Gospel we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord".

And so the first phrase of our article indicates its basic message: if the Gospel is to be studied and lived in all salesian communities as the "supreme Rule", all the more must it shine forth in the formation communities; but it must be the Gospel as understood and lived by Don Bosco.

To round things off it should be said that the two basic books for the salesian in formation are the Gospel and the Constitutions; and that his living central reality is the Eucharist.

*Lord Jesus, you gave to Don Bosco
the Virgin Mary as Mother and Teacher,
and led him through the experience of joy and suffering
to understand your design for the salvation of youth.
Grant that we too may live to the full,
under the motherly guidance of Mary,
the values and commitments of our vocation.
Help us to conform with untiring generosity
every moment of our existence
to the light of your Person and your Gospel,
so that among those to whom you send us
we may be, in faithful and creative fashion,
educators and pastors in the style of Don Bosco.*

ART. 99 PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Each salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation. Docile to the Holy Spirit he develops his talents and his gifts of grace in a constant effort of conversion and renewal, as he lives and works for the common mission.

The natural environment for vocational growth is the community which the confrere joins with trust and in which he gives his responsible collaboration. The very life of the community, united in Christ and open to the needs of the times, is itself a factor in formation, and hence must continually move forward and be renewed.

Who is the subject of formative activity? Who carries the responsibility for the vocational process, and how is the responsibility expressed?

There are numerous articles of the Constitutions (cf. in particular those of chap. III) which refer to the personal responsibility of the individual salesian and the shared responsibility of the community. The call is given to the individual, but at the same time it forms part of the gift that the Lord wants to see alive in the Church and which he has entrusted to the disciples of the Founder, gathered together in unity by his Word. This is a "general aspect of formation", i.e. a condition for its success and a principle of its validity.

Every salesian is personally responsible for his own formation

Every salesian, from the moment in which he replies "yes" to the Lord who calls him and sends him (cf. C 24), chooses to take on personally and permanently in every circumstance the obligation to foster his own vocational growth. It is a responsibility which is part of his identity; he can neither avoid it nor renounce it.

Perpetual profession is not so much a sign of "having arrived", as an ecclesial expression of a commitment to permanent collaboration with the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord is the protagonist and chief Teacher. But after him and with him the person called is another direct term of this Covenant (cf. C 23). Each one therefore is called personally, and is obliged to give a personal response to the call.

Attitudes and methods for a responsible course of action

To give each one's responsibility a definite content, the text asks us to cultivate certain attitudes and adopt a practical method.

— The *fundamental attitude* proposed is to *live in docility to the Spirit*, who right from the first articles of the Constitutions appears as the great animator of the

548 salesian vocation in Don Bosco (cf. C 1, 21), in the community (cf. C 2) and in the

process of sanctification of each confrere (cf. C 25).

Being a disciple of the Spirit implies a constant reference to Jesus Christ. Jesus is truly "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (Col 1,15). He is the image of both the Father communicated to men, and of the Son of man who returns to the Father to sing his glory. Spiritual life means being constituted with Christ in a single existence, becoming in our turn an image which reveals his love, especially to youth, and renders to the Father the response of their freedom conformed to his own.

— The *method* is to "live and work for the common mission". It is in work and personal relationships that we discover the needs around us and hear the invitations of the Lord. Taken together these two experiences are in fact the sources for the release of a person's energies and for developing in him a living awareness of the needs around him and for responding to them. Not every activity, however, and not every relationship leads towards docility to the Spirit, but only those sustained by true and authentic motives. The Constitutions assert that the development of aptitudes and gifts of grace comes about only through a "constant effort of conversion (purification and deepening of motivations) and renewal (the discovery and progressive assimilation of values)".

As can be seen, the responsibility for the formation of oneself and others demands spiritual dynamism, concrete pedagogical applications, and the practice of ascesis.

The horizons of the salesian's responsibility, therefore, are on the one hand Christ's will in his regard, and on the other young people to be served and the pastoral commitments of the province to be provided for. Each one "develops his talents and his gifts of grace", but clearly not for self-affirmation. The gifts of God are not only, nor especially, for the individual. The latter came to "serve" and he enriches himself so as to be of greater service.

The Constitutions, by indicating with a certain insistence the personal obligation of the individual, remind also all those working in formation structures of the clear awareness they must have of the central position of the person who asks to begin a process of growing responsibility and to give a response to God who is calling and leading him, sustained by the intelligent work and charity of his brothers. But if their help is to be effective, it is essential that they work consistently and follow an appropriate pedagogical method.

The community, the setting and the subject of formative experience

The setting and subject of formative experience.

"We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), form a community of the baptized.
548 Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's

apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life" (C 2). This opening statement of the Constitutions expresses a principle which defines and covers the totality of our vocation.

One cannot speak of vocational experience without speaking of the community as the setting and subject of formation.

The Rule says, in fact: the community is "*the natural environment for vocational growth*". "The very life of the community" becomes a constant promotional element: brotherly sharing, and especially the apostolic thrust embodied in a consistent common project, the central position of Christ which is lived and celebrated, the genuine style of evangelical life, all become a vital communication of the salesian ideal and a vocational criterion and stimulus. This is true all the more because often this vocational ideal is perceived in the community not primarily through the sum total and quality of the virtues which circulate in it, but rather in individual "models" who through their relationships make it easier to identify the values themselves.

The community therefore is the setting, but it is also the *collective subject* which interacts with the individual and has a special and efficacious formative grace: "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18,20).

Conditions for an efficacious formative setting.

Art. 99 is concerned to point out in a general way the conditions and attitudes which must be fostered by both the individual salesian and the community so that by their life they may willingly promote formation. These attitudes and conditions are also found more completely and in greater detail in chap. V which deals with the community in general, and in the articles which describe the formation communities for initial formation (cf. C 103, 110).

1. *The salesian is asked to join the community with trust and give his responsible collaboration.*

- *Trust* implies openness and confidence, esteem for the community to which he belongs, for the qualities it has and for its potentialities, which make him feel that it is the place to which the Lord has called him to build his own life and that of his brothers. "Every salesian, through prayer and personal witness, contributes to the sustaining and renewal of the vocation of his brothers" (C 101). Naturally this trust is greatly facilitated when it is reciprocal. Everyone knows how much the attitude of the community towards a confrere can augment or depress his ability to become truly part of it and contribute to its life and work.
- *Responsible collaboration* obliges him to seek all the information he can about his own field of work, to play his part in the drawing up and realization of formative plans, checking periodically on his own life and activities to see to what extent they are useful and meaningful as regards the young people we meet, the society in which we live, and the Church which makes her own the urgent problems of

mankind. One may be living in a restricted situation, but responsibility requires that the wider Kingdom of God be always kept in mind.

2. *The community*, to be a true setting for formation, is asked to *become a living community* characterized by being:

— "*united in Christ*" the apostle of the Father, called together by him, sharing responsibility for the mission he has entrusted to it, animated by his Spirit of communion, where interpersonal relationships are inspired by "the model of the first apostolic communities and the homely community of Valdocco";¹ where it is possible to communicate in an atmosphere of consideration and attention, of understanding and corroboration, the pastoral and spiritual experience of each member; where there is concern on the part of all for the building up of the vocation of each one, through friendship, example, advice, fraternal correction and forgiveness.

¹ SGC, 672

— "*open to the needs of the times*", sensitive to historical change, to the needs of the young and the poorer classes, to cultural characteristics. The kind and extent of the relations of the community with the life of society and with its culture and demands are shaped and determined by the overall vocation perspective (cf. C 7) and by the needs of the Church's pastoral work, and in the case of formation communities by particular requirements related to the different stages of formation which call for a different timing of presence and separation. The community helps the member to accept with a sense of responsibility the openings and withdrawals implicit in the following of the Lord in his particular way of life: these too are away of loving God and young people.

*God our Father,
you have called us by name
and united us in a spiritual family
for the benefit of the young.
May each of us be fully docile to your Spirit,
so that by living and working for the common mission
we may be renewed each day
in the generous service of you and of our neighbour.*

*Grant that our community,
united in Christ and open to the needs of the times,
may become and ever more suitable environment
for experiencing the salesian life and mission
after the example of the first community of Valdocco.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 100 UNITY OF FORMATION AND DIFFERENT CULTURES

The principle of unity in the Congregation is the charism of our Founder, which of its richness gives rise to different ways of living the one salesian vocation. Formation is therefore one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expression; it accepts and develops whatever is true, noble and just in the various cultures.¹

¹ cf. Phil 4,8

Among the People of God the Holy Spirit is at one and the same time the principle of unity and the seed of universality. He is the Spirit of Pentecost: many nations but one people; many cultures but in the single Body of Christ.

With regard to the salesian charism too, the Spirit who brought it into being renders it fruitful, and while giving to it its own specific character by means of his gifts, he multiplies its presence among different peoples; he plants it and causes it to grow in different ecclesial situations. In virtue of its mission, therefore, the Congregation is called to live in the various cultures the experience of the one Catholic Church. God calls salesians from specific cultural milieu from which they draw their own individual identities and to which they will then be sent to be both "signs and bearers of God's love for young people, especially those who are poor".¹

This is a fact that can be deduced from our history and also, in a synthetic and symbolic manner, from the dream of the ten diamonds, which is the dream of our identity. The various diamonds on the garment, with the relative importance indicated by their position and lustre, provide an organic and dynamic presentation of the spiritual characteristics of the salesian and together outline our distinctive spiritual profile. Don Rinaldi, the most perspicacious interpreter of this dream, invites us "to bring to life in ourselves this living personage in the minutest details"², so that the Society may shine before the whole world in its true form.³

The charism, principle of unity and rich source of diversity

"The principle of unity in the Congregation is the charism of our Founder, which of its richness gives rise to different ways of living the one salesian vocation": this is the first statement of art. 100, and it recalls a reality and a vocational characteristic already amply indicated, because they correspond to the very significance of the constitutional text which is meant to be the symbol of this unity and the foundation and criterion of an authentic diversity. "We strive everywhere to

¹ Cf ACS 55, 24 December 1930, p. 924.

² FSDB, 19

³ ibid

bring to life and render incarnate the spirit of our Father and Founder Don Bosco, the one model for all".⁴

This is important for the continuity and development of the charisma and of the cultures themselves: "A charism which is not open and adaptable to the values of different cultures will become fossilized, it can have no future. But any culture closed against the challenge of the signs of the times, interchange with other cultures and the transcendence of Christ and his Spirit, risks becoming nothing more than a museum piece or a watered-down interpretation of universality. This makes it clear just how delicate and exacting is formation activity in the Congregation".⁵

Formation: one in its content and diversified in its expressions

The strength of unity of the Congregation and its deepest reality lies in its identity.

But unity is realized at the present day in decentralization, and a genuine decentralizing process implies an explicit and concrete commitment to unity. Formation, which is specifically determined by the nature of the vocation, draws its inspiration from an underlying principle and takes on corresponding characteristics: *it is at the same time "one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions"*.

The FSDB, as the practical guide to formation at world level, "sets out in an organic and instructive way the complexus of principles and norms concerning formation which are found in the Constitutions, general Regulations and other documents of the Church and of the Congregation".⁶ "The service it aims at rendering is that of ensuring the solidity and efficacy of this formation...; and consequently of safeguarding the unity of its essential content in the diversity of its concrete expressions".⁷

It is the task of the Provincial Directory (formation section) to apply all this to the local reality.

Both of these (i.e. the FSDB and the Provincial Directory) aim at fostering and ensuring the realization of formative experiences which respond to the demands of our times while remaining faithful to Christ, to the Church and to the genuine thought of Don Bosco.

Requirements and steps of a process

⁴ E. VIGANO, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 39

⁵ *ibid.* p. 40

⁶ FSDB, 1: R 87

⁷ *ibid.*

noble and just in the various cultures" recalls the need to be open to cultures which the Constitutions referred to as early as art. 7: not only decentralization, but the transmission itself of the gospel message and the salesian charism require that they be incarnated in the culture of a specific people: it is the law of "incarnation", which derives from the very origins of the Christian mystery.

But the article also presents directly and in a positive manner a step in the process which implies attention and discernment. The Rector Major writes: "The process of inculturation requires at one and the same time that both the values to be embodied are clear and well understood and that an accurate and just discernment can be made of the demands of local cultures".⁸ This implicitly points to other criteria and requirements that are easily deducible. They are:

- a knowledge of the culture of origin and of that of the place concerned, obtained through contact with those who live it;
- the identification of anything in the culture which is not compatible with the evangelical and charismatic patrimony of the Congregation. If the incompatibility is absolute, a process must be begun for the transformation of mind and heart; if it is only relative it will be a question of correcting, redirecting, extending and perfecting its values.
- The explicit declaration of absolute innovations contained in the evangelical and charismatic patrimony, from which every culture can benefit, as from a grace.

We must remember that only in the light of transcendental values is it possible to assess the value of any one culture. The way in which the manifestations of the "signs of the times" has grown in the last ten or twenty years, and the near-universal interchange between different cultures, puts the spotlight on each one of them. The truths too of the mystery of Christ and the creative vitality of the charisms of his Spirit bring about an agitation for revision, for purification, and for a new drive that can benefit the cultures themselves. We must maintain one of the characteristics of the Kingdom, which is its location above or beyond every culture, in the fraternal unity of the People of God which should know neither race nor frontier.⁹

⁸ACC, 312 (1985), p. 39

⁹ibid. p. 39-40

*Almighty God,
your Wisdom fills the universe
and holds all things together
in a strong yet gentle manner,
sowing in all peoples and cultures
the seeds of your holy presence.
You have made the gifts of unity and universality
shine forth also in our own Society:
many countenances, many peoples and different cultures
in a single family with a single "oratorian heart".*

*Give us attention of mind and generosity of heart,
so that we may remain faithful
to the charism you gave to our holy Founder;
help us to preserve our unity of spirit,
and perceive "all that is true, noble and just"
among the gifts you have bestowed
on the people to whom you send us,
so that we may bring them back to you,
the source of all goodness,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

ART. 101 THE PROVINCIAL COMMUNITY AND FORMATION

The provincial community welcomes and follows up the vocation of every confrere, sees to the preparation of formation personnel, provides formation structures, and makes each local community aware of its obligations in the formation sector.

It is the duty of the provincial community, through the various organs of animation and government, to lay down the method of formation according to the needs of its own cultural context and in conformity with the directives of the church and the congregation.

In the exercise of this common responsibility every salesian, through prayer and personal witness, contributes to the sustaining and renewal of the vocation of his brother.

From the time of the SGC the provincial community has been accorded particular importance as regards the shared responsibility and participation of the confreres and in the realms of subsidiarity and decentralization, so as to promote the development and growth of the Congregation in its many different situations. At the present day a lot of elbow room is given to the provincial community and to its responsibility also in the formation field, both for the possibilities it presents ("with the autonomy that belongs to it", C 157) and for the service it is called upon to provide: part of its task is that of "promoting the life and mission of the Congregation" (C 157).

It belongs to the Rector Major with his council to promote "the constant fidelity of the members to the salesian charism" (C 126) and their integral formation (C 135); the corresponding duty of the individual confrere is to accept responsibility for his own formation in the measure that is left to him to decide, and of the local community to make itself both a setting and the subject of formation; but the primary and direct responsibility for salesian formation in its various aspects and in its overall practical realization belongs to the provincial community.¹

The fundamental and specific task

The provincial community has the obligation for salesian formation in its own context. This is a task which follows from the very definition of its significance and function: the promotion of the one salesian vocation and the mission of the Congregation in a specific juridical circumscription (C 157).

It must therefore provide for what was stated in art. 100 and is now taken up again in art. 101: to combine unity with pluriformity, charismatic identity with cultural pluralism, "to lay down the method of formation" according to the requirements of the culture to which it belongs, in conformity with the directives of the Church and the Congregation (C 101), and express this method through practical guidelines in the formation section of the Provincial Directory (cf. R 87).

¹Cf. FSDB, 156

This perspective governs all formative activity in the province: "It is an arduous task, and is particularly intense in the period of initial formation, though it is always pressing and relevant all through life".²

Practical expression of the provincial service

Art. 101 brings to an end the section which presents the general aspects of formation, and the principles and conditions which make possible the salesian formative experience. And it does so by specifying the service to be rendered by the provincial community to individuals, to local communities, and in the organization of the formation process, keeping in mind its basic task we have already spoken of. We could sum it all up in the expression of art. 58: the province "shows a loving concern for new confreres, and is solicitous for the formation of every member".

a. It willingly accepts the vocation of every confrere and follows it up.

It offers to anyone who is thinking of becoming a salesian an environment and suitable conditions to enable him to discern his own vocation (cf. C 109); it accompanies him in the delicate periods of the initial formation and especially at the more significant moments, the admissions; it promotes various ordinary and extraordinary activities (cf. R 101, 102) which foster the process of ongoing formation and stimulate an active spiritual life, theological and pastoral updating, professional competence and apostolic inventiveness (cf. C 118).

The task of "accepting and following up vocations" is not expressed only in service and activity. It implies in the first place that the provincial community, which lives with a spiritual flair and competence the various obligations of the salesian vocation, shall be itself a valid model and permanent stimulus for every confrere and especially for the younger ones.

b. It sees to the preparation of formation personnel and formation structures.

This is a task which applies especially to initial formation. Two particular responsibilities need to be pointed out:

- that of providing the formation community with a rector and formation team specially prepared for spiritual direction (cf. R 78), to ensure a valid formative experience. The province is therefore asked to make a careful and timely choice of capable confreres to be prepared, and requalified if need be, for this "specific and necessary role" (C 104);
- that of ensuring the formation structures, i.e. the ensemble of conditions (buildings, communal environment, social context, study curriculum, pastoral experiences) which will allow of an authentic formative experience under its various aspects (human maturing, intellectual preparation, consecrated life, insertion in pastoral and educative activity), the attainment of the objectives of the different phases and of the whole formative process.

²E. VIGANO, *The renewed text of our life*, AGC 312 (19850, P. 39

The provincial community fosters fraternal communion among local communities and supports them in their mission (cf. C 58). The local community, in fact, shares the responsibility for the development of every confrere (cf. R 81), fosters his growth to maturity and sustains him in moments of difficulty (cf. C 52), it provides a stimulating vocational environment (it has an obligation to do this!) and, above all, offers an experience of a formative life. "Hence", as art. 99 says, "it must continually move forward and be renewed".

Animation by those chiefly responsible, particularly the provincial and his council, the ordinary and extraordinary activities planned and realized for this purpose (cf. R 101), the formation of a fraternal provincial community (cf. C 161) which actively promotes the salesian life and mission (cf. C 157) on the basis of an educative and pastoral plan (R 4) which is constantly evaluated and brought up to date, all these are the clear signs of the continuity of this formative commitment.

The responsibility of every single member of the provincial community

From the beginning of this section dealing with the general aspects of formation, the Constitutions have emphasized the responsibility of the individual member for his formation, understood as a personal response to the Lord's call (cf. C 96). The section now ends by pointing to the obligation of every single member of the provincial community.

This is an illustration of the fact that always and insistently the role of the individual and that of the community are stressed as functioning together. If the provincial community has a specific and fundamental task to perform in the matter of formation, it must be emphasized that it is itself made up of individuals: every salesian takes on the responsibility for his own formation (cf. C 99); every confrere collaborates to make the local community a formative setting (C 99); every salesian lives his responsibility for formation also at provincial level, and "through prayer and personal witness contributes to the sustaining and renewal of the vocation of his brothers".

*Lord our God,
we have been given the charism of your Spirit
so that we may pass it on in our turn
and make it grow in others.
You want us to be responsible
for the fertility of your gifts,
and the multiplication of your talents.*

*Enlighten, we pray you,
the Superiors and all the confreres
of our provincial community,
so that with the strength of your Spirit
and the warmth of your love,
they may be able to direct the work of formation,
dedicating themselves to it by prayer and example,
so as to sustain, confirm and renew in every confrere
the grace of your call.
Through Christ our Lord.*

Section II

INITIAL FORMATION

"Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears" (1 Sam 3,9).

In its brevity, clarity and density of meaning, this has become a classical text in connection with vocation. The context can help to make its aspects more precise, showing in the first place how the vocation develops in terms of a dialogue with the Lord, and how the call is not always so that a process of discernment of God's voice and hence a climate of prayer is unnecessary.

The account of the vocation of Samuel, in the deuteronomical setting to which it belongs (from the Book of Joshua to the 2nd Book of Kings), seems to be intended to exalt the rebirth of prophecy in Israel, the grace of the presence of the Word of God among the people. In fact at the beginning of chap.3 it says that "the word of the Lord was rare in those days" (v.1), but at the end we are told that Samuel was a true prophet (v. 20). God's silence, caused by the bad conduct of the priestly house of Eli (1 Sam 1-2), was broken during the night through divine communication *when "the Lord called Samuel"* (v.4). It is the same formula as that by which Moses (Ex 3,4) and Isaiah (Is 6,8) were called. As with Moses, and later with Jeremiah (Jer 1), a process of discernment was necessary, for which purpose Samuel went to Eli for the recognition of God's voice. The three fold repetition of the call makes this quite clear. Samuel entrusts himself totally to the Lord: *"Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears"*(3,10).

Immediately after the call comes the prophetic mission of gigantic proportions (3, 19-21). Between God and Samuel a pact of reciprocal fidelity is established: to the complete docility of the youth he has called, who from the outset would not let God's voice be lost even when questioned by Eli (3,16-18), and then in the dramatic story from Shilo to Saul, God responded by "letting none of his words fall to the ground" (3,19).

The story brings to mind another story, that of the vocation of Don Bosco. He was so completely open to the voice of God and attentive to the interpretation of its sense and directives, that because of his fidelity he later became the prophet of the call of God for countless young people.

Although he commits himself personally, the salesian who wants to become an apostle of the young entrusts himself with docility to the Spirit and willingly accepts his inspirations.

In this context the second section of chap. VIII presents the general aspects of the *initial formation*, i.e. those indispensable elements needed for a valid experience in the process which leads to perpetual profession for all, and for some to priestly ordination. In this more specifically defined process the contents of the chapter's first section still apply.

The text presents in seven articles the various aspects which complement each other in harmonious fashion:

- the objective of the initial formation (*art. 102*);
- the setting (*art. 103*);
- those responsible and their tasks (*art. 104-105*);
- the curriculum (*art. 106*);
- the stages of formation (*art. 107*) and the admissions (*art. 108*), as times of synthesis and the beginning of deeper and more specific commitments.

It is evidently a question of the foundation on which will be built the process of initial formation which is dealt with specifically in chap. IX.

ART. 102 COMPLEXITY AND UNITY OF THE INITIAL FORMATION PERIOD

The aim of initial formation is the human maturing of the young confrere, his intellectual preparation and the deepening of his consecrated life, as he is gradually introduced to educational and pastoral work.

In the formative experience these elements must be harmonized into a living unity.

Initial formation takes place in view of general purpose of salesian formation. What specific contribution does it make to the attainment of this objective? This is the first of the general aspects dealt with by the constitutional text.

Initial formation aims at fostering an experience which brings the young confrere to develop those attitudes and values which are proper to the salesian vocation. They are indicated and summarized from four points of view, each of them in turn the result of the convergence of various other elements (this is the complexity referred to in the title of the article): human maturing, intellectual preparation, the deepening of the consecrated life, and gradual introduction to educational and pastoral work.

Human maturing

Human maturity has been attained when a person is capable of making free choices in the light of true and interiorly assimilated motivations, of authentic human relationships and objective judgements on people and events, and of an open and personal love for others in an attitude of mutual acceptance and unconditional esteem. These values are more easily attained by one who is in good physical condition with, as far as possible, good health, ability to work, and undisturbed willingness for sacrifice; one who knows himself and accepts himself for what he is; one of mature affections and a well balanced sexuality which is given its proper place among human values.

Intellectual preparation

Intellectual preparation is called for and determined by the vocation and its implications. These specify the objectives aimed at, and shape the choice of cultural settings and the relations between the separate disciplines: "the programme of studies", says art. 82 of the Regulations, "must preserve a balance between serious and scientific reflection and the religious and apostolic dimensions of our way of life": intellectual preparation is, in fact, an integral part of the life plan.

This requirement and guideline pervades the whole of the long process of formation, though the emphasis varies (cf. novitiate: C 110, R 91; postnovitiate: C 114,

R 95; specific formation of the priest and brother: C 116, R 97-98; ongoing formation: C 118-119, R 99).

The mission, in particular, through the service of integral development which it is called upon to render to youth, "orientates and characterizes at all levels the intellectual formation of the members" (R 82) . It asks that "those branches of study shall be cultivated with special care which deal with the education of and pastoral work for youth, catechesis and social communication" (R 82).

Studies are a necessary component, in their own way (cf. C 98, 102), for knowing Jesus Christ, feeling with the Church and the Congregation, maturing in awareness and professional competence, and passing on the message of salvation, especially to the young.

As can be seen, intellectual preparation implies the development of one's own intelligence, but also an openness capable of reflection and judgement, attention to people and situations, maturity in discernment, and willingness to learn.

Deepening of consecrated life

This is an expression which in a wide sense comes under the heading of "salesian religious values". It includes the sense of God and of his presence in history, which is manifested in us particularly by the gift of pastoral charity and by the sense of Church; it includes the ability to "live and work together", overcoming individualistic ideas and styles of life in the conviction that communion is itself the best safeguard for diversity and originality; it includes the practice of the, evangelical counsels, which manifest a style of life recollected in God, so as to reveal the definitive nature of its religious value and its divine fruitfulness in the service of one's fellow men; it includes living in dialogue with the Lord, something which involves the whole of vocational experience and moves from God to youth work and back from youth work to God in the celebration of a life consecrated by him for the Kingdom.

Gradual introduction to educational and pastoral work

In the whole process of initial formation, educative pastoral work is particularly concentrated in the pastoral experience (cf. R 86) and during the practical training period (cf. C 1 15). Gradual insertion into motivated and programmed activity, subsequently followed up and evaluated, is in itself a formative element, distinguished from and complementary to intellectual formation.

Pastoral educational practice, based on wisdom and belief, is central to the formation of every salesian, even though in initial formation the demands of time and methodology require that theoretical activities and the acquiring of qualifications be given priority. These develop pastoral sense and abilities, and lead to the formation in young salesians of the necessary skills and aptitudes which will latter enable them to carry out fully and efficaciously their apostolic and formative pastoral work. This was

Society of St Francis de Sales" of 1875, wrote in chap. XII: "The members, whilst attending to the studies prescribed by the constitutions, should not apply themselves more than is needful to the works of charity that are proper to the Salesian Society".¹

Harmonized into a living unity

The terms used in the text of the Constitutions to describe these various aspects: "maturing", "preparation", "deepening", "gradual introduction", stress the dynamic nature of the experience and lead to the idea of ongoing formation. They give prominence too to the perspective of the formative process, of which the following chapter will emphasize the gradual nature and continuity, the specific and complementary character of the different phases, and the criterion of synthesis and unification.

In the formative experience these various aspects must always be cultivated simultaneously and not successively, because they interpenetrate and sustain each other. No one should ever forget this, even though the different phases contemplate a greater emphasis on one or other of them according to the specific objective of the phase concerned: on spiritual efforts during the novitiate; on intellectual and professional training during the postnovitiate; and on practical experience during the period of practical training. The same unity and continuity of formation is involved all the way through, and so therefore is its successful result.

"A living unity" says the text, because formation is not a matter of bits and pieces. It is a living reality which continually links its different aspects together in harmony. One of the great tasks of initial formation, its first and characteristic general aspect, is the individual's experience of himself as a person called to unify his own life. This unity comes from his progressive concentration on his plan of life, which he finds authentically presented in the Constitutions, and in which Don Bosco himself found the secret of his unity as a person who loved the young in loving God and who loved God in loving the young. He said himself, as he handed the book of the Constitutions to Fr John Cagliero: "I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place" (cf. Foreword to the Constitutions).

¹*Costituzioni 1875*, XII, 6 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 181)

*Lord Jesus,
it was your will to take upon yourself
the task and challenge of growing
"in wisdom, in stature, and in grace with God and men".
You personally accompanied your Apostles
in the process of the purification of their humanity
and their efforts to re clothe it with grace
in view of their future mission.*

*Grant to the young men you have called to serve you
in the Salesian Society
the joy and generosity of applying themselves
to their own formation,
so that they may live in fruitful unity
the maturing of themselves as persons
and the spirit of "da mihi animas"
at the school of Don Bosco.*

ART. 103 FORMATION COMMUNITIES

Initial formation is ordinarily carried out in communities specifically designed for this purpose.

In accordance with Don Bosco's style of education these communities are open and keep in mind the aspirations of the young for a more personal and fraternal life style.

In them our spirit is lived in a more intense manner; together the members form a family founded on faith and enthusiasm for Christ, united in mutual esteem and common endeavour.

Those in formation and their guides contribute according to their different roles to the creation of an atmosphere of shared responsibility, and work with the aims of formation clearly in view.

The lines of growth which constitute the general objectives of initial formation have been indicated. In what kind of setting can this characteristic experience be realized? The Constitutions answer: ordinarily in chosen and specialized communities, in which there is:

- a life style open to the aspirations of the young;
- a family spirit lived in a more intense manner;
- an atmosphere of shared responsibility.

A particular setting for a specific purpose

Every salesian responds to the Lord's call in the community and with the help of the community. The latter, said art. 99, is in every circumstance the natural setting for growth in his vocation.

This principle is all the more valid for the salesian in initial formation. The special situation of discernment and of vocational identification, the particular phase of human maturing and deepening of the consecrated life, and the formative significance of being inserted in educative pastoral work while the salesian is being gradually formed, all mean that normally only communities structurally designed for the purpose can provide conditions suitable for realizing the desired environment.

All communities are formative, but not all are able to offer a service adapted to the different phases of the formation process.

The style of life of the formation community

The article points out *three requirements* or characteristic elements of the style of life proper to a salesian community for initial formation. We shall examine them one by one.

- a. *A style of life open to the "aspirations of the young".*

The salesian vocation wants to be open to cultures and to the needs of the young and of working-class areas (cf. C 7), and to the values of the world (cf. C 17). It is said explicitly of the local community that "it is open to the world's values and attentive to the cultural milieu in which it carries out its apostolic work" (C 57). Normally the salesians live a particular capacity for openness, friendly reception and harmony with the young (cf. C 14, 15, 39).

The text asks that this attitude, proper to Don Bosco's style of education, become a particular characteristic of the environment of the formation communities. They must live and structure their relationships according to a style of life which is more personal and more fraternal:

- more personal, in the sense that it respects the individual and his needs and fosters his interior life;
- more fraternal, so that relations are marked by simplicity, joy and mutual service in which there is real authentic communion.

b. *A family atmosphere lived in a more intensive way.*

This is the second characteristic of formation communities: a style of relationships, an intense spirit which animates them and which fosters encounters, communion and sharing between the members.

These statements are based on experience. More than being an abstract definition of a series of qualities, they evoke a climate, an environment of fraternal life, of the true family spirit, which is felt and experienced in a house of Don Bosco. It was the experience of those who found their way to the Oratory: "I came to realize that the Oratory was a big house with ever open doors and hearts open wider still", wrote Fr Joseph Vespignani.¹

The motives and conditions which make possible these encounters between people who are naturally different and which constitute the bond of unity in the formation community are:

- *faith and enthusiasm for Christ.* The fundamental motivation is the common salesian vocation: our "coming together" is based first and foremost on the conviction that "God calls us to live in community" (C 50), that "God brings our community together and keeps it united by his call, his Word, his love" (C 85);
- *mutual esteem, welcome, recognition,* the valuing of each individual in his personal reality. Don Bosco, speaking of "this matter which is so essential to our Society",² told his salesians: "So that this community life may be pleasant, we must rid it of all envy and jealousy; we must love one another as brothers, help one another, assist one another, respect one another, be understanding with one another. Each of us must guard against belittling our Society; rather, each must strive to make it respected by all";³

¹ G. VESPIGNANI, *A year at the school of Don Bosco*, San Benigno Canavese 1932, p. 13

² BM IX, 269

³ BM IX, 268

— *convergence of efforts*. The feeling of being committed to a common project, consistency in our activity, "working together": this is a basic factor in the communion of those living an apostolic vocation.

The relationship with Christ in faith, the brotherly relationships between the members, the practical convergence of endeavours in the mission, which presuppose a mature and docile mentality, constitute the bonds of unity and make the community a family.

c. An atmosphere of shared responsibility.

A concrete expression of the "convergence of efforts" is the ability to generate an atmosphere of shared responsibility, which allows and stimulates the contribution of each one to the formative objective; i.e. that makes for a life that is more responsible, individually and collectively; in which initiative is possible, dialogue is real, important questions are studied as far as possible in common and realized in collaboration.

Shared responsibility must evidently be practised to the extent and in accordance with the role that obedience has entrusted to each one.

The specific tasks of formation personnel and the confreres in formation are dealt with in articles 104 and 105; but the general Regulations ask that "those in formation should play their part in practical ways in the running of the community" (R 78). And the same article specifies two of the more important moments in which they are asked to express their shared responsibility: the planning and evaluation of their work in the light of the formative objective to be attained. In their common search for the will of God also, both one group and the other must develop in themselves the attitude of spiritual discernment, which is like the soul and delicate internal structure which moves towards its goal all research that is made together and every practical decision.⁴

*Let us pray for our formation communities,
and implore for the confreres working in them
wisdom, intelligence and largeness of heart,
that they may fulfil joyfully and efficaciously
the vital mission entrusted to them.*

*Lord, you have made your Church
the house and family of the Father,
where the life of each one
comes into being, develops and bears fruit
through the power of the Holy Spirit.
Grant that our formation communities
may be a faithful reflection of your Church
in their solicitude for the confreres in formation.*

⁴ Cf. "The Rector's Manual", Rome 1986, analytical index: shared responsibility, discernment

*You called your apostles
and formed them with patience and strength,
offering your life for them
and flooding their souls with the gifts of your Spirit.*

*Grant that
the formation environments of our young brothers
may be animated by your Gospel
and enlivened by your Spirit,
and become places of welcome, of encounter and stimulus,
for a full and fruitful response to your call.*

*You gave your Apostles the example of your
preaching to the poor and the little ones. Grant
to all our confreres in formation the same
yearning for the salvation of the young that you
infused in the heart of Don Bosco.*

ART. 104 ROLE OF FORMATION PERSONNEL

The guides in formation communities have a specific and necessary role.

They ensure that those in formation have the opportunities for a valid experience and for serious doctrinal reflection in an appropriate setting.

Aware of being instruments through whom the Lord is working, they make every effort to constitute with the rector, who is the leader of the community and its spiritual guide, a group that is convinced of its common responsibility.

Chosen for this task are men of faith and sufficient pastoral experience, capable of a living communication of the salesian ideal, and of genuine dialogue with the young confreres.

After describing the style of life of formation communities, the Constitutions go on to speak of those more immediately responsible for the formative setting: the formation personnel in the present article 104, and the salesian in formation in the following one, art. 105.

With regard to the formation personnel the article draws attention to three points: their specific task, their working together as a team, and the criteria for their choice and the qualities they should have.

The task of the formation guides

The "specific and necessary" task of the formation guides is that of ensuring the conditions necessary for the attainment of the general and specific objectives of the respective phases of formation.

Their overall role is that of seeing to it that the formative experience and the reflection that must accompany it are valid and positive, i.e they fulfil the purpose of the formation. This means that the lack of formation guides or their insufficiency will be seriously prejudicial to the young confreres.

Among the conditions, in addition to the suitable environment referred to in the commentary on art. 103, particular importance attaches to the "serious doctrinal reflection". For us this is a requirement that arises from the very nature of our vocation; it finds its first adequate response in a study curriculum which is complete and faithful to the guidelines of the "Ratio". Pastoral activity, in which are perceived the real difficulties, the problems and the calls of God, is a source of formation, but it needs periods of reflection and discernment so as to make a critical interpretation of the problems according to criteria of faith and science, and hence to prompt new projects and perspectives. The latter will always involve the subject directly and will keep salesian experience in mind. Teachers too, both those regularly on the staff and those who may be invited from time to time to present special matters outside the ordinary scholastic programme, guarantee continuity with the doctrinal patrimony of the Church and the charismatic heritage of the Congregation. In the present

pluralistic atmosphere they ensure adherence to the truth and at the same time a proper balance in critical judgements and practical evaluations. They are therefore a unifying presence, indispensable for a complete and well-ordered in initial formation.

The text speaks of formation guides" in the plural, not just a single one by himself. The task is, in fact, a complex one and calls for the complementary contributions of several persons. The text emphasizes the importance of them working together, on the basis of the awareness and conviction of their personal and common responsibility.

These considerations help us to understand more clearly that in the matter of salesian formation no one is self-taught, nor in the ordinary run of events is he a salesian who thinks he can do everything on his own, saving the possibility of charismatic exceptions which, however, need very careful verification. One of the biggest graces a young salesian can receive is without any doubt that of coming in contact with formation guides who are both competent and holy!

A role to be lived in shared responsibility

The coherence and consistency among the formation personnel is based on the conviction of faith that they are people "through whom the Lord is working", i.e. servants of the unitary action of the Spirit and responsible for following the criteria and directives of the Congregation in their activity.

Theirs is not an individual service nor an intermittent activity, but a task which provides a common and authentic response to different needs in view of the objectives to be attained. They are not there solely to provide a series of services, albeit valid ones, but to assume a common responsibility. The formation plan itself acquires greater authority when it is seen to be unified in content and evaluation, even though it reflects the originality of each of those involved in its presentation.

This coherence therefore is called for by theological and charismatic motives, as well as by pedagogical wisdom and by experience. The decree "Optatam totius" notes: "Superiors and professors should be keenly aware of the extent to which their mental outlook and content affects the formation of their students. Under the guidance of the rector they should cultivate the closest harmony of spirit and action".¹

It is certainly not a case of a dull and unproductive uniformity but of a fundamental conviction, which places the efforts and qualities of all that at the service of their common responsibility. It is an application of the spiritual and pedagogical criterion proper to one who is a mediator and minister.

The Congregation's guidelines in the field of formation help to express this unity of intentions in concrete form. The diversity of roles, structures and interventions renders simultaneously indispensable both the individual contribution of each one and his ability to work "in unum" with others.

¹OT 5; cf. SGC, 672

the community and its spiritual guide": the phrase recalls the distinctive features of the salesian rector, expressed especially in art. 55, which take on greater importance in the period of initial formation. All our salesian tradition, going back to Don Bosco himself, sees in the rector the spiritual guide, proposed in the first place not only to the formative community as such but also to each individual confrere.

The text insists nevertheless that the different roles, grouped around the rector, must be harmoniously and creatively linked together (cf. C 66), so as to form a "group that is convinced".

The requirements

The specific task assigned to the formation personnel requires in them the presence of the spiritual, intellectual and pedagogical qualities demanded by the Church and the Congregation. They must be:

— *"men of faith"* .

Since formation is a response of faith to a call accepted in faith, this perspective of life must be evident primarily in the witness of the formation guides. They are in fact animators of a community "founded on faith and enthusiasm for Christ" (C 103); they must accompany and stimulate a formation process "enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit" (C 98); they must help the young confreres to develop their personal motivations of faith and attain a spiritual maturity proportioned to the definitive commitment of perpetual profession founded on a right intention.

— *"capable of a living communication of the salesian ideal"*.

"Everything about Don Bosco had a power of attraction", said Don Albera, "because from his every word and deed emanated the sanctity of union with God which is perfect charity... This singular attraction was the source of the conquering force that captivated our hearts".²

Art. 85 of the Regulations tells us that "the assimilation of the salesian spirit is fundamentally a fact of living communication".

Formation personnel therefore must have the gift and ability of identifying fully with the salesian ideal so as to be able to announce it, bear witness to it and vitally communicate it more by their life and relationships than by their words. Tranquil possession of the salesian identity is the first condition for forming others, for inculcating in them a motivated and enthusiastic adherence to vocational values, and a love and taste for them.

— *"capable of genuine dialogue"*.

²ASC 3 (1920), p. 64-65; cf. D. ALBERA, *Circular letters* p. 373-374

This is a characteristic quality of Don Bosco's style of education, a style which is prompted by sympathy, by the ability to listen, and also by the exchange of valid information, all of which create confidence and openness, foster communication and facilitate formation in depth. It is a style which presupposes a certain attitude of heart and more than a little ascesis.

— *with "sufficient pastoral experience".*

This condition is directly linked with the fundamental objective of the service being given (to contribute to the formation of pastors and educators according to C 98), with the specific orientation of formation (the religious and apostolic nature of the salesian vocation referred to in C 97), and with the particular and original characteristics of intellectual formation (cf. R 82). It is a condition therefore which excludes the danger of a too abstract intellectual or spiritual approach.

Formation personnel are chosen on the basis of these qualities; in view of them they are prepared and are helped in a constant renewal and requalification process. Not all of them will satisfy these requirements to the same degree, and to ensure that the level reached is sufficiently high they will have to look continually to their own development and bring their professional ability and personal holiness to greater maturity.

In any case, what is particularly important is that the group of formation personnel, taken as a whole, be suitable for the adequate fulfilment of their formative mandate.

*Lord Jesus,
you manifest your will for us in many ways,
and through the confreres you have placed at our side
you help us to know the way that leads to you.
And so you willed that Don Bosco should be
the instrument through whom you call many
to serve you in serving the young.*

*Grant, we pray you,
to those you still choose today
to be at the school of Don Bosco
teachers and guides of their younger confreres,
a living awareness of the task they have received,
the wisdom they need and ability for dialogue,
together with kindness of heart and unity of purpose.*

*Make them docile instruments of your Spirit
so that they may be able to transmit,
in a true and joyous experience of faith,
the genuine sense of the common vocation and mission.*

ART. 105 THE SALESIAN IN INITIAL FORMATION

For the salesian the time of initial formation is not so much a period of marking time as already one of work and holiness. It is a time of dialogue between God, whose initiative calls him and leads him forward, and his own freedom as he gradually assumes responsibility for his own formation.

In this process of growing responsibility he is sustained by prayer, spiritual direction, personal reflection, study and brotherly relationships.

The first section of the chapter emphasized, among the general aspects of salesian formation, the importance of the personal commitment of each confrere, who bears the primary responsibility for his own formation. This obligation is now made more specific with respect to initial formation, indicating the young confrere himself as the first in the formative experience and pointing to the means which sustain him in this task.

Initial formation: a time of dialogue and vocational commitments

Initial formation is without any doubt a period of preparation, a process of maturing, of discernment and of growing assumption of responsibility leading to the salesian spiritual maturity required for perpetual profession. It is a dialogue between the confrere and the Congregation, aimed at appraising his suitability and maturity in view of his definitive incorporation.

But in the perspective of ongoing formation, the initial formation constitutes the beginning of the salesian religious experience and not just a preparation for living it later on. It is already a progressive realization of that experience; it is already fruitful: it "*is not so much a period of marking time as already one of work and holiness*",

This first point made by the article highlights the serious nature and the significance of this period:

- *a time of work*: the serious work of one who is totally dedicated, capable of self-sacrifice, with a sense of collaboration and tireless industry, so as to respond to the demands of the formative environment and of pastoral service.
- *a time of holiness*: the holiness which is found and which grows in the effort to collaborate with the action of the Spirit and his mediations, in the generous acceptance of the Father's plan for the confrere's life and for the coming of the Kingdom, as he becomes progressively more conformed to Christ through the Word, the sacraments and pastoral charity.

The words that follow: "It is a *time of dialogue* between God, whose initiative calls him and leads him forward, and his own freedom as he gradually assumes responsibility for his own formation", make more explicit and characterize still further the kind of work and holiness that are proper to the salesian in initial formation.

The "*work*" and the "*holiness*" consist in living this time of dialogue with complete docility. For the young confrere it is a matter of committing himself incessantly and with all his capabilities to discern and concretely accept God's initiative which he recognizes in the mediations, structures, process and formative experiences. The Lord calls and leads, but he asks for progressively freer and more authentic response, or in other words, one that is radical and motivated.

The first article of this third part, dedicated to formation, has already described the formative commitment in its first and fundamental aspect: it is a concrete response to the Lord's call, the first "yes" said in the living dialogue with God (cf. C 96). This same principle is now put forward again in the period of initial formation of one who, by saying with all he has and is: "Be it done to me according to your Word" (Lk 1, 38), wants to dispose and fit himself for God's initiatives, for the fullness of the service of charity, and increase in himself the joy of his vocation.

The means for sustaining the formative commitment

In the process of growing responsibility the young salesian does not go ahead haphazardly, nor must he think that everything will happen automatically. He must avail himself of all the means he is offered, and art. 105 indicates five of them:

— *Prayer.*

This is the experience which invigorates his contact and dialogue with God through listening to his Word, sacramental and liturgical life, and personal contact. It enables him to express in the intimacy of a personal relationship his own way of being God's son, of showing him gratitude, of entrusting to him his yearnings and concerns (cf. C 93). It is primarily in prayer that is realized in depth the dialogue between God's initiative and the freedom of the salesian which is characteristic of this period of formation.¹

— *Spiritual direction.*

For years Don Bosco was the protagonist in an approach which brought together three elements for setting his boys and his Salesians on the road to holiness: direction of conscience, which normally took place in the confessional; community direction or that of the environment, which created an educative spiritual atmosphere; and occasional personal direction by means of a word, a short piece of advice or a brief note. All this succeeded in making him a "captor of hearts", as he used to put it. Education is a work of the heart, and if it does not reach the point of winning over hearts and working on consciences it is gravely compromised. This was his conviction.²

The Constitutions and Regulations recognize the importance of personal spiritual direction, especially in the period of initial formation, and link it with the task

¹ On spiritual formation, and especially on prayer, cf. OT 8

² Cf. Collected letter, IV, p. 209

speak of it in the context of the immediate prenovitiate (cf. C 109), the novitiate (cf. C 112), and the period of temporary profession (cf. C 113).

Spiritual direction is recommended by Vatican II³ and by the "Ratio institutionis sacerdotialis" which adds: "Each student should have his spiritual director, to whom he may humbly and confidently open his conscience, so as to be guided safely in the Lord's way".⁴

A process of personal and communal spiritual direction starts nowadays from the fact accepted by everyone, that it is a human and spiritual reality. Spiritual growth is possible within a life plan that is in a certain sense already programmed and conditioned by the personal nature and history of each one. Spiritual direction is not only a religious fact. Its object is the concrete man with his concrete problems.

While all this is an inducement to the formation guides to prepare themselves carefully for their task, it also prompts the young confrere to be more easily aware of it and (what is more difficult) to accept that at times he needs to be helped and guided by those around him, and more especially by a spiritual guide. The General Regulations say that according to our constant tradition the spiritual guide of this kind in formation communities is the rector (cf. R 78).

— *Reflection.*

This is born of the desire and willingness to learn and accept what is new, overcoming irritation caused by changes through the ability to distinguish the changeable from the permanent, without going to extremes; it is born of a capacity for dialogue without being hidebound and requires an aptitude for concentration and the constant willingness to practise it.⁵ Every authentic experience presupposes a properly formed conscience which is keen and continually alert.

— *Study.*

Serious study of all the disciplines indispensable to the life and activity of the salesian apostle, so that he becomes almost a "specialist" in study, moves him in his humble search of objective truth; he aims at this by a constant purification of motives and by making use of scientific methods best suited to the purpose. This calls for presence and active attention at lessons which transmit not only knowledge but also a genuine tradition of life; it is a personal commitment which ensures the sound assimilation of cultural contents, their deeper critical analysis, their synthesis and their practical realization.

— *Brotherly relationships.*

There is no doubt that these are of great help because of the stimulus created by a friendly atmosphere for emulation and encouragement.

³Cf. OT 8

⁴RFIS 55; cf. also *ibid.* 45, 56; CIC, can. 239 §2; can. 240; can. 246 §4

⁵Cf. FSDB, 61

To all this we may add the content of art. 80 of the Regulations which refers to *normal discipline*. No "experience of life and action" can achieve its objective without perseverance in daily effort, ongoing conversion, a striving for purity of heart, and a sense of sacrifice in a paschal spirit. This is the price that has to be paid for spiritual freedom, a key element in every maturing process, and there is no one and nothing that can take the place of the young confrere in this service.

*Lord Jesus, every period of our life
is a dialogue of salvation,
a time for work and holiness.
Such was your own experience at Nazareth,
a prolonged preparation for your saving mission;
such were the formation years of John Bosco,
to whom you had shown his future field of work.
We pray for our young confreres in formation:
grant them the abundance of your Spirit,
that they may be able to assume with serious generosity
the responsibility for this period of their life
so as to grow in vocation,
sustained by prayer,
by the interest and company of their brothers,
and by love for the young who await their service.*

ART. 106 FORMATION CURRICULUM

Lay salesians, future priests and permanent deacons normally have the same initial formation and follow curricula of equivalent level, with the same phases and similar content and objectives.

The necessary differences are determined by the specific vocation of each one, by his personal gifts and inclinations and the duties of our apostolate.

The salesian vocational identity, which is common and fundamental for all, is the one purpose of formation.¹ But the forms in which it is expressed differ from one another. There is no such thing as a "generic" salesian;² every member lives the common aspects in a specific form, and during initial formation aims at becoming an educator and pastor of youth in the priestly or lay form proper to him (cf. C 98).

Art. 100 expressed as a general aspect of formation the principle of charismatic unity lived in a diversity of cultural contexts: a single vocational identity, common essential content, variety of concrete forms. This principle (unity in diversity and diversity in unity) is applied by art. 106 to the individual members, with respect to their formation. On the one hand there must be "curricula of equivalent level" and, on the other, attention must be given to the distinct vocational forms. This is a principle to be kept in mind throughout the whole of the formative process, because it forms one of its permanent perspectives.

We shall take a closer look at the statements in the article, which must be read and understood in the context of the salesian vocational identity already spoken of, and of the various forms in which it is realized: priestly, diaconal and lay (cf. C 4, 45).

The two complementary statements are as follows:

- initial formation is one only, with curricula of equivalent level and with the same phases and similar content and objectives for all;
- Initial formation is diversified, because it takes account of the distinctions determined by the specific vocation of each one (layman, deacon, priest) by his personal gifts and inclinations and by his apostolic duties.

Initial formation is unitary

This means that the curricula are at a common level for all, with the same phases and similar content and objectives. The statement is logical and self-evident. One need only recall that all Salesians have to attain the same vocational objective, and therefore they must live the same fundamental formative experience. The latter does not consist only in intellectual preparation; it also includes human maturing,

¹ Cf. FSDB, 21

² Cf. GC21, 264

deepening of consecrated life, and insertion in educative and pastoral work as a process of progressive identification with the salesian vocation.

The Constitutions and Regulations meet this requirement not only by prescribing that each one, before being definitively incorporated in the Society, must pass through the same periods of formation (immediate preparation for the novitiate, the novitiate itself, and the period of temporary profession: C 107), but also by indicating the objectives and content of the individual phases and applying them in fact to all Salesians.

This unitary formation is diversified

From the point of view of salesian formation, a salesian brother must be as well formed as a salesian priest, but in his own line as a lay religious and according to an appropriate cycle of preparation and studies.

This is a statement based on a reality which is both theological and anthropological. It is true that the Lord calls many to share Don Bosco's charism, but it is also true that each one lives it by incarnating it in his own personal reality, which is unique and different from that of others. On the other hand it is precisely this personal reality which, when probed and understood, becomes one of the principal signs used by the Holy Spirit as a concrete manifestation of his will in respect of a particular person. One has only to look at the typical formative experiences referred to in the constitutional text at the beginning of the part dealing with formation: the experience of Jesus with the Apostles and that of Don Bosco with the first Salesians. Peter James, John, etc. on the one hand, and Rua, Cagliero, Bonetti, etc. on the other are different forms and creative experiences of what is really the same vocation.

— The first distinction, which influences all aspects of formation and becomes a permanent standard and impression, is provided by the vocational form proper to each one: *lay salesian*, *salesian deacon*, *salesian priest*. "The different forms of the one vocation constitute a permanent perspective which specifies the experience of the values of the vocation itself (cf. C 98) under its various aspects (cf. C 113). The mission, community life, experience of the counsels, prayer and the spiritual life are lived by each one according to the dimension proper to him".³ It is a distinction which in a certain sense pervades the whole curriculum and is expressed in different periods, experiences and particular items, as for instance in art. 116 of the Constitutions (and the corresponding articles 97 and 98 of the Regulations), which speak precisely of the formation of the salesian priest and of the lay salesian.

— Conversely it must be kept in mind that responsible formation implies the development of personal aptitudes and gifts of grace (cf. C 99). *Different talents and personal aptitudes* may call for different formative periods to foster preparation for a specific educative and pastoral service.

³ FSDB, 44

In this case too the apostolic mission, considered not so much in its direct relationship with the Congregation and its form as with the individual members, "sets the tenor of (their) whole life" (C 3) and dictates the specific direction their formation must take (cf. C 97). The tasks entrusted to a confrere, the concrete manner of his service in the mission, call for a formation and preparation at a level which will enable him to meet the demands of his apostolic work, and must therefore be specific and appropriate for this purpose.

— We are all salesians, but we are not all called to live the vocation in the same way nor to make identical contributions to the common mission. The personal way of living the one vocation depends on the Lord, on the *specific call He gives to each one*, by the gifts and aptitudes with which He enriches him, and on the particular contribution which is asked of him in view of the obligations He entrusts to him in the mission.

They are not therefore differences born primarily of personal choices and decisions. They come rather from him who through his Holy Spirit raised up in Don Bosco the salesian vocation with its manifold riches, and calls others to share it in different ways.

In conclusion, unitary and diversified formation is a service to God's plan for the community and each of its members, who are called to life "a special gift of God: predilection for the young" (C 14).

*Lord Jesus, you formed your Church
and gave to it an infinite variety of gifts and tasks,
grant to our communities
the gift of unity in diversity,
so that we may be able to grow, with all our confreres,
brothers, deacons and priests,
in the one salesian vocation.*

*Make us attentive and grateful to the
Spirit, able to put to good effect
the personal talents of each member in
complementary respect and harmony, so as
to express authentically among youth the
richness of the charism you have given us.*

ART. 107 INCORPORATION IN THE SOCIETY AND STAGES OF FORMATION

Before being definitively incorporated into the Society, each one passes through the following stages of formation: preparation for the novitiate, the novitiate itself and the period of temporary profession.

These steps are necessary for both the candidate and the community, so that they may work together to discern God's will and correspond with it.

The candidate gradually gets to know the Society, and the Society in turn can evaluate his suitability for salesian life.

This article presents the three periods of salesian initial formation: the immediate preparation for the novitiate, the novitiate itself and the period of temporary profession, and provides a synthesis of their implication.

To them and the phases they comprise is dedicated the greater part of the following chapter, and there is no point in anticipating here what will be explained more organically and at greater length in chap. IX. It would seem more useful here to take up some statements which show the significance of the process.

Following the paragraphs of the article this significance can be perceived:

1. in the perspective of a definitive commitment for which it is a preparation;
2. in the attitude of discernment which accompanies it:
 - to know and correspond with God's will
 - for a mutual understanding and evaluation by the candidate and by the Society he wishes to enter.

In the perspective of perpetual profession and as a preparation for this definitive commitment

Initial formation has its permanent point of reference in perpetual profession. It must, in fact, lead to the salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with the importance of such a step, which is a definitive commitment (cf. C 117) implying a knowledge of one's vocation (of one's own person, of the salesian identity and of the possible relationships between them), and maturity at a human and Christian level (C 109).

The perspective before one who is entering the Society is a radical choice, an entirely consecrated life, a definitive gift. He does not give himself "on loan" to God and youth for a few years. He "gives" himself completely with his whole being. This was Don Bosco's firm indication for the consecrated members of his family.¹

¹Cf. D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*. The vows; cf.. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 228-229

When we look at the process of formation and recognize in it the gradual growth of vocational awareness, progress in commitment, the pedagogical significance and basic attitude of discernment which accompanies the unfolding of the experience, we must be careful not to consider the process as being in some way fragmentary, made up of partial commitments of a provisional, conditional or experimental kind.

The article synthesizes these two aspects, uniting the perspective of the definitive incorporation in the Society with the need for formative periods which permit, as the article says, the discernment of God's will, the responsible evaluation by both parties of the vocational suitability of the candidate and consequently whether or not he is ready for a definitive commitment.

The "gradual" element inherent in the process and the "definitive perspective" are not contradictory, but rather an expression of the awareness and respect which should accompany the making of fundamental human decisions, by giving proper importance to the spiritual significance of dialogue with the Lord.

Hence the serious nature, from a human and faith point of view, of a definitive commitment, and the need for an appropriate preparation for it. The perspective of perpetual profession brings home the fact that in the different periods, in the objectives proper to each of them and in the commitments they imply, what is at stake is the whole of life.

The significance of the formative "periods"

The attitude of discernment which continually accompanies the process of vocational growth makes "periods" necessary in formation. The article emphasizes some of the underlying reasons for this:

— *to know the will of God and correspond with it.*

Commitment to formation is itself the response to the Lord's call to live Don Bosco's apostolic project in the Church (cf. C 96), but its first objective in order of time for the vocational process to be formative is that of discerning to what plan of life the Lord is in fact giving the call: "verify his suitability" for beginning the salesian religious experience (cf. C 96, 109).

This discernment, realized in mutual collaboration between the candidate and the community, since the vocation is a gift which involves the responsibility of both, presupposes a process for recognizing the signs of God's will. It is a matter of discovering in the overall context of the life to which the candidate feels called, in its roots and practical expressions, in its perspectives and prospects, in its qualities and attitudes and in its motivations, what are the aspects through which the Holy Spirit reveals his presence and indicates the call to the Salesian life. In concrete terms they have to work together to verify the presence of the "right intention", i.e. of the manifest will, decisive and well tried, to give himself entirely to God through motives of faith, with a genuine inclination and interest towards the salesian vocation.

Experience in the field of vocations recalls the importance of a serious discernment process which enables the candidate to know himself and make himself known. This is the purpose of those formative experiences, referred to as "periods", the use of which by the Church and the Congregation is considered necessary for understanding and accepting the will of God and for growing in ability to correspond with it.

— *for a mutual understanding and evaluation of the candidate and of the Society.*

"Profession is also the expression of a mutual commitment between the professed member who enters the Society and the Society which receives him with joy" (C 23).

The previous paragraph emphasized from the standpoint of vocation the relationship between God who calls and the candidate who responds. Now the accent is placed on the mutual commitment between the candidate and the Society, expressed in common responsibility as a service to the individual and to the charism.

In its double aspect this is a complex and diversified reality; it involves both the Society, of which the candidate must gain a better knowledge, and the candidate who has to be evaluated on the basis of positive and specific elements; neither of these can be anything else but a progressive experience.

The various periods taken together provide a gradual and continuous method of reaching a sufficient and well founded judgement, since each period is designed for furnishing the necessary elements for the purpose.

*God of infinite wisdom,
you have disposed all things
in proper measure, number and importance,
and have assigned to every life
its rhythm and periods of growth.*

*Grant to your servants who are being formed
for the mission of educators and pastors of the young
and to confreres who guide them,
discernment and the spirit of collaboration
so that they may know in depth your holy will
and faithfully correspond with it.*

*Enlightened and supported by your Holy Spirit, may
they persevere in following the formation process, in
total dedication to you and to their brethren.*

Through Christ our Lord.

After the candidate has freely presented his application, admission to the novitiate, to temporary or perpetual profession, to the ministries and to sacred orders, is made by the provincial with the consent of his council, after hearing the opinion of the rector of the community with his council.

The superiors base their judgement on positive indications of the candidate's suitability, and keep in mind first of all the canonical requirements.¹

¹ cf. CIC, can. 642-645; 1019-1054

The process of initial formation is complex and vitally integrated into the unity of the individual (cf. C 1 02); it is carried out in appropriate settings — (cf. C 103), and on the basis of a curriculum of equal level for all (cf. C 104), which involves formation personnel (cf. C 104) and salesians in formation (cf. C 105) with shared responsibility. Its different periods are the organic expression of a pedagogy of research, of maturing and of encouragement.

The various periods are marked by times of synthesis and deeper analysis at the level of both knowledge and commitment: these are the admissions, which are dealt with in the present art. 108, the last article of chap. VIII.

The text gives prominence to two aspects:

- *the responsibility* and the part played by the provincial, the candidate and the local community respectively;
- *the criteria* which form the basis for the judgement on suitability.

The admissions are important final moments of evaluation, choices and decisions; at the same time they offer a valuable pedagogical help in leading the candidate towards a response which is ever more concrete, consistent and mature. Although discernment is a constant feature of the formation process, especially in the initial phases, it is manifested more strongly at these times when the reading and the synthesis of the vocational signs take place and an evaluation is made. These signs become the basic motivation of both the candidate in making his application, and of those responsible for making a judgement on his vocational maturity in line with the requirements of the corresponding formative phase.

There is therefore a close connection between discernment and admissions. The application, freely made by the candidate, is based on the discernment he has made with the collaboration of the community, and he remains open to a sign which will be the indication of God's will, the judgement of those "through whom the Lord is working" (C 104). On the other hand, the judgement of the superiors is the fruit of the effort at spiritual understanding, enlightened by the criteria of the Church and the Congregation, which pervades all formative experience and has the purpose of serving both the vocation of the individual candidate and the salesian identity.

For this reason admissions should be seen in the perspective of a process with different levels of maturing and commitment.

The application, opinion, and responsibility in connection with admissions

There are three persons or groups which share responsibility in the matter of admissions: the candidate who freely presents his application; the local community which expresses its opinion through the rector and his council, and the provincial who makes the decision with the consent of his council.

— The application of the candidate.

Admission takes place after the candidate has freely presented his application. It is not something which takes place automatically at the conclusion of a formation period or at a fixed date in the calendar. The initiative is taken personally by the candidate. He does so freely i.e. "without any external or internal pressures" (C 109), aware of the choice he is making (cf. C 109) and with the salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with such a choice (cf. C 11 7) .

It is up to him to take the first step by which he expresses, as far as he is concerned, a first personal positive conclusion as regards discernment of his vocation, reached together with those who can and must make their contribution to the evaluation.

— The opinion of the rector of the community with his council

Vocational signs are revealed especially through personal contact and common life in the places and circumstances in which experience of vocational values is gained by living and working together. It is natural therefore that the local community should contribute information and its own evaluation on the basis of the life lived together. This is one of the concrete expressions of what is stated in art. 99, speaking of the community as the "natural environment for vocational growth", and is made more explicit in art. 81 of the Regulations: The local community, since it shares the responsibility for the development of each confrere, is invited to express its opinion whenever one of its members seeks admission to profession or to holy orders. This will be done in the form most in keeping with charity".

Without prejudice to the importance and significance of the contribution and participation of all the members of the community, the juridical responsibility for sending an official opinion to the provincial rests with the rector and his council.

— Responsibility for Admission.

The juridical responsibility for admission belongs to the provincial, the rector and their respective councils, and is deliberative or consultative according to the competence of each. Moral responsibility extends very much further, and attaches to all who live with the candidate and have some part in the formative process. A special responsibility is borne by the personal spiritual director and the confessor, who naturally remain bound to secrecy in virtue of the sacrament or their office.

examined and an opinion expressed at two levels: that of the council of the community where the candidate resides and that of the provincial council of the province on which the local community depends from a religious point of view.

The admission itself belongs to the provincial, and is a formal act of his personal authority and not of the council, though the consent of the latter is necessary.¹

— *Proven suitability.*

The judgement of the responsible superiors is a judgement on the degree of suitability of the candidate in relation to the formative phase in which he finds himself at the time; it must be decided on the basis of criteria of discernment indicated authoritatively by the Church and the Congregation. It is a matter of those elements which permit the ascertaining of the presence or absence of the signs of God's call and the candidate's suitability for responding to it, always supposing that he has calmly and honestly made himself known in his true reality. The FSDB and also the "Criteria and Norms for salesian vocation discernment" provide an ample presentation of the common and specific positive criteria for the indication of basic suitability and the identification of the necessary qualities, in proportion to the age of the applicant and the commitment he is taking on (dispositions and aptitudes, motivations, right intention); they also indicate the negative criteria or contraindications which enable attitudes or modes of behaviour to be identified which exclude or diminish vocational suitability. The article makes it clear that the absence of contraindications is not sufficient. The presence of elements indicating positively an aptitude for salesian life is indispensable. Suitability, in fact, does not consist in the absence of obstacles, but in the presence of gifts which have been received, and have been cultivated and offered for the present and future.

¹Cf. *Criteria and Norm for salesian vocation discernment*. Admissions, Rome 1985

*God our Father,
enlighten with your truth and your love
those you have chosen for the delicate tasks
of pastors and guides in vocational discernment.
Give them faith and wisdom, trust and prudence,
so that by appraising all your gifts
they may be able to judge of the suitability
of their young confreres
and our Society may grow in numbers and quality
for the extending of our Kingdom.*

*Grant also to the young confreres themselves a heart
that is free and strong, but docile and generous, so that
they may be able to respond in truth and charity to the
obligations of their vocation.*

Through Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER IX

THE FORMATIVE PROCESS

"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1,6).

Formation, like any other process, has a fixed goal. It belongs however to the context of christian revelation and differs, for that reason, from other processes: although it recognizes intermediate objectives it has its sights set on the definitive transforming outcome of the "day of the Lord". It is against this wider background that the introductory quotation from the letter to the Philippians invites us to see the constitutional text in a context which, from a human point of view, is never ending but is nevertheless highly encouraging when viewed in the light of the second coming of Christ.

We are at the opening of the letter Paul wrote from prison. It is autobiographical in tone, and very affectionate in its sentiments: "God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (1,8). The community at Philippi is perhaps the one with which he had the most tender relationship. We know that from the very beginning it was always fully docile to the Apostle (Acts 16,12-40; 20,1-16). We know too of the great and generous help it gave in collecting for the poor (2 Cor 11,9; Phil 4,16), and in the other assistance it provided while Paul was in prison (Phil 2,45; 4,10 ff.).

Paul brings together all these christian qualities of the Philippians (financial help, missionary activity, maintaining the purity of the Gospel) under the general heading of "good works" (1,16), and on this basis, on this existence centred on the Gospel, he significantly projects a correct theological interpretation which has evident practical applications: *every "good work" is begun by God's grace, and by grace is developed and brought to a successful conclusion*. In 2,13 he makes the thought more explicit: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure"; and in 2,12 he draws the practical conclusion: "Therefore work out your own salvation with fear and trembling". This is excellent advice for one who lives continually under divine inspiration in a process of ongoing formation.

In 1,6 Paul explains, as something close to his heart, that the "good works" which always call for real sacrifices, are never without their reward. This motive of reward, divorced from any mercenary ideas (which Jesus makes very clear in the Sermon on the Mount: Mt 6,1-18) is always in the forefront of the mind of Jesus and Paul – and we may rightly add, of Don Bosco — as a sign of the serious and at the same time human approach of God in our regard (cf. Phil 2,14). We must not overlook the warning implicit in the phrase "the day of Christ Jesus" (or as it is called elsewhere "the day of the Lord"), in so far as it is also the day of judgement (1 Cor 3, 10-15). Meanwhile, as Paul notes very realistically later on, "let us go forward on the road that has brought us to where we are" (Phil 3,16).

* * *

1. Purpose and significance of the chapter

As a response to the Lord's call which invites him to live in the Church Don Bosco's plan as an apostle of youth (cf. C 96), the salesian "commits himself to a formation process which will last all his life and will keep pace with his maturing in others ways. He learns by experience the meaning of the salesian vocation at the various moments of his life and accepts the ascetical demands it makes on him" (C 98).

The *process* means the ensemble of periods, elements and characteristic ways of doing things which influence the development of personality and its relation with life. Within the process particular importance attaches to initial formation, which embraces everything from the first approach to salesian life (cf. C 109) to the definitive incorporation in the society (cf. C 117).

Chapter VIII has presented the general aspects of salesian formation, including those of initial formation, so as to guide formative experience and ensure its validity. The purpose of chapter IX is different but complementary: it applies in consistent fashion the general aspects previously indicated to the formation process, i.e. to its different periods. Vocation and its formation move like a story within other stories, with which they live in a reciprocal influential relationship. Against the same continuous background there is a rhythmic sequence of periods, situations and different contexts, which evolves sometimes gradually and sometimes in a quite unforeseen manner; difficulties are met and faced up to, stimulating help is received, means are found for solving problems. It is a gradual moving forward step by step, as one situation follows another, as cat period follows its predecessor.

Of decisive importance in this process is the initial option and the quality of growth during the various periods, as the confrere defines his project more clearly, identifies with his vocation, and trains himself to live it in an adult manner with ever increasing freedom and awareness.

2. Structure of the chapter

In the overall structure of the chapter, three principal nuclei can be detected, which correspond to three significant phases in the gamut of formation.

a. *Before definitive incorporation in the Society* the candidate passes through three PERIODS which follow one another without a break:

- Preparation for the Novitiate (*art. 109*).
- Novitiate:
considered separately are the formative experience and its objective (*art. 110*), its duration (*art. 111*), and the important role of the director of novices (*art. 112*).
- Time of temporary profession:

588 with its formative experience (*art. 113-116*), during the immediate postnovitiate

(*art. 114*), time of practical training (*art. 115*) and with regard to specialized formation (which will continue even after perpetual profession) (*art. 116*).

b. Perpetual profession incorporates the salesian definitively in the Society (*art. 117*).

c. Ongoing formation:

The two *articles 118 and 119* do not describe this as though it were a "period", but present it rather as an attitude and perspective which animates the whole of life, recalling what was said at the beginning of the third part of the Constitutions: our life is an experience of an ongoing dialogue between the Lord who calls and the salesian who responds. He does so by making the effort to discern the voice of the Spirit in daily events and by committing himself to an appropriate and continued formation. This he does to renew the religious and pastoral sense of his life, and to fit himself to carry out his work with greater competence (cf. C 119), together with Him who began this good work and will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 1,6).

ART. 109 PREPARATION FOR THE NOVITIATE

To anyone who is thinking of becoming a salesian, an environment and suitable conditions are offered to enable him to discern his own vocation and to mature as a man and a christian. In this way, and with the help of a spiritual guide, he is able to make a choice with greater awareness of what he is doing, and without any external or internal pressures.

A period of special preparation is required immediately prior to the novitiate to deepen the candidate's vocational choice and verify his suitability for beginning the novitiate. This preparation is made through an experience of salesian community and apostolic life.

In several different places the Constitutions refer to vocations as a divine gift and remind us of the obligation we have of following them up. "The Lord continually calls some to follow him," said art. 28, "and enriches them with a variety of gifts in the service of the Kingdom". As pastors and educators, we help young people "to discover, accept and develop the gift of a vocation" (C 28). "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" (C 37).

Among the young people called there are some who are attracted to the salesian life, because the Lord, who "loves the Congregation wants to see it vibrant for the good of the Church and never ceases to enrich it with new apostolic energy" (cf. C 22). Before they begin in the novitiate their salesian religious experience, a formative period is offered them to prepare them adequately for such a step: this is the period of "preparation for the novitiate" which is dealt with in this first article of chap. IX.

The Congregation does not define the details for this stage, nor does it provide for it a specific juridical structure. It is up to each province to decide on the way it shall be carried out. The Constitutions merely point to the purpose and conditions of this time of preparation and refer to two phases which we could call "*preparation for the novitiate in a wide sense*" and the *special immediate preparation*.

Preparation for the novitiate

The objectives for this particular time of formation are that the candidate may get to know himself better and see the salesian vocation as a deepening of his own baptismal vocation, to mature as a man and as a Christian, so as to render himself able to make a free and generous choice in response to his feeling that God is calling him, a response that will translate into a living reality the project he has come to know.

Certainly it is a preliminary choice that is involved, but one nevertheless with all the conditions for being personal and validly motivated, yielding to neither fears nor mere superficial attraction, nor to pressures arising from affections or the

environment. Only when the candidate has made his option for the salesian life can he begin his immediate preparation for the novitiate.¹

For the service of young men who want to attain this objective the community offers a suitable environment and conditions (a programme of initiatives, experiences, aids, etc.) and especially the help of a spiritual guide. The importance and practical function of these methodological aspects have already been considered in the previous chapter. They are, in fact, general aspects of the formative experience which in varying forms and degrees are required in every case.

The realization of this vocational service is a task which presents a challenge to the responsibility and salesian youth sensitivity of the provinces and individual communities.

A "special immediate preparation"

Entrance into the novitiate presupposes a decision to want to begin, for reasons of faith, the salesian religious life in preference to any other form of life. The ability to make such an option requires a sufficient maturity of conscience and freedom so as to be able, with the help offered, to deepen the vocational choice and verify personal suitability for it.

From formation experience one can understand how important is the attainment of this objective for the individual and for the novitiate environment. Often the difficulties met with in the formation of novices seem to derive from the fact that the latter, when they were admitted to the novitiate, possessed neither the necessary maturity for making a choice, nor a clear understanding (at least in a general way) of the obligations they were taking on, nor the ability to accept the breaks which a vocation always implies with respect to persons, environments and things not compatible with it.

All this never fails to have its effect on the novitiate community itself, which is not sufficiently homogeneous in consequence, and is sometimes conditioned by attitudes which are unacceptable or by problems which should have been resolved during the period of preparation.

The method indicated by the Congregation as valid for an adequate preparation for the novitiate, so as to eliminate uncertainties and ignorance of various kinds, includes the following indispensable elements:

- an *experience of community and apostolic life* in a salesian community, normally for a period of not less than six months (cf. R 88);
- a *guide who follows the candidate personally*, leads him to an understanding of himself and of the plan of life he wants to make his own, and helps him to acquire the maturity needed to do so;

¹Cf. GC21, 267

— *formation personnel* (whether the candidates are inserted in an already existing community, or form a community on their own), who have a constant understanding with the corresponding personnel of the novitiate, and are thus able to ensure the continuity in formative content and criteria of evaluation which, without any doubt, facilitate the making of a judgement about suitability by anyone who is obliged to do so;

— an *intellectual formation* which, by exploiting the studies already done and integrating them with readings, communications and experiences of various kinds, sows the seed of a habit of and leads to a first overall vision of the reality and vocation of man, of the christian and of the salesian, and makes it perceived as a concrete and up-to-date proposal for a commitment that is both possible and valid.

From the indications given in the Rule the importance can be seen of this time of preparation for the novitiate, and how indispensable it is that salesian communities render themselves suitable for offering this precious service to many young men.

*Lord God, you love our Society
and never cease to enrich it with fresh apostolic energy Watch over the
young men
whom you call to experience salesian life;
guard in them the germ of a vocation
against all temptation and doubt,
and give them the courage and joy
of deciding in their heart to follow you.*

*Grant also to our communities the
grace to correspond with your gifts by
the witness of a life given in joy, to
offer to the young a suitable setting for
the maturing of their vocation in life.*

Art. 110-111 THE NOVICIATE AND ITS DURATION

ART 110

The novitiate offers the candidate the possibility of beginning the salesian religious experience.

For this reason the novitiate community must always provide an example of life founded on faith and nourished by prayer, in which evangelical simplicity, joy, friendship and mutual respect create a climate of trust and docility.

With the help of the director the novice examines carefully the motives for his choice, makes certain of his suitability for the salesian calling, and prepares himself to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco.

ART. 111

In accordance with canon law,¹ the novitiate lasts twelve months; it begins when the candidate, after being admitted by the provincial, enters the canonically erected novitiate house and places himself under the guidance of the director of novices.

The novitiate is invalidated by an absence of more than three months, continuous or broken. An absence of more than fifteen days must be made good.

¹ cf. CIC, can. 647,3; 648; 649,1

In three articles (C 110-112) the Constitutions present respectively the objectives and environment of the novitiate, its duration, and the role and requisites of the director of novices. To these must be added a further six articles of the Regulations.

The contents of art. 110 refer to the fundamental scope of the novitiate: the possibility of launching the salesian religious experience; they therefore indicate its specific objectives and the environment that makes them possible.

Fundamental scope: launching the salesian religious experience

The word "beginning" in art. 110 has more than its ordinary significance. It implies also introduction and follow up: to enter gradually, to take the first conscious steps in a process in which one has become freely and vitally involved. In this sense the term "beginning" is linked with and derives its full significance from its proper objective: *"the salesian religious experience"*. It is a matter of "starting up" this experience of life, of trying out the values of this vocation (cf. C 98), by integrating its various aspects (cf. C 102) and ensuring their validity (cf. C 98-99).

It is a "salesian" experience, and therefore a specific one, marked by its distinctive charisma. In this connection it will be useful to read again what is laid

down by the Code of Canon Law in connection with the formative experience of the novitiate.

The common elements are included in and taken up by the "divine vocation proper to the Institute": "The purpose of the novitiate, by which life in an institute begins, is to give the novices a greater understanding of their divine vocation, and of their vocation to that institute. During the novitiate the novices are to experience the manner of life of the institute and form their minds and hearts in its spirit. At the same time their resolution and suitability are to be tested".¹

The specific objectives of the novitiate

In an appropriate formative setting the novice begins his salesian religious experience, which will be lifelong. The specific objectives to be attained are suggested by the closing expressions of can. 646 and the third paragraph of art. 110.

They are three in number, and convergent and complementary in nature: to examine motivations, make certain of suitability, and prepare for complete self-donation to God.

The novitiate experience should lead the novice *"to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco"*. He is preparing himself, in fact, for religious profession by which he *"offers himself to God in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom"* (C 3) *"according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions"* (C 24).

Two indispensable conditions are necessary if this gift is to be complete, true and really possible.

— *suitability for the salesian vocation must be ascertained*: this is the aim of vocational discernment, a process which employs natural and supernatural means suitable for detecting those aspects of the personal reality through which the Holy Spirit indicates that a certain person is called to the salesian life, i.e. that he has the requisite aptitudes and virtues, chief among which is the right intention. It is suitability that, in a certain sense, guarantees that the gift is a true one;

— *the motives underlying the choice must be examined*. The presence of the qualities which make a young man suitable for the salesian life and the absence of contraindications can certainly constitute a sign of God's call which is important and necessary, but it is not sufficient by itself for reaching a safe decision about it.

The person asking to be admitted is a gifted candidate, who feels attracted and called to be a salesian. He opts for a kind of life and set of values which he perceives according to his reality and his aspirations. But it is necessary to know and assess the source of this inclination, this propensity, this learning: what are the needs and

¹ CIC, can. 646

deep motivations.

The discerning of these motivations is one of the essential aspects of the formative process.

Motives never exist in an unmixed state. They are subject to gradual and continuous maturing and purification. Formation leads the candidate little by little to understand that it is the Lord who calls and is the reason for his choice and service.

Motives are as complex as is the person himself, in whom physiological and psychological elements combine with the spiritual and with grace to form a unit still capable of further development. They may be of many kinds and to some extent convergent as, for example, the desire to work for youth and the will to give oneself totally to God for the construction of the Kingdom. What is important is that the specific and primary motive (the "right intention") be able to weld together the secondary motives compatible with it which are inevitably present either consciously or unconsciously, and be able to overcome and eliminate those which are incompatible.

The detection of a particular motivation is always a delicate business. Ordinary meetings with candidates are not enough, just as by themselves neither psychological nor aptitude tests will suffice. What is needed is a deep contact for spiritual direction and guidance with someone who has a true sensitivity and ability for discernment, together with a willingness and determination on the part of the person being helped to join simultaneously in the same process.

The community environment

The novitiate is a school of life, and for this reason the atmosphere prevailing in it is a fundamental factor in formation. What are the constituent elements in this climate which is so valuable for salesian life? Chapter VIII has already dealt with the community as a setting for formation: art. 97 recalled the first Salesians, who lived at the very heart of Don Bosco's community in action, and were intent on modelling their own lives on his; art. 99 presented the community as the natural environment for vocational growth; art. 103 described the characteristics of formation communities; and all this is naturally valid for the novitiate community as well. But at the same time the constitutional text points out some aspects more especially required for the novitiate setting. Two of these elements are emphasized: the climate of faith and the family atmosphere. The community must be:

— *an example of life founded on faith and prayer.*

"Example of life" is a phrase which introduces once again the perspective of experience. It is not a matter of learning theoretically about salesian life, but of a kind of life which enables a person to catch a glimpse of and feel for himself its foundation which is faith, the perceiving of a presence: Christ, his Word, his example, his call, his

criteria, his mission; a presence which is felt and acknowledged in prayer, dialogue and friendship with the Lord.

— *a climate of trust and docility.*

How much our Rule of life insists on this characteristic aspect of the salesian spirit which is so typical of our communal style of living together! We may recall one or two of its statements in this regard: "the salesian is open and cordial, ready to make the first approach and to welcome others with unfailing kindness, respect and patience. His love... is able to draw out friendship in return; this is the loving kindness so much recommended by Don Bosco" (C 15). "Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments... In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness... relationships are governed... by faith and the promptings of the heart" (C 16).

There come to mind the simple and well known expressions of Don Bosco which, although not referring directly to formation communities, nevertheless describe the soul of an educative and formative atmosphere: "Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you? Nothing else than, due allowances being made, we should go back to the happy days of the Oratory of old; the days of affection and Christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone".²

A "*climate of trust*" means a style of attention to people, of openness, dialogue and cordial encounter, which overcomes fear and prejudice. A "*climate of trust*" implies a setting in which everyone is docile to the Spirit though commitment to discernment and the acceptance of his mediations, in practical fidelity to vocational criteria while respecting personal rhythm and the laws of gradual progress.

How is such an atmosphere to be built up and nourished? The text indicates four indispensable elements:

- *evangelical simplicity*, a deep simplicity which is not just a surface veneer but comes from within; it is a maturity which grows in unaffectedness and in daily expression;
- *joy*, as a natural expression of youth, and especially as an experience of vocational enjoyment;
- *friendship*, a deep encounter between persons who are called to live their vocational and their whole life in communion;
- *mutual respect*, which art. 52 characterizes in these terms: "The community receives each confrere with an open heart. It accepts him as he is and fosters his growth to maturity". This statement is valid in a quite special way at the beginnings of salesian experience, when there may emerge more easily and more strongly character differences that have not yet been worked on, clashes arising

² Letter from Rome 1884; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 263

from differences of origin or preparation, vocational guidelines not yet well defined, and the exertions associated with new obligations.

Without any false idealism but with a clear awareness of its efficacy, the novitiate community, both the stable personnel and the novices who change each year, use these qualities to build the community's physiognomy so that the possibility of setting out on the salesian religious experience may be a happy reality for all.

Duration of the novitiate (art. 111)

Art. 111 repeats what is laid down by the Code of Canon Law concerning the duration of the novitiate and how absences are calculated. Can. 648 §1 says: "For validity, the novitiate must comprise twelve months spent in the novitiate community, without prejudice to the provision of can. 647 §3". And the latter adds: "A major Superior can allow a group of novices to reside, for a certain period of time, in another specified house of the institute".

Concrete details for the application of these dispositions, which are designed to ensure a continuous and sufficient experience, are given in the FSDB.³

The indications given in the article point to the three persons more directly responsible for the novitiate experience: the candidate, the provincial, and the director of novices.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
to prepare your Apostles
you took them away from others for a time
"to a desert place"
and taught them "the mysteries of the Kingdom".
Enrich with the abundance of your grace
our novitiate communities,
so that with the zealous collaboration of the superiors
and the assistance of your Holy Spirit
they may become
a cenacle of filial communion with the Father
and admirable places for preparing
for our mission among youth.*

³ Cf. FSDB, 379-381

ART. 112 THE DIRECTOR OF NOVICES

The director of novices is the spiritual guide who coordinates and animates all the work of formation of the novitiate.

He must be a man of prudence with spiritual and salesian experience and an up to date knowledge of practical psychology and youth problems. He should be able to relate easily to the other people, to engage in dialogue, and to inspire confidence in the novices by his kindness.

He must be perpetually professed and is appointed by the provincial with the consent of his council and the approval of the Rector Major. He remains in office for three years and may be reappointed.

The renewed picture of formation puts the figure of the director of novices in a new light. Art. 112 of the Constitutions is specifically dedicated to him. His presence and role have already been referred to in the two previous articles: art. 110 said that "with the help of the director" the novice attains the objectives proper to the novitiate, which begins, said art. 111, "when the candidate places himself under the guidance of the director of novices".

Although all the formation personnel have a "specific and necessary role" (C 104), that of the novice director is unique and distinctive. The rector of the formation community is "the leader of the community and its spiritual guide" (C 104), but in the novices' community this role belongs always and solely to the director of novices.

The three paragraphs of art. 112 reflect respectively:

1. his principal role;
2. the qualities required for its exercise;
3. the canonical requirements for his appointment.

The novice director, a principal role

Articles 110 and 111 speak of the function of the director with respect to each individual novice, the first paragraph of art. 112 broadens the perspective to an overall and comprehensive view of his task: he is the "spiritual guide who coordinates and animates all the work of formation of the novitiate".

He is the "*spiritual guide*", in the sense that it is his function to welcome, accompany and precede as a guide (father, teacher and spiritual guide" are qualifications of the salesian rector, according to art. 55); his function is to indicate the path to follow, and how to proceed along it so as to attain the goal, pointing out obstacles to avoid and means to use.

He is a "spiritual guide" because the path is one of a spiritual and charismatic experience. The term "spiritual" is used not to exclude other aspects of the personal

reality but to indicate the particular perspective of an experience which involves the whole person in his response to the Spirit.

The director fulfils this service in a formative relationship with each novice, but also (and this is the point being emphasized) by co-ordinating and animating all the formative activity so as to ensure, as art. 104 says, the conditions for the validity of the experience.

"*Coordinates*" means that he brings about a convergence of aspects of shared responsibility, functions, efforts, and all the other elements of the formation process on the principal objective.

"*Animates*" adds to coordination a deeper interior dimension, more sensitive to the pedagogical aspect and to the processes which start from the motivations.

To coordinate and animate all the formative activity implies a complex of initiatives and ideas, which foster the vitality of the formative experience by appealing to conscience and active participation through the exploitation of roles and personal gifts.¹

The required qualities

Two series of qualities are required if the novice director is to fulfil his task in a salesian manner. The first could be called personal, and the second concern contacts with others.

"*A man of spiritual and salesian experience*": this first requisite is explained by the very nature of the formation of the novices. If the director is to be their guide in beginning their salesian religious experience, it is both normal and necessary that he himself be a man of salesian spiritual experience. It is expected of a professor that he be well acquainted with the discipline of his competence, and that he be able to teach it by didactically efficacious methods. And of the novice director it is expected that he live and have lived what he is speaking of, and that he be able to introduce the young candidates to their self-giving, taking them as it were by the hand and leading them along a path that is well known to him.

The spiritual experience of a man of God is needed therefore, but so too is salesian experience, which implies a minimum of practical educative and pastoral experience in active communities, and a living knowledge of salesian values, particularly those which contribute to the salesian "apostolic sense".

Anyone who must formulate judgements, often delicate and decisive in nature, on persons and their situations evidently requires prudence, which supposes the ability to observe and interpret, using criteria of knowledge and faith. For this reason the text adds that the director should have "an up-to-date knowledge of practical psychology and youth problems". The novices in fact are usually young and children of

¹ Cf. GC21, 46

and history. To understand them and build on a firm and realistic foundation, the director must have a sufficient knowledge of the dynamics of personal psychological and spiritual forces and the influences normally exerted by every culture. He will therefore need an appropriate specific formation.²

But knowledge and other qualities would be of little use without the relationship of mutual confidence which is part of the atmosphere of all authentically salesian education. This aspect has already been touched on in the commentary on art. 110, when speaking of the "climate of trust".

Rightly therefore it is required of the novice director that:

- he "*be able to relate easily to other people*", i.e. that he be of a welcoming disposition, with the ability to make the first approach and establish interpersonal relationships;
- he be able to "*engage in dialogue*", which implies more than simple human contact: it supposes the full acceptance of the other person, respecting him in his diversity, and the intention to make no judgement about him while dialogue is proceeding;
- he be outstanding in *kindness*, which is the great norm of salesian education. It is manifested in a fatherliness which does not create childish dependence, but fosters adult maturity and prompts that transparent and solid trust so much asked for by Don Bosco: "Let the master of novices show himself amiable, gentle and of kindly disposition, so that the novices may open their hearts to him and place their full confidence in him". This is a text which already appeared in the Constitutions of 1874.³

Canonical norms for his appointment

These are clear and precise. Beyond what they lay down at a procedural level, they have a particular significance. As the "spiritual guide" in a period which is decisive for formation and consequently for the unity and growth of the salesian vocational identity, the novice director does not act in his own name only. His ministry is an expression of the responsibility of the whole Congregation, represented by Rector Major and the provincial, in fidelity to the gift of the Spirit and in the commitment to live, preserve, deepen and develop it in harmony with the Body of Christ⁴ and with sensitivity in respect of different cultural situations.

He must therefore act with a sense of communion and shared responsibility, docile to the dispositions of the Congregation and the province and concerned to ensure continuity in the formative experience, especially in the immediate postnovitiate.

²Cf. SGC, 685

³Cf. MB X, 912; cf. also *Costituzioni 1874*, XIV, 10 (F. MOTTO, p. 195)

⁴Cf. MR 11

*Grant, O Father,
the light and strength of your Holy Spirit
to our confreres whom you have called
to be the directors and spiritual guides
of those who are beginning
their salesian religious experience.
May their ministry be fruitful and full of joy;
enriched with the wisdom that comes from you
and well endowed with patient kindness;
may they be able to welcome, correct and encourage
the young people entrusted to them,
so as to lead them to give themselves wholly to you
their one supreme Good.
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 113 PERIOD OF TEMPORARY PROFESSION

The first profession marks the beginning of a period of consecrated life. In this period the confrere, with the help of the community and of a spiritual guide, completes his maturing process with perpetual profession in view, and develops the different aspects of his vocation as a lay salesian or as a candidate for the priesthood.

During the first three years of this period, profession may be either triennial or annual; in the next three years it will be triennial.

The Constitutions dedicate four articles to the third formative period, that of the time of temporary profession. Art. 113 explains its general sense, art. 114 refers to the immediate postnovitiate, art. 115 to the period of practical training, and art. 116 to the specific formation of the salesian, which usually begins before perpetual profession.

Fundamental significance of this period

Two complementary statements reveal the essential perspectives of this period:

- on the one hand it is said that "the first profession marks the beginning of a period of consecrated life". It is not just a passing phase, but has its own proper significance and value (cf. C 105): the professed is already a true salesian religious;
- on the other hand it is said that it is a period limited in time which, as the text itself lays down, aims at completing the maturing process with perpetual profession in view. Temporary profession, in fact, is made only with the firm intention of making perpetual profession in due course.

The period is not just a time of waiting (cf. C 105). The temporarily professed confrere is a salesian vowed to God and the young, and a true member of the Society (cf. C 24). If he is not yet bound to it in a definitive and official manner, this is not through lack of desire and generosity but because of a prudent norm of the Church and the Congregation, in the awareness that the definitive profession must be based on solid moral and spiritual foundations for the attainment of which he strives with shared responsibility in a community.

Commitment during the time of temporary profession

The main points to be attended to during the period of temporary profession are described as follows: the confrere completes his growth process so as to reach the salesian spiritual maturity required for perpetual profession, and develops the different aspects of his vocation, especially those indicated in art. 102: human maturing, intellectual preparation, deepening of consecrated life, and introduction to educative pastoral work.

In this connection the text recalls *two general aspects* which, precisely because they are general, apply to the whole of formation and salesian life:

- Every confrere lives one and the same vocation *as a lay salesian or as an aspirant to the priesthood*, and hence carries out his formation too in this same perspective, particularly during the period of temporary profession.
- The young confrere is *sustained by the community and by a spiritual guide*. He is not left on his own. The community and the guide, who is normally the rector, share with him his formative task, ensuring for him "the opportunities for a valid experience and for serious doctrinal reflection in an appropriate setting" (C 104).

Frequency and duration of temporary profession

The second paragraph of the article refers to the frequency and relative duration of temporary profession in the time that passes between first and perpetual profession.

For the first three years two possibilities are offered (triennial or annual), without indicating any preference for one or the other. For the second three years it is laid down that normally profession will be for three years, without excluding other arrangements that may be advisable for good reasons. To this should be added what is provided for in art. 117, i.e. that the time of temporary profession may be prolonged to nine years.

These different possibilities are chosen in sensible fashion only if the gradual and serious nature of the process is simultaneously kept in mind. Personal maturity remains the fundamental criterion which gives truth to the sign of profession, not the objective length of time. On the other hand, a too frequent repetition of profession (which of itself signifies a choice of life), unless it is sufficiently motivated at a psychological and pedagogical level, ends by weakening the sign as regards its human content and spiritual depth. It creates, in fact, a sense of impermanence and internal instability, which gives a weak appearance to a decision which springs from the very centre of the life of the one making his profession and refers to a project with which he intends to identify himself.

Great flexibility is needed, and a no less degree of prudence, for appraising in the service of the individual and the charisma all the relevant elements.

A real and sincere personal and communal responsibility in respect of temporary profession and its frequency is certainly shown at the moment of choice and decision, but it is manifested even earlier and more deeply when the attainment of the objectives of the preceding formation periods has been ensured: the preparation for the novitiate and the novitiate itself. The confrere should not allow problems and indecision to drag on which should have been resolved much earlier, and local and provincial councils should not pass on uselessly to others in later years the duty of making a decision which they should have fulfilled earlier.¹

¹ Cf. RFIS, 40

*Render fruitful, O Lord, in our young confreres
the grace of first profession;
may your Spirit accompany them in their path
towards the definitive donation of their lives to you
for the good of the young.*

*Grant that by daily growth
in their friendship with you,
in resemblance to Don Bosco
and in brotherly communion,
they may progress in the formation
which will render their motivations more solid,
and their educative and pastoral activity
more competent and efficacious.*

*May they live with joy and responsibility
the period of formation,
a time of commitment and holiness.*

ART. 114 THE IMMEDIATE POSTNOVITIATE

The first profession is followed by a period of religious maturing which continues the formative experience of the novitiate and serves as a preparation for the practical training phase.

The deepening of the life of faith and of the spirit of Don Bosco, together with an adequate philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation that interacts with the prevailing culture, disposes the young confrere to a progressive integration of faith, culture and life.

A phase of religious maturing between the novitiate and the practical training phase

"Maturing" is a word frequently met with in the two chapters of the Constitutions which deal with formation. It indicates a process towards maturity (cf. C 102) and is called "religious" not so much to indicate a specific aspect but to indicate its final and distinguishing objective.

The commitment to religious maturing during the postnovitiate has two points of reference: the novitiate and the practical training phase. The experience of the first must be continued and that of the second suitably prepared for.

The novitiate, first of all, needs a further complement. The work of formation for a group of young people of different origins and varying levels of maturity always requires further effort and more time. Certainly by the end of the novitiate there are reasons for believing that a sufficient maturing has taken place, but it still needs further help and development in continuity and consistency with the work already done. In this way sudden changes in life style and a falling-off in commitment to vocational growth are avoided.

Furthermore the practical training period, with its objective which calls for a personal synthesis between activity and vocational values to be built up "in an experience of salesian educative and pastoral action" (C 115), demands that the young confrere continue to make the effort to achieve this synthesis and should have acquired suitable means for living it.

The postnovitiate is therefore a delicate and important time because it provides this possibility and responds to these requirements.

A phase which has formative value in its own right

But it can be seen without any difficulty that the postnovitiate is not exclusively nor even primarily a phase which completes an earlier one or provides "means" for a subsequent one. It has a value in its own right. The young salesian is not asked to live it merely to complete the formation of his novitiate or to be better able to deal with the problems of his coming practical training period. Both of these need to be done, but his first objective is still his own maturing .

He is called upon in fact:

- to "achieve a progressive integration of faith, culture and life";
- to make practical use of the means for attaining this objective, i.e.
 - a deepening of the life of faith and the spirit of Don Bosco;
 - an adequate philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation that interacts with the prevailing culture (cf. C 114) and "an introduction to theology" (R 95).

Some of the means are derived from study and others from experience, and the former must help in living the latter at greater depth.

a. The significance of "a progressive integration of faith, culture and life".

"Daily life", "eternal life", "faith and life" are all frequently used terms which recall a series of contents.

"Faith" expresses the supernatural dimension of christian existence; "life" indicates the creatural values of this existence and the numerous daily realities in which it is immersed.

To live these two aspects in unity is to be spiritual men, while remaining men of the present day.

It is a matter of believing that the ultimate and decisive reason for all reality is the Incarnation, the expression of the love of the Father, or in other words of God's desire to communicate himself to men as Father in the deepest manner possible, in the Son. It is a matter of believing that this is the reason for his creational action.

There exists therefore only this order of reality which we call supernatural, but side by side with the supernatural elements it also includes natural elements which, if they are to have definitive value, call for completion through progressive participation in the paschal mystery of Christ.

By rediscovering the event of the Incarnation (faith), we shall approach life and history (personal and collective, life and culture), as places bearing all the signs of the Lord's presence: we shall see that ever since the beginning of time the world has been enveloped and penetrated by the grace of divine communication, present in it always and everywhere. Man is the place where God is present, daily life the context of the Lord's diaphanous appearance. To join together faith and hope means opening up a new ability to contemplate daily events marked by local culture, by seeing in them the signs of God's presence which requires that one understand the situation, that one work and invoke his light and grace in prayer in order to build with him.

b. The appropriate "experiential" means: deepening of the life of faith and of the spirit of Don Bosco.

It would be better to speak of "deepening of the life of faith *according to* the spirit of Don Bosco". In fact Salesians live the synthesis of faith, life and culture "in pastoral charity" (C 10), which has its model and source in the very heart of Christ,

apostle of the Father (cf. C 11). One cannot therefore experience this charity without deepening one's own faith which is always the recognition of a presence, that of the Lord, which we reach according to our own spirit:

- in "predilection for the young", a special gift of God, an "expression of pastoral charity", for whose welfare "we give generously of our time, talents and health" (C 14);
- by approaching them with the loving kindness of Don Bosco which "gives transparent witness to God's anticipating love" (C 15) in a family atmosphere of exchange of affection and of mutual trust and esteem. It is "a spontaneous expression of love inspired by the love of God" (C 20);
- through attention to the presence of the Spirit, accepting the values of the world and believing "in man's natural and supernatural resources without losing sight of his weakness" (C 17);
- by continually reminding ourselves of the divine dimension of his work (cf. C 12) and the union with God whose fatherhood we experience.

c. *The intellectual means: a philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation that interacts with the prevailing culture, and an introduction to theology.*

To achieve the intended objectives the postnovitiate fosters a serious and updated intellectual formation.

The FSDB specifies the ground this should cover, and goes into considerable detail about the various sciences and their relationship with formation.¹ It can all be summed up by saying that pastoral charity demands a mentality stemming from an active synthesis of the contents proper to the disciplines of faith (introduction to theology in the case of the postnovitiate), philosophy and the educational sciences (pedagogy). They are essentially autonomous but, being all at the service of existence (culture), they are not independent of each other. They are all linked with knowledge and personal development, with the complexity of man's world and ultimately with the mystery of Christ who epitomizes everything in himself.

Art. 21 of the Constitutions has shown us Don Bosco as a unified person with a splendid blending of nature and grace. The objective of the postnovitiate is manifest in him as a demand of the original charisma. It is indeed identified with his very person: "He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the *realities of this earth*; and he was just as deeply the *man of God*, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living '*as seeing him who is invisible*'. These two aspects combine to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young" (C 21).

¹Cf. FSDB, 210-236

*Father, ever merciful and faithful,
assist with the grace of unity
our young confreres
whom you have introduced into the salesian life.*

*Grant that the postnovitiate environment,
made up of experience, study and reflection
and permeated by prayer,
may help them to lay the foundation
for a solid personal unity,
so that they may become valid instruments of your love
amid the young people to whom you send them.*

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ART. 115 PRACTICAL TRAINING

Throughout the whole period of initial formation, importance is given not only to study but also to the pastoral activities of our mission.

The practical training period provides opportunity for a deeper living experience of salesian educative and pastoral action. During this time the young confrere gets practice in the preventive system, particularly in salesian assistance.

With the support of the rector and the community; he is able to integrate his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation.

Formation and pastoral activity

"Throughout the whole period of initial formation, importance is given not only to study but also to the pastoral activities of our mission". This statement finds its truth and confirmation in numerous expressions scattered over the third part of the Constitutions. Educative and pastoral practice, based on wisdom and belief, is central to the salesian's formation. All through his life he experiences vocational values "as he lives and works for the common mission" (C 99).

In the initial formation, from a methodological point of view, because of the priority of what has to be done and the time needed, theoretical activities and training prevail. This was already Don Bosco's mind,¹ because these are the things that give to the young confreres in formation the skills and competence to live their pastoral work later with full apostolic efficacy. But even in this period the gradual introduction to educational and pastoral work (C 102) remains one of the fundamental factors in formation, which is present in varying degrees of intensity in every phase: preparation for the novitiate is made "through an experience of community and apostolic life" (C 109); the novitiate prepares the candidate "to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco" (C 110); the period of temporary profession commits the confrere to the development of "the different aspects of his vocation" (C 113).

The present art. 115 emphasizes the fact that in the practical training period the educative and pastoral aspect finds a characteristic expression.

Formative experience in the practical training period

What is the objective of the practical training? What kind of formative experience is gained in this phase, which is perhaps the most characteristic of the salesian formative process?

According to the Rule the practical training period is an encounter, an exercise, an adequately guided integration into an educative pastoral experience. We shall examine its component elements.

¹Cf. *Constituzioni 1875*, XI I, 6 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 181)

— *“a deeper living experience”.*

The practical training period is one which serves for both verification and maturing; it provides a first taste of salesian action, i.e. an encounter with salesian life in its common situations, in the ordinary daily vicissitudes of the mission, which are not always identical with those met with in the communities specifically designed for formation (C 103). Like the first salesians who grew up while living at the heart of a community in action (cf. C 97), the young salesian who is heading for perpetual profession needs to try himself out in the real life, so as to know himself better (as regards suitability and motivations) and to get a better knowledge of the concrete form of the vocation to which he feels himself called and to which he is already committed. The experience of practical training offers important elements for discernment purposes and is an indispensable means of growth.

— *an exercise in the practice of the preventive system and particularly in salesian assistance.*

The preventive system" and "assistance" are two expressions which identify educative pastoral experience of the first and original kind of Don Bosco, to which he himself gave the name "preventive system" (cf. C 20), and which called for "a fundamental disposition, an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them" (C 39) or, in other words, salesian assistance.

Practical training is above all else an exercise in this attitude lived in the context of the salesian educative project. It is so characteristic of this phase that in salesian tradition those involved in it were often referred to simply as "the assistants".

— *a personal synthesis of activities and vocational values.*

The salesian is called to live, as did Don Bosco, a strongly unified plan of life which is at the same time both apostolic and religious, and to combine its expressions in a single movement of charity towards God and his fellow men.

The rector and the community make possible and foster these experiences which, as asked for by art. 86 of the Regulations, should be programmed and followed up through the presence and guidance of formation personnel for their periodic evaluation.

The experience will be well programmed if attention is given to the following points when the programme is drawn up:

- it must overcome a spontaneous temptation to meet immediate needs, by a wise and critical application of the relevant sciences;
- it must provide for all the necessary elements (analysis of the situation, objectives, methods, procedure and criteria for verification, deadlines);
- it must define the objective to be attained after studying the initial situation and plans for dealing with it;
- it must ensure the active presence of guides who are witnesses of pastoral charity, have sufficient competence and are of recognized prestige.

The personal synthesis, as could be seen from the indications given in the previous article concerning the various stages, is not something static; it is a unity with a specific aim and the need to continually maintain a proper balance. The young confrere must mature simultaneously as a "man of God" and a "man for youth"; he must live the mission as a typical experience of God, accepting its mystique and ascetical aspect.

*Lord Jesus,
through the Blessed Virgin, your Mother,
you guided Don Bosco
in the formation of the first Salesians;
the apostolic experience of the Oratory
was for them a source of spiritual enthusiasm,
a stimulus and support
in their personal maturing and in asceticism.*

*We ask you to be with our young confreres
in the experience of their practical training,
so that through contact with youth
they may assimilate the attitudes
proper to the preventive system,
and by living and working together
they may make a mature personal synthesis
between vocational values and their activities.*

*Grant also that our communities,
while sustaining the young confreres in their
progress, may be the natural setting
for vocational growth.*

ART. 116 SPECIFIC FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN PRIEST AND THE SALESIAN BROTHER

After practical training the salesian goes on to complete his initial formation.

The specific formation of a candidate for the priestly ministry follows the norms and directives laid down by the Church and the Congregation, and has for its scope the preparation of a priest who will be a genuinely salesian pastor and educator.

The specific formation of the lay Salesian offers him the opportunity to deepen his knowledge of the spiritual heritage of the Congregation. He receives an adequate theological preparation appropriate to his consecrated lay status, and completes his formation with a view to his subsequent apostolic work of education.

After practical training the salesian goes on to complete his initial formation". This is the time of the specific formation, which continues even after perpetual profession, and which for practical purposes began with the initial formation itself which is carried out in the perspective of the specific vocational form.

Of the different forms (priestly, diaconal and lay) in which the same unique salesian vocation is realized, the Constitutions have already spoken from the early articles (cf. C 4), they have pointed out their common and complementary responsibilities and have emphasized the contribution made by each to the mission (cf. C 45). By laying down that lay salesians and future priests receive the same basic formation (C 106), the Constitutions do not overlook the necessary distinctions determined by the specific nature of vocational form and its particular participation in the common mission. The same art. 106 also spoke of "curricula of equivalent level" and of the necessary and appropriate "differences".

The present article considers in more detail some of the requirements of the specific formation of clerical salesians and lay salesians.

Specific formation of the salesian priest

For the formation of "*a priest who will be a genuinely salesian pastor and educator*" the Constitutions refer in general to "the norms and directives laid down by the Church and the Congregation". These norms and directives are fully contained in the FSDB.¹ The General Regulations specify some details and conditions in their turn: "Members who are preparing for the priesthood must receive, over a minimum period of four years, a more intense and specifically priestly formation in formation communities, preferably studentates. They must attend seriously to theological studies, preferably in salesian centres. During this period they must not undertake duties or other studies that will interfere with the specific purpose of this formative phase" (R 97).

¹ Cf. FSDB, 456-473

It is a matter of a formative experience directed towards specific objectives. It supposes in the candidate a clear and decisive commitment for the priestly life. It is a progressive and gradual process during which the reception and practice of the ministries of lector and acolyte and the conferring and exercise of the diaconate provide occasions for verification, discernment and renewed commitment.

Particular objectives of this phase, some aspects of which apply in due proportion also to the salesian deacon, are especially:

- Conformity to Christ the Shepherd in a life which is destined to be an existential expression of him, and in the priestly ministry because the person of the priest is a sign of him in the service of youth. This is the basis of a true priestly spirituality. The future salesian priest must be aware that his apostolate passes first and foremost through the love of Christ and of the Father, because in the last analysis there is only one Apostle and Saviour, Jesus, sent by the Father. It is in His name that the priest is called to work among youth and bring them into contact with Him;
- A deepening of the ecclesial sense of unity and of communion with the Church, and in particular with the Pope and the Bishops; brotherhood with other priests; experience of the priestly ministry within and from within the local and provincial community, in a reciprocal and complementary relationship with the lay salesian;
- The development of a particular sensitivity and competence in announcing the Word of God to men and youth of the present day, especially through catechesis, liturgical animation, youth pastoral work, the sacrament of Reconciliation and spiritual direction;
- Attention to personal intellectual preparation, following a model which in its general outlines refers explicitly to the figure of Don Bosco the priest. In point of fact, theological studies carried out seriously enlighten spiritual life and practice with solid principles and up-to-date knowledge, and with methods suited to the times and environments, in line with the emergence of the culture of the young and the working classes.

Specific formation of the salesian brother

As was said earlier, the specific formation of the salesian priest basically follows the directives and curriculum laid down by the Church for all who are called to exercise the priestly ministry. The Church however does not give details for the lay salesian's formation, which therefore admits of more diversified expressions according to his talents and aptitudes and the tasks of his apostolate.

This in no way detracts from personal and communal responsibility, in a certain sense institutional, for ensuring and realizing the specific formation of the salesian brother. This is laid down explicitly in both the Constitutions and the Regulations, which call for the vocational requirements of this period of formation to be harmonized with a realistic consideration of different situations.

The Constitutions insist on particular attention to four areas:

- *a deeper "knowledge of the spiritual heritage of the Congregation";*
- *an adequate theological preparation appropriate to his consecrated lay status",* sufficient to permeate the whole culture of the brother and indicate the deep significance of his formation and instruction;
- the completing of his *technical and professional formation* "with a view to his subsequent apostolic work of education";
- the integration of the content of intellectual formation for the purpose of attaining these objectives.

All this is implicit in the text of the Regulations: "Lay salesians must be afforded the possibility of acquiring a serious theological, salesian and pedagogical preparation suited to their cultural level. They should be engaged also, according to their talents, in studies aimed at their professional preparation in view of the apostolic work they will later carry out" (R 98).²

*God our Father, through your Holy Spirit, you
rise up vocations and distribute ministries so
that they may contribute to the building of the
one Body of Christ.*

*You have willed that in our Society
salesian priests and brothers
shall live the same vocation and mission
in full brotherly complementarily for the
benefit of youth.*

*Assist both priests and brothers by your grace
in the preparation for their specific task.
Infuse in them a love of the Church and her teachings,
ability for reflection and generosity in dedication,
so that they may become efficacious collaborators
in the one work of your salvation
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

²Cf. FSDB, 474-476

ART. 117 PERPETUAL PROFESSION

A member makes his perpetual profession when he has reached the level of salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with the importance of such a step.

The celebration of this act is preceded by an appropriate period of immediate preparation, and is marked by the fraternal recognition of the provincial community

Perpetual profession takes place ordinarily six years after the first profession; if he considers it opportune the provincial can prolong this period, but not beyond nine years.

Significance of perpetual profession

"I make the vow for ever...", says the professed confrere, making his commitment before God and the Church (cf. C 24); art. 23 says: "Religious profession is a sign of a loving encounter between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds by giving himself totally to God and to his brothers and sisters".

The words "for ever" and "totally" express the significance of perpetual profession, seen as a response to God's initiative and grace. Their truth is built on, and to a certain extent ensured by, the initial formation, the purpose of which is precisely that of reaching by means of a living experience the "salesian spiritual maturity" called for by the importance of perpetual profession (cf. C 117). It is a maturity based on motivations and attitudes which bring together in a vital unity the various aspects of the formative process and reach their point of synthesis in the possession and authentic living of the salesian identity.

Perpetual profession is this point of arrival. The formative periods through which the candidate has passed were a necessary preparation for this definitive incorporation in the Society (cf. C 107): during the novitiate he prepared himself to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco" (C 110); and in the period of temporary profession he completed "his maturing process with perpetual profession in view" (C 113).

Without prejudice to the value of temporary profession, which is itself made with the intention of offering oneself to God for the whole of life (cf. C 24), it is perpetual profession which synthesizes and celebrates, even liturgically, what the Constitutions declare in chap. III concerning the profession of the salesian: It is the deepest expression ("for ever" and "totally" of our freedom, an expression which by God's grace has the effect of giving concrete witness to the fundamental option made at our baptism. It is rooted in our way of following Jesus Christ, and hence becomes the lens through which we read the Gospel and the point of departure for all our choices and commitments".¹

¹ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 27-28; on the significance of perpetual profession cf. also AGC 295 (1980), p. 18-21

Its public character is an authoritative assurance and proclamation of its ecclesial and communal significance of apostolic consecration. On the one hand it is a new and definitive bond with the Congregation, and on the other the young salesian enters a well-defined ecclesial situation which is at the same time both spiritual and juridical, and assumes with his confreres the particular task carried out by the Salesians in the Church's sacramental dimension.

The fundamental importance of this choice, the Christian and ecclesial significance it takes on, the relationship it establishes between the confrere and the Society, the kind of life-plan with which it identifies, all these determine the degree of salesian spiritual maturity (the salesian "adult state") which must be achieved if the gesture is to be truly authentic.

Preparation for this commitment

While continually repeating that the whole process of formation is a preparation for perpetual profession, the Constitutions prescribe that it be "preceded by an appropriate period of immediate preparation", which completes the long work of understanding and assimilation and allows for a final reflection on the experience itself and on its overall synthesis.

This final period is deliberately set aside as one of the most significant of the whole formation process. It must therefore be appropriately prepared, sufficiently long, passed in recollection and prayer with the help of persons who are skilled in the guidance of individuals and groups, and lived in a tranquil setting which makes possible a deep community life.

Both the immediate preparation for the perpetual profession and the celebration itself will be marked by the fraternal recognition of the provincial community which gladly accepts this gift of God, recognizes its fruitful nature and is enriched by it with new apostolic strength.

*God our Father,
through the mysterious voice of your Spirit
you attract some
to follow Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd,
and dedicate themselves after the example of Don Bosco
to young people who are poor.
Look upon our brothers
who offer themselves to you for ever
uniting themselves with the definitive "yes" of Christ.*

*Pour out upon them your Spirit of holiness,
so that they may fulfil with your help
all that by your gift they have promised with joy.*

*Grant that at all times
they may be prompted by pastoral charity
to seek souls and serve you alone, O lord.*

*Be for them, Father, their secure guide.
may they find in Mary a motherly presence,
in Don Bosco their model,
in their confreres unfailing support, and in the
young their stimulus and incentive. Through
Jesus Christ our Lord*

ART. 118 NEED FOR ONGOING FORMATION

In the context of a society characterized by pluralism and rapid changes, the evolving nature of each individual and the quality and fruitfulness of our apostolic religious life call for a continuation of our formation after the initial phases. We try to grow in our human qualities, to conform ourselves more closely to Christ, and to renew our fidelity to Don Bosco, so that we can respond to the ever new demands arising from the situation of the young and the poor.

Through personal and community initiatives we nurture our salesian spiritual life, ensure our theological and pastoral updating, and develop our professional competence and our apostolic inventiveness.

As has been said right from the introduction to the third part of the Constitutions, ongoing formation is the perspective and organizing principle of the entire third part. What has been said so far about the general aspects of formation and the formative process finds its point of synthesis in ongoing formation. Initial formation is itself seen in this perspective.

The Constitutions therefore do not begin the consideration of this reality with the present art. 118; nor do they present it as a phase entirely separate from initial formation. Though it was considered as a new and necessary requirement at the beginning of the renewal period following Vatican II, ongoing formation is now present in the constitutional text as the organizing principle, as something necessary and as a permanent attitude.

The two concluding articles of the third part (to which correspond art. 98-102 of the Regulations) have the purpose on the one hand of taking up this principle and reasserting it, and on the other of highlighting the need for an attitude of ongoing formation to be lived all through life.

Need of ongoing formation

Whence arises the need of ongoing formation? The Constitutions respond by pointing out the fundamental motivations of the salesian pastor and educator.

— In the first place the need arises from the *reality of the individual*: each person represents a call and a response, a project in process of realization at a human and Christian level. "He calls... and we respond by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation". This call, referred to in art. 96, comes from within the person. Each individual is both its response and its permanent realization. "The dynamic and developing charter of the human personality presents a constant opening up, whether on the level of doctrinal synthesis or of the plan of life."¹

— Secondly, the need of ongoing formation arises from *our own specific vocation*: if apostolic religious life is to be fruitful and influential it cannot allow itself to be bogged

¹GC21, 309

down in mediocrity, superficiality or stagnation. Talents are meant to be exploited, not buried. A plant must be pruned if it is to give more fruit. Life must be kept open to the demands of the Spirit, because by definition it is "life in the Spirit", and the Spirit creates, animates and renews. "Watchful attention to the Spirit present in the events of history, which we have to decipher and which await from us a response of faith",² places us in a state of continual renewal.

— These two fundamental demands, which might be better classified as laws of life, are rendered more urgent and important by the *pluralistic context* in which we live, and in which multiple and rapid transformations produce and contrast with each other different plans for man and society, and present challenges at cultural, social and ecclesial levels. "These very transformations urge us to continuous renewal so as to maintain an intelligible witness and an efficient apostolic service"³ in response "to the ever new demands arising from the situation of the young and the poor".

Lines of commitment

The article suggests three principal lines we can follow with good effect. They constitute three complementary aspects of the personal vocation of every salesian: *growth in human qualities, conformity to Christ, and fidelity to Don Bosco.*

This recalls, almost as though to emphasize the unity of the entire third part, what was stated in art. 98 when summing up formative experience as an ongoing process: "Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit, the salesian commits himself to a formative process which will last all his life". The human and personal reality, Christ and his Gospel, Don Bosco and his spirit form part of a unique experience which defines the salesian and makes it possible for him to live his identity as an apostle of youth.

Young people too, in their turn, are for us a need and incitement for ongoing formation; they oblige us to make progress and help us to do so: our fidelity, we read in art. 195, "is sustained too by love for the young to whom we are sent".

Concrete aspects to be cultivated

The above-mentioned basic lines of commitment are rich in content as can easily be seen, but they may appear to be too wide ranging. The text dwells on four of the more concrete aspects which the salesian, and the community too, must constantly cultivate: salesian spiritual life, theological and pastoral updating, professional competence, and apostolic inventiveness. Let us look briefly at each of them.

— *Salesian spiritual life.*

² *ibid.*

³ GC21, 310

from others in the Church: it includes all the constitutions have indicated as making up our "identity card", and all that has been passed on to us by the living tradition of our Family. A continually deepening knowledge of the Rule and the comparison of ourselves with our Founder and the first Salesians formed by him are among the most valuable means of ongoing formation.

— *Theological and pastoral updating.*

This is not merely a matter of a revision of previously studied treatises, "but also of a deepening of the primary disciplines which (the confreres) studied in the past, especially with regard to those questions of sacred doctrine which are of greater importance for spiritual life and pastoral work. (One should keep in mind) the progress of theological doctrine and new pastoral questions, especially as regards what has been specified by the living teaching of the Church. Finally there should be concern to connect pastoral discoveries resulting from experimentation with a solid doctrinal basis.⁴

— *Professional competence.*

Pastoral charity should also include pastoral "ability". The analysis and critical evaluation of a given situation according to criteria of faith and science; the planning of a service to meet a specific social, cultural and ecclesial context; the utilization of the means of social communication; the correct application of apostolic methodology, are all things that need competence, i.e they require the discerning utilization of the results of the relevant sciences;⁵ one of the aims of ongoing formation is to ensure up-to-date competence in these matters.

— *Apostolic inventiveness.*

Two quotations link the past with the present and indicate just how much apostolic creativity is a permanent feature of our spirit and must be cultivated at both personal and community level. Don Albera stated: "The spirit of personal initiative must be linked with due submission to the superior; this spirit gives to our Society that pleasing modern aspect which makes it possible to do the good needed by the needs of time and place".⁶ And in his closing address to the GC21 the Rector Major declared: "Pastoral creativity, pedagogical imagination, enterprise and courage; holy guide — these are all genuine expressions of the oratorian heart of Don Bosco... We must take up (pastoral inventiveness) ourselves as the patrimony of every salesian community and as an expression of fidelity to Don Bosco".⁷

The General Regulations indicate still more aspects in the field of human maturity as suitable means for promoting ongoing formation: "Ongoing formation requires that each confrere develop his capacity for communication and dialogue; he should form in himself an open and discerning mentality and a spirit of initiative, and

⁴"*Inter ea*", CEC, Rome 1969, n. 5 —

⁵ Cf. FSDB, 78

⁶D. ALBERA, ASC 4, 15 May 1921, p. 201; cf. Circular letters, p. 499

⁷GC21, 573

in this way conveniently renew his own plan of life" (R 99). In this line and to this end
620 "each one should cultivate the habit of reading and the study of those branches of

knowledge proper to his mission; he should maintain his openness to prayer, meditation, and to personal and community spiritual direction" (ibid.).

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you recommended your disciples to be vigilant.
You have called us to work in a world
of upheaval and rapid change.
Make us docile to your Spirit, and grant us,
together with perfect fidelity to the charisma
passed on to us by our Founder,
the ability to renew ourselves each day,
in a sincere and permanent effort of formation.*

*As we grow in our humanity
and conform ourselves ever more deeply to you,
may we follow the example of Don Bosco,
and become better able to respond
to the needs and challenges of our time,
and be among youth
authentic witnesses of your Love.*

ART. 119 ONGOING FORMATION AS A PERMANENT PERSONAL FRAME OF MIND

Living in the midst of the young and in constant contact with working-class surroundings, the salesian tries to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of each day, and so acquires the ability to learn from life's experiences. He sees his ordinary activities as effective means of formation, and he also makes use of any other means of formation that may be offered him.

Even when he is fully occupied he finds opportunities for renewing the religious and pastoral meaning of his life, and of learning to carry out his work with greater competence.

He also feels it his task to make the best formative use of any situation, and to see it as a favourable opportunity for growing in his vocation.

"Every salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation". This statement of art. 99 is valid also for ongoing formation. After re-calling the need, and indicating the lines of commitment and the aspects to be cultivated, we may put the question: And how is all this dynamic process to be ensured? What kind of attitude must the salesian display who wants to live his vocation in a renewed form, giving to the Lord an ever more authentic and consistent response, and offering an efficacious service to youth? Art. 119 answers this question by speaking of an "attitude" of ongoing formation.

The first article of the third part presented the two elements in the formative experience: the Lord who calls and gives his daily grace, and the salesian who responds with an adequate and continuous formation (cf. C 96). The final article of the same part endorses the same point: to live in an attitude of formation is to live in dialogue with the Spirit, to listen to his voice which makes itself understood, under proper conditions, in the events, ordinary activities and elements of everyday situations. To live as disciples of the Spirit is what this commitment comes to. Let us look more closely at the content of this article, of which the first and third paragraphs refer to formation as a permanent frame of mind, and the second to the commitment to formation during the period of full activity.

Ongoing formation as a personal frame of mind

To live in an attitude of ongoing formation means in the first place discerning the voice of the Spirit in everyday events, recognizing the formational efficacy of ordinary activities and using the means that come to hand.

Docility to the Spirit, attention to the signs of the times, a sense of reality, the Lord's message transmitted through urgent needs here and now, are frequently presented in the Constitutions as characteristics of the salesian spirit. On the other hand "spiritual discernment" is a fundamental law in the process of Christian growth.

The context and result of this discernment is specified in a significant manner.

The subject doing the discerning is an apostle living among youth and in contact with working-class surroundings; a careful assessment of the associated realities will lead him to understand from them what the Lord is saying.

The result of this discernment is not a specific decision, but a permanent ability to "*Learn from life's experiences*", to be an intelligent disciple at the school of life, to reach true wisdom through experience.

This first affirmation of art. 119, read in the light of Don Bosco's experience, gives us a better idea of its significance. It is not a question of a spontaneous attitude, but of a frame of mind that has to be formed and cultivated. It is not a matter of going in search of extraordinary occasions; what is necessary is to attribute formative efficacy to ordinary activities, to learn from everyday life, using the means that are offered, and they are plentiful (cf. R 101-102). All this can be achieved by living in depth and in dialogue with reality, but not in a superficial and hurried manner, as though we were more concerned about the particular action than about our responsibility for a whole project.

The principal condition therefore for a true process of ongoing formation is the attitude of the salesian, who in docility to the Spirit has learned to open himself to everything that daily life and the demands of the salvation of youth ask of him: this is the spirit of "*da mihi animas*" that moved Don Bosco so much. If this mentality were missing, the life of the salesian would become superficial, stagnant and withered.

During the time of full activity

The Constitutions speak at length of the experience of initial formation, for the obligations it involves and the objectives it gradually achieves. Now the text refers more directly to the time of full apostolic dedication and activity.

The formative purposes emphasized and cultivated are those of the constant renewal of the significance of the vocation of each one and the updating of his capacity for service: or in other words, vocational consciousness and competence. Occasions must be found for the preservation of these two aspects at a high quality level. Any weakening of the religious and pastoral sense, any fading of the awareness of personal identity, any indifference or generic kind of approach extinguishes vocational joy and lessens the fruitfulness of self-donation: life then becomes closed to the animation of the Spirit and bogged down in an attitude quite opposed to that of ongoing formation.

For our vocation, which is entirely ministerial, it is also necessary to develop competence, to be better qualified to give to pastoral charity more adequate means for its expression. "Let every confrere", say the Regulations, "preserve that availability which is characteristic of our spirit, and be ready for periodic requalification" (R 100).

Any situation is a favourable time for growing in vocation

first article of chap. VIII: the salesian "feels it his task to make the best formative use of any situation".

The salesian is one who is "called", but he is not called just once for all time. He feels the call constantly and keeps himself alert and docile to accept the invitation and respond to it. The response is: "*to make the best formative use of any situation*" by an experience of salesian spirit. "We respond", said art. 96, the first article of the third part, "by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation".

"*Any situation*"; the Constitutions recall nearly all of them, from the various periods of initial formation to that of full activity, in times of difficulty, sickness and old age. The salesian has offered to God his whole life and all his being, committing himself to live every vicissitude in accordance with God's will and the salesian project. "Totally", "for ever") and any situation" are expressions which indicate the radical and all-embracing nature of our Covenant with God. The Lord has consecrated this entire commitment and offering.

"Any situation" is to be considered "*a favourable opportunity for growing in vocation*".

"A favourable opportunity" recalls the phrase of the New Testament, the "acceptable time", and is an invitation to recognize that God's action is always taking place, to discover the value for salvation contained in the present moment, which is not therefore to be lived in superficial fashion, is not to be put in parentheses, but exploited for growing in vocation".

The word "growth" or "growing", always associated with vocation and formation, concludes the two chapters dedicated to formation and reaffirms the dynamic perspective of our life; a process, a project, a permanent commitment, an ever renewed response to the Covenant the Lord has established with us (cf. C 195). For us growth means maturing in vocation, in the project with which we identify ourselves, which calls for the commitment of the deepest dimensions of our being and makes manifest the will of God in our regard.

The formative process therefore is one which is open to the voice of the Spirit in whatever way it may reach us, and leads to docility on our part. This openness and availability in the salesian and in the community become translated into an attitude of ongoing formation of which the main lines and content were indicated in the preceding article: an attitude of collaboration with Him who, having begun a good work in us, will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 1,6).

Lord Jesus, you formed your Apostles to be disciples docile to the action of the Spirit, and you taught Don Bosco from his childhood to recognize your voice in the midst of the young.

Give us clarity of vision and a docile heart, so that we may discover the signs of your presence in our life and amidst those to whom you have sent us.

Grant that by finding every event and situation a favourable time for growth in our vocation, we may respond with generosity to your continual call, so that "all things may work together for our good" and our life may become a complete offering for your glory and the benefit of our fellow men.

FOURTH PART

THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN OUR SOCIETY

"It is of the very nature of the religious life, just as it is of the very nature of the Church, to have that structure without which no society, not even a supernatural one, would be able to achieve its end, or be in a position to provide the best means to attain it".¹

These words of the Instruction "Renovationis causam" were echoed by the SGC, which stated: "The religious life is of its nature charismatic; for this reason it has a spiritual dimension and here its vitality is to be found. From the very fact that religious are human and have specific goals to attain together there must be an organization as in any other society, and this has need of structures".²

For this reason we find in every part of the Constitutions elements which touch on institutional aspects of the Congregation: in speaking of activities, of the common life, of the practice of the evangelical counsels, and of formation.

These elements are naturally present in a particular way in the part which deals specifically with the organization of our Society, i.e. the structures of government at different levels. After the first three parts which have presented respectively the basic features of the salesian identity (part I), the constituent elements inseparable from this identity (part II), and the process of growth of each vocation (part III), the fourth part presents what can be called the "*book of government*". Its importance derives from the fact that it provides the Society with an organic and dovetailed structure to enable it to achieve its aims.

Its principal purpose is to indicate the norms and means for the effective functioning of all the internal structures of the Congregation, particularly with a view to the realization of communion between all the confreres and the fulfilment of the mission.

Its concrete objectives are: to establish the organs of government' and consultation and their functions and to render effective the service of authority, so as to coordinate the duties, initiatives and activities of all Salesians.³

1. Unity of treatment

¹ Cf. RC Introduction

² SCC, 706

³ Cf. SGC, 707

Because of the matter it deals with, the fourth part is concise and juridical in style and language, and also somewhat extensive in its treatment (71 articles), as required by the points involved.

But its complete and authentic significance can be understood only if it is considered not as a part by itself, detached from the rest of the Constitutions, but in its relationship with the other parts and in unity with them. This unity results from the general structure of the constitutional text and indicates the perspective in which the fourth part on the service of authority should be read.

In fact the salesian identity described in the first part, and especially the chapter on the salesian spirit as an element which informs and permeates all salesian life and activity, are determining factors for both the setting up and codifying of the structures of government and the practical exercise of the service of authority in our Congregation. The six concluding articles of the Constitutions include also the fourth part as an integral element of the "apostolic project of our Society" (C 192) and of the "way that leads to love" (C 196).

It should be noted too that the three constitutive elements of our vocation, indicated in the second part of the constitutional text, are specifically linked with the fourth part:

- *through the apostolic mission*: in the section dealing with shared responsibility for the mission, where emphasis is laid on the fact that the mission is entrusted to the community and on the animating function of the provincial and the rector in pastoral discernment and in putting into practice the apostolic plan (cf. C 44);
- *through the common life*: in the articles which describe the central place of the rector in the community (cf. C 55), and also the linkage between local and provincial communities, and the communion of all the confreres with the Rector Major and his council (cf. C 58, 59);
- *through the practice of the evangelical counsels*: in the section concerning the vow of obedience, which highlights the salesian style of obedience and authority and the common responsibility of all, confreres and superiors, in obedience to God's will (cf. C 65, 66).

In its turn the whole of the fourth part is strictly linked with the preceding parts of the text by the introductory chapter on general principles and criteria (chap. X), which indicates the main lines of animation of the whole organization: the configuration of the Society in communities at different levels with their respective structures of government (C 120), the nature of the service of authority and its objectives (C 121-122), the participation and shared responsibility of all the confreres, subsidiarity and decentralization (C 123-124).

2. The content of the fourth part

With regard to the content of the fourth part it should be noted that the Congregation, in the post-conciliar revision, has rethought in depth the matter of our

628 structures. It was not satisfied merely with bringing them up-to-date, but wanted

to reflect explicitly, in the light of the doctrine of Vatican II, on the sense of the structures of government and on the general principles which inspire them.

These reflections, made by the SGC,⁴ are summed up in chapter X of the Constitutions, which is almost completely new by comparison with the previous text of 1966. Both the GC21 and the GC22 endorsed the inserting into the Constitutions of this introductory chapter on principles and general criteria of the service of authority, so that it might serve as key to the reading of the entire fourth part.

It would be a bad mistake to consider this part as of less importance, or in some way reserved to those who exercise some kind of authority in the Congregation. Chap. X shows that the question of structures is one that not only touches the life of the whole Congregation and every member, but also calls for the shared responsibility of all. A precise juridical designation of the competence of the various office-holders is not enough; what is needed is a spiritual attitude of common and shared obedience, to which all the members contribute and in which they participate, each according to his own role and capacity.

In the work of revision a careful examination was made of all the structures of government at three levels:

- by applying the general principles and criteria indicated in the introductory chapter of this part;
- by evaluating each of the structures, according to the general criteria set out in the *Motu proprio "Ecclesiae Sanctae"* for the revision of Constitutions.⁵

Because of the particular nature of this part, particular importance attaches to:

- *the juridical and normative criterion*, so as to guarantee the presence, essential content and clarity of the norms: the GC21, in particular, took care to bring the particular law of the Congregation into harmony with that of the Church, promulgated in the new Code of Canon Law which came into force in November 1983;
- *the criterion of experience*: the definitive redrafting made by the GC22 took into account the practical results of all the experiments in structures of government that had been introduced by the SGC and tried out for practicability over the previous twelve years.

After all this process of revision, including the final verification on the part of the Apostolic See we can safely say: The structures of government appear to accord with the Church's norms and to be a practical reflection of the Spirit in which the Congregation exercises the service of authority".⁶

⁴Cf. SGC, 706-709, 720-722

⁵Cf. ASC 305 (1982), p. 40-44

⁶Cf. GC22, *Sussidi alle Costituzioni e Regolamenti*, Rome 12.5.1984, p. 81

3. Title and arrangement

In the definitive revision the fourth part has been given the title; *"The service of authority in our Society"*. For this material it was not possible to continue with the personalized titles of the preceding parts, which refer to the Salesians whose Rule of life they describe. On the other hand there was a general desire to avoid a title that would sound too juridical and abstract, like that which still appeared in the text of 1972 (where the part was entitled "Organization of our Society", and the successive chapters "Structures of government at world, provincial, local level").

The new title was chosen because it rightly emphasizes the nature of religious authority as a service (cf. C 121) and links the fourth part better with those that precede it.

For the same reason the title of the fourth part is repeated for the chapters which concern the structures at the three levels, adding "in the world (provincial, local) community" as the case may be.

The fourth part is therefore divided into five chapters:

- Chap. X* *General principles and criteria*
art. 120-124 (5 articles)
- Chap. XI* *Service of authority in the world community*
art. 125-155 (31 articles)
- Chap. XII* *Service of authority in the provincial community*
art. 156-174 (19 articles)
- Chap. XIII *Service of authority in the local community*
art. 175-186 (12 articles)
- Chap. XIV *Administration of temporal goods*
art. 187-190 (4 articles)

The order adopted for the three levels is that of the preceding Constitutions: first the world structures are presented, then the provincial ones and finally the local ones. It is true that at the practical level of life and the more immediate realization of our mission, the local communities come first, but they always give effect to one and the same charism, the unity of which has to be ensured by the higher structures. The order adopted is meant to signify: the same universal salesian charisma functions in the context of the different provinces, and in any particular province the charism, as detailed for the circumstances of the province, functions in the local context of each community. It is well to emphasize too that government in religious institutes is intrinsically connected with the world of faith and the vocational response to God. The structures of these institutes reflect the very nature of the Church of which Christ is the Head.⁷

Within each level (chap. XI-XIII) the treatment starts from the personal aspect of authority and proceeds to the collegial aspect. The fundamental reason for this

⁷ Cf. *Essential elements of consecrated life*, CRIS, 31.5.83, n. 49

arrangement (which was followed also in the preceding Constitutions) is found in the vow of religious obedience. Religious life calls for a form of government and authority which expresses the value of the vow of obedience as submission to an authority which

arises not from the members themselves but has its source in God through the Church, which confers it on the religious superior. Such authority is therefore personal and cannot be shared, even though it be not exercised in isolation, since the superior is assisted by a council and the supreme authority resides in the General Chapter when it is gathered in assembly.⁸

This arrangement is the same as that adopted by the Code of Canon Law itself, which deals first with superiors and their councils, and then with chapters.

N.B. It should be noted that in this fourth part individual commentaries are given only for the articles of the introductory chapter and those of chap. XI which concern authority at world level: the Sovereign Pontiff the Rector Major and members of the General council. For the remainder an overall commentary by paragraphs or sections will suffice.

⁸Cf. *ibid.* 49-50; cf. also CIC, can. 617-618

CHAPTER X

GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (MK 10, 43-45)

The general content of this chapter well deserves this classic gospel text, which is a synthesis par excellence of the christian sense of authority. Its best exegesis is found in the life of Christ himself, in the way he lived the 'power' (exousia) he was acknowledged to possess (Mk 1,22; Mt 28,18) in a wonderfully balanced harmony between courageous proclamation of the truth (Mk 12,14) and encouraging respect for the little ones, the weak and the frail (Mt 9,12f; 12,20).

At a decisive turning point in his life, when the painful end he had foreseen was about to become a fact (Mk 10,32-34), Jesus revealed the sense of his life as service, as an autobiographical feature, a confession which was all the more impressive because so difficult to understand by the common people, and yet in perfect harmony with all the rest of his life.

The historical context for the gospel quotation is the somewhat impertinent question of the sons of Zebedee (Mk 10,35-45), but in it there is also a touch of the problem that had arisen in the christian community about the role of the heads of the community and what they did. We may remember especially that Jesus made as the dogmatic basis of everything the event of the cross (the "baptism" and "chalice", 10,38), in the light of which he said: "But it shall not be so among you" (10,43). In other words it should have been clear to the disciples that they could not follow the practice by which the "great men of the Gentiles" ruled over them, even to breaking-point; or to put it in positive terms, service alone (and therefore servants) was the only christian qualification for exercising authority in the community, combining with the practical act of love the little prestige that went with it (10,43-44); but to remove any doubt about the matter, it was the service of Christ the servant which made him the supreme criterion and model (10,45). He truly had the power of God, being the Son of man (Dan 7,13f), and yet as the Servant in Isaiah he exercises it in radical fidelity and full responsibility towards men. He serves man by redeeming him, and loves him by liberating him for God, accepting the fact that by doing so he puts his own life at stake. Hence authority is service if it draws its inspiration from the service of authority of Jesus Christ.

We have already spoken of this chapter when presenting the fourth part in its entirety: it should be seen as an *introduction and key to the understanding of the whole of the fourth part.*

It is meant to set out the spirit and the principles of authority and its exercise at all levels and will find concrete applications in the three chapters that follow, and in the corresponding chapters of the general Regulations.

It should be noted that the source of the doctrine contained in this chapter is found for the most part in the documents of Vatican II which reflected deeply on the nature of authority in the Church, but they are also found in our salesian tradition which has passed on to us Don Bosco's own way of exercising authority: a true father and servant of his brothers.

The five articles of the chapter are arranged as follows:

- *Those who have authority in the congregation according to its threefold nature:*
art. 120

- *Nature and purpose of authority:*
 - art. 121: authority as*
service purpose of authority
requirement of priestly character

 - art. 122: authority in communion*
guarantee of unity

- *Criteria for the exercise of authority:*
 - art. 123: participation and shared responsibility*
 - art. 124: subsidiary and decentralization*

ART. 120 BASIC STRUCTURE OF OUR SOCIETY

Our Society is made up of provincial communities, and these in turn are divided into local communities.

Government at world level ensures unity of life and action in differing environments and situations.

Central, provincial and local government is exercised with ordinary authority by a superior assisted by his council.

Supreme authority over the whole Congregation belongs to the General Chapter. Provincial chapters are granted specific powers within the domain of the province.

The salesian community at its three levels

Art. 120 presents a brief compendium of the fundamental structures and the respective organs of authority in the Congregation.

It starts from the complex reality of our Society, of which the first article of the Constitutions recalled the foundation through Don Bosco, and of which the first part of the same Constitutions described the vocational identity and its position in the Church. The salesian Society is a world community (cf. C 59), present in different social, political and cultural contexts.

To the different presences correspond the provinces or provincial communities of which it is made up: the Italian term "si configura" (rendered in the English translation by "is made up of") was chosen to express the idea that every province is like a reflection in miniature of the whole Congregation in its fundamental completeness of life and mission in a particular territory (cf. C 157).

The province is in turn divided ("si articula") into local communities (cf. C 58), rather like different members which combine to constitute a living body, which is in this case the province.

In this way the three structural levels in the Congregation are clearly distinguished: the three communities are presented with a brief reference to the correlation between them, which will be dealt with at greater length and made more precise by the various dispositions of the successive chapters.

In particular the article emphasizes the significance of the central government for ensuring unity of life and action in the Congregation, an urgent necessity because of its worldwide dimensions and the lawful pluralism and rich diversity of provincial communities spread over five continents.

While subsequent articles (C 122, 124) will further develop the theme of unity in diversity, the intention here is to stress with a certain insistence the fundamental value of unity, on account of which it would be no exaggeration to say that the

structures at world level are the '*structures of unity*', of a "unity of ministry which must organically unite everyone in the same vocation".¹

Authority of the Superior

At every level (central, provincial and local) there is a superior, who governs his community with ordinary power. As was said in the introduction to the fourth part, his authority is proper and personal² like all authority in the Church, and this implicitly excludes government of a collegial nature.³ Authority in religious life is, in fact, linked with the mystery of obedience which is realized through the mediation of a member within the prescriptions of the Constitutions.

But on the other hand the superior does not exercise his power in an absolute and autocratic manner. He is assisted, according to the Rule, by a council and is obliged to make use of it in the exercise of his own office.⁴ The personal authority of the superior is thus enlightened and strengthened by the help of his council and in specific cases of particular importance indicated by the particular law, he cannot act without its vote deliberative or consultative as the case may require.

This manner of exercising religious government, with on the one hand the personal authority of the superior and on the other the active participation of his council, was desired by Vatican II and endorsed by the Code of Canon Law and is explicitly affirmed at all levels of government in our Congregation.

Collegial organs

While stating that the authority of the superior is personal, continuous and effective, and ensured in permanent form by the dispositions of our particular law (duration in office, temporary substitution by vicars, manner of succession), it should be noted that organs exist in the Congregation which enjoy authority exercised in another form in specific moments and circumstances. We are speaking here of the collegial authority of Chapters, once they have been assembled and are in session.

A Chapter is essentially an "ad hoc" organ, i.e. called together for precise purposes laid down by the Constitutions; it is composed of "ex officio" members and of delegates representing provincial or local communities, elected for a specific Chapter, its authority is limited to the time it is in session.

The General Chapter has supreme authority over the whole Congregation, in so far as it elects the Rector Major and the General Council and has the task of making laws for the entire Congregation (cf. C 14-).

¹ Cf. SGC, 720

² Cf. C1C, can. 618

³ A decree of the CRIS, 2 February 1972, gave a negative response to the question whether authority in religious life could be understood in collegial fashion (cf. AAS 69 (1972). p. 393)

⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 627

Within the domain of the province the provincial chapter has specific powers, particularly as regards the application of universal laws to its own territory (cf. C 171; R 167).

A more detailed commentary on these collegial organs is given in the individual articles which follow.

*God our Father,
in your wisdom you have given to your Church
among the gifts of the Holy Spirit
the support provided by the service of authority.*

*Look with love on our Society
and place at its head enlightened men,
plentifully endowed with the spirit of
prayer, capable of discernment and rich in
kindness, so that they may safely guide us
in the way of your will.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 121 NATURE OF THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY

In imitation of Christ and in his name, authority in the Congregation is exercised according to the spirit of Don Bosco as a service to brothers for discerning and fulfilling the Father's will.

This service is directed to fostering charity, coordinating the efforts of all, animating, orientating, making decisions, giving corrections, so that our mission may be accomplished.

According to our tradition, communities are guided by a member who is a priest, and who by the grace of his priestly ministry and pastoral experience sustains and directs the spirit and activity of his brothers.

He is obliged to make the profession of faith prescribed by canon law.¹

¹ Cf. CIC, can. 833,8

This article is connected with previous parts of the Constitutions: it takes up again and completes the content of art. 55 on the rector in the community, who "represents Christ who unites his followers in the service of the Father", and of art. 65 on the salesian style of obedience and authority, both of which "are practised in a family spirit of love which inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust".

Authority as service

Our text defines authority with a statement dense in meaning: it is exercised at all levels *"in imitation of Christ and in his name as a service to brothers* for discerning and fulfilling the Father's will".

In the context of apostolic religious life the concept of authority does not evoke the idea of a power which distinguishes "superiors" from "inferiors" and puts the latter at the service of the former, as can easily happen at a simply human level.

The model par excellence of the religious superior is the Lord Jesus. on the day before his passion he washed the feet of his disciples and have them to understand that if there be one who is called to serve the rest, it is precisely the one to whom authority has been given: the "Lord and Master" who called others to "follow" him became a servant (cf. Jn 13,1-17). And after the request of the sons of Zebedee, he taught his Apostles: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all".¹

Vatican II took up this theme with a significant insistence and applied it among others to religious superiors. Their authority is real, but exists only in view of a ministry or "diaconia", i.e. a service, and a brotherly service. "Superiors should be

¹ Cf. commentary on biblical quotation at beginning of chap. X, p. 872

docile to God's will in performing the task laid upon them and should exercise authority in a spirit of service of the brethren, thus giving expression to God's love for them".² The Code of Canon Law clearly draws its inspiration from the same text when it asserts: "The authority which superiors receive from God through the ministry of the Church is to be exercised by them in a spirit of service. In fulfilling their office they are to be docile to the will of God, and are to govern those subject to them as children of God".³

On this evangelical and ecclesial doctrine our own Constitutions are based. In fact for us this teaching has a particular significance because it is in line with the way we read the Gospel "in the spirit of Don Bosco": among the aspects of the figure of the Saviour to which we are more sensitive, art. 11 includes "the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving; the desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion". These features should characterize in a special way the salesian superior: his authority is pastoral", i.e. it proceeds entirely from a pastoral charity which finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, the Servant of the Father and the Good Shepherd of his brothers, even to the extent of complete self-donation. in this radical sense the superior's authority, is a service available to his brothers and an obedience to the will of the Father free of self-interest.

The purpose of Salesian authority

The second paragraph completes the first and adds some details to it. It describes the purpose of the service of authority. Without pretending to be exhaustive it mentions two points in particular, recalling ideas expressed also elsewhere in the Constitutions:⁴

— the first task of authority concerns *brotherly communion*: it is directed to "fostering charity" among the members of the local community, the province and the Congregation, and to "coordinating the efforts of all", or in other words in ensuring unity of hearts and wills in communal life and in collaboration in the common plan (cf. C 55). in the community the superior is the sign and means of the communion of all the confreres in seeking and giving effect to God's will (cf. C 66); we may recall especially what the Constitutions say about the superior's role in fostering the family spirit (cf. C 55, 65);

— the second task concerns the *salesian mission*: this is a duty arising from our specific pastoral identity, and is one of animation for the choosing of objectives and giving guidance for their attainment; more concretely it involves the obligation of making decisions when a solution must be chosen, or for correcting a situation where there is risk of going astray (cf. C 44, 66).

² PC 14

³ CIC, can. 618

⁴ Cf. Introduction to fourth part, p. 865 ff.

Requirement of the priestly character

Since this article gives a general outline of the service of authority with specific reference to pastoral charity and the common mission, the GC22 considered it the best place for stating explicitly that a salesian Superior must be a priest, an assertion which in the text of 1972 had been included in the part referring to the apostolic mission.⁵

The text makes explicit an aspect of the form of our Society already indicated in art. 4. It appeals to salesian tradition which goes all the way back to Don Bosco the Founder and has remained uninterrupted down to our own days, and which moreover was explicitly confirmed by the last three General Chapters, which carried out the postconciliar revision of the Constitutions. We read in the documents of the GC21: "We are not dealing merely with a juridical or sociological question; nor is it a problem that arises from a consideration of religious life in general. It is a question of a specific religious ecclesial problem that can be termed 'salesian'. It is concerned with a particular mode of life, as found in the salesian community as started and structured by Don Bosco, and lived and approved by the Church with a view to the fulfilment of the concrete mission that the Holy Spirit entrusted to our Father and Founder".⁶ "It is a point that concerns the very roots of our spirit and of our salesian life, both with regard to the internal government of the community and in respect of the pastoral method proper to our mission".⁷

It is a fact that the salesian community was built up around Don Bosco, the first "rector" of the Oratory, who gave to the figure of the superior all the marks of the fatherliness flowing from his priestly ministry. Even after the Apostolic See had prescribed that the superior of a religious community should not be the regular confessor of his confreres, the Successors of Don Bosco were tireless in pointing to the salesian rector as the true "shepherd" and "director of spirit" of confreres and boys, according to the mind of the Founder.⁸

⁵ Cf. *CONSTITUTIONS 1972*, ART. 35

⁶ GC21, 199

⁷ GC21, 200

⁸ It will be useful to recall some significant interventions of General Chapters and Rectors Major concerning the authentic figure of the salesian rector.

An event which Fr Ceria described as a turning point in the history of the Society (cf. *Annali* III, p. 170-194) was the decree of the Holy Office of 24 April 1901 which prescribed that the religious superior should not be the ordinary confessor of the confreres. We know what concern this caused to Don Rua and the salesians because it seemed to conflict with one of the original characteristics of the rector in our houses. Against the background of this concern we must read what the GC10 of 1904 laid down in the Regulations in respect of the rector: "The GC 10 made the rectors effectively responsible for the religious progress of their confreres, by constituting them their true spiritual directors, even though not their confessors. To this end it recommends them to make souls their principal concern; spiritual works, moral improvement, and religious progress their first care, so that 'formetur in omnibus Christus' and they may not have a community of mere workers or employees" (*Regulations 1906*, art 135). Don Rua, for his part, in various letters to provincials and rectors insisted on the formation function that belonged to the rectors. In an important letter to the provincials and rectors of America he wrote that the rector is "the guide, and master of virtue and perfection" of the confreres, and especially of the younger ones (cf. D. RUA, *Circular letters*, p. 134-135).

The General Chapters were firmly convinced that the priestly character in the superior is an element that belongs essentially to the salesian charisma. In his address of 24 January 1978 to the GC2 I the Rector Major gave the following three motivations as determining the Chapter's decision:

- the explicit and verifiable will of the Founder;
- the approval and formal declaration by the Hierarchy;
- the harmonization of such an element with the methodology of the preventive system in the practical realization of our mission.⁹

The salesian superior is not primarily an administrator, nor an organizer, nor the manager of a particular work, nor a builder etc.; he is first and foremost the guide of a community which has been entrusted with a specific pastoral mission; he is in a certain sense the spiritual educator of a group of educators, the shepherd of a group of shepherds, the animator of their spirit, the one who gives direction to the 'missionary' activity of his confreres, both priests and laymen, seen in all its aspects.

The significance of this service being provided by a priest can therefore be clearly seen, as also can Don Bosco's reasons for wanting it so. The sacrament of Order confers on the superior the fundamental capacity for his service, and pastoral experience provides the practical skill. His model is Don Bosco himself, priest and educator, superior and shepherd, spiritual director of his confreres and of the community of Valdocco.¹⁰

Don Albera too has various interventions on the rector in his letters (cf. D. ALBERA), Circular letters). Very significant is an intervention in the GC11, made a few days after his election as Rector Major. He concluded a capitular session with these words: "It is essential for the life of our Society that we preserve the spirit of the rector according to Don Bosco's ideal; otherwise we shall be changing our method of education and shall no longer be salesians. We must do all we can to preserve the fatherly spirit. Especially through the rendiconto we can know our subjects and direct them... In this way we shall be able to maintain around the rector the aura with which Don Bosco wanted him to be surrounded" (cf. CERIA, *Annali* IV 8-9). To Don Albera is due also the drawing up of the "Manuale del Direttore" which opens with this remark addressed to the rector himself: "This book contains the norms of conduct you should follow, so as to work efficaciously and preserve Don Bosco's spirit in the house entrusted to your care...".

Specially remembered of Don Rinaldi is his heart-rending appeal to provincials and rectors to preserve jealously the sense of spiritual fatherhood of Don Bosco: My dear provincials and rectors, I beg of you through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ to revive in yourselves and all around you the tradition of spiritual fatherhood, which is unfortunately declining to the great detriment of young souls and of our salesian physiognomy. Be true fathers of the souls of your young people. Do not leave aside this fatherliness, but practise it... Leave to others the confessions of women and nuns; you yourselves should be the confessors of the youngsters of the oratory and outsiders" (ASC 56, April 1931, p. 939-943).

In the circular letters of subsequent Successors of Don Bosco can also be found frequent references to the figure of the rector. In the official teaching of more recent times before the SGC, the deliberations of the GC19 should be remembered; they dealt with the rector in chap. V of document I (structures), in doc. VII (entirely dedicated to the spiritual direction of the confreres), and in doc. XIX on the formation of the young. There are some significant passages in doc. 1: after recalling the "uninterrupted tradition" that the rector constitutes "without any doubt the centre for unity and of initiative in all salesian work", the document adds: "The need of flexible unity and on the part of the rector especially in the sense of spiritual and formative fatherliness, alive and active, ... would seem to be in need of special emphasis at the present day". (GC19, p. 32-33)

⁹ Cf. GC2I, 220

¹⁰ On this theme cf. Letter of the Rector Major: *The salesian rector and animation*, in ASC 306, 1982

*Jesus, Good Shepherd,
give to the superiors of our communities
the fullness of your grace,
to enable them to foster unity of purpose
among their confreres,
and full agreement in their desires and activity.
Grant that, like Don Bosco,
they may be shepherds full of zeal,
and in animating, guiding, deciding and correcting,
they may lead us
to an ever more diligent and joyful fulfilment
of our mission of salvation.*

ARE 122 UNITY IN THE GOVERNMENT OF ME SOCIETY

Superiors at every level of government share in one and the same authority, and exercise it in communion with the Rector Major for the benefit of the whole Society. In this way, while fostering the good of each individual community, they are solicitous for the unity, growth and perfecting of the whole Congregation.

In the definitive revision of the text of the Constitutions this article has been preserved, but has been transferred from the section dealing with the Rector Major, where it was found in the 1972 edition, to the chapter on the general principles and criteria to emphasize the importance of the unity of the Congregation spread all over the world.

Art. 59, in the chapter on the fraternal and apostolic community, had already opened to every confrere who becomes incorporated in the Society by religious profession its world dimension in communion with the Rector Major and his council (cf. also art. 24, on the profession formula).

This is truer still of those who are superiors at provincial or local level. They must be guarantors of the convergence of all the confreres in the charismatic and vocational unity of the Congregation, and must therefore exercise their office in close conjunction with the Rector Major, who is its centre of unity. "At the different levels", said the SGC, "the centre which in Don Bosco's mind guarantees unity is the respective superior. For the Congregation considered in its totality, this 'centre of unity' par excellence is the Rector Major with the Superior Council" (now General Council)¹ The Society as a whole is the heir and continuation of the spirit, mission and charism of Don Bosco (cf. C 1), and his Successor is the father who fosters the constant fidelity of all the members to the salesian charisma. We recall Don Bosco's words, already quoted elsewhere: "Let everyone help the Rector Major, upholding and assisting him in every way, let everyone *rally about him as the sole focal point*".²

There are two statements of a fundamental nature in this article.

— The first emphasizes the concept of participation (and this will be further developed under a different aspect in the next article). "*Superiors at every level of government share in one and the same authority*", which "does not immediately derive from designation by the members, but has its origin in the act of the canonical erection of the Society. Therefore there exists in the whole Congregation only one nucleus, only one centre of authority. And this authority, received from the Church, comes through the elective will of the General Chapter to find its centre, according to the Constitutions, in the ministry of the Rector Major".³ And our Founder himself reminds us: "What we have said about the Rector Major in reference to the whole Congregation applies also to each rector in his own house. He must be united to the

¹ SGC, 720

² BM XII, 62

³ SGC, 721

Rector Major, and all the members of his house must be united with him".⁴ Clearly indicated therefore is the deep communion that must exist between the Rector Major and all who exercise authority.

— A second important aspect, which follows immediately from the above, is also given prominence. It is the "preoccupation and interest which all superiors must have for the good, the unity and the increase of the whole Congregation, over and above their immediate concern for their own field of activity and for their own communities".⁵

This observation in no way weakens the personal and ordinary authority of superiors at the various levels, nor does it take anything from their task of "fostering the good of each individual community", even according to the criteria for a proper subsidiarity and decentralization (cf. C 124); but is aimed at achieving the harmonious realization of two complementary elements, those of *unity and plurality*. In fact our structures should make possible the expression of the diversity of personal qualities and the values of every community and region, and facilitate adaptation to the educative and pastoral demands of different social and cultural circumstances and of the Local Churches. Pluralism of ideas, of opinions, of endeavour, of work, of activity, of the forms of concrete living, demand of our structures a greater spiritual and juridical unity, because our mission is one, our consecration is identical, as also is our spirit; and the diversity of abilities and duties ought to be directed towards the exchange of ideas, to collaboration, and to fraternal and ecclesial communion.⁶

*God our Father,
you inspired Don Bosco to found
a family of brothers united around their father.*

*Grant that all of us, confreres and superiors,
may be united around the Rector Major,
whom you have given us
as our "father" and "centre of unity".*

*While we foster the good of each of our
communities, make us solicitous for the unity,
growth and perfecting of the whole Congregation.*

*This we ask through the intercession of Mary,
and through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

⁴ BM XII, 62

⁵ SCC, 721

⁶ Cf. SGC, 706

ART. 123 PARTICIPATION AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Our common vocation requires the responsible and effective participation of all the members in the life and action of the local, provincial and world communities, not only in terms of implementation but also of planning, organizing and evaluating, according to their respective roles and competence.

This shared responsibility requires also the participation of the confreres, in the most suitable way, in the choice of those responsible for government at the different levels, and in the working out of their more important decisions.

It is the duty of those who exercise authority to promote and guide this contribution by means of adequate information, personal dialogue and community study and reflection.

This article and the one that follows are strictly linked with the two preceding ones: together they form a single block and lead to an understanding of some complementary aspects of authority and service.

To the specific and personal responsibility of superiors corresponds a shared responsibility on the part of all the confreres. The superior should not think that he is obliged to do everything himself or on his own authority. On the one hand he has to foster a responsible participation by all the confreres (art. 123), and on the other he must leave to those responsible at lower levels what they are capable of doing within the limits of their own competence (art. 124). These are criteria insisted on by Vatican II and which also inspired the new Code of Canon Law.¹

Responsible participation of all in communal life and activity

Art. 123 bases the responsible and effective participation of all the confreres on the "common vocation", which the first and second parts of the Constitutions described in its essential elements, and which each member, called by God to be part of the salesian Society, accepted on the day of profession.

Art. 22 stated that every confrere is "a responsible member" of the Society, who "puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks".

Then in dealing with obedience, the Constitutions emphasized the involvement of all: "In the community, in view of the mission entrusted to us, we all obey even though we have different tasks to perform... in matters of importance we seek the will of the Lord together in patient brotherly dialogue, with a deep awareness of shared responsibility" (C 66).

The concept of personal and communal co-responsibility for the common vocation is here taken up again and endorsed as one of the criteria for the

¹ Cf. CAC, Introduction. The principle of the shared responsibility of each one, according to his own role, is part of the tradition, which goes back to Don Bosco. His words, are well known: "Let the rector be the rector; i.e. let him direct others as to what they should do..." (BM XIII, 258; cf. also BM X, 493)

governmental structures called for by the conciliar renewal and which must involve all members. All are asked to give their "responsible and effective participation ... in the life and action of the local, provincial and world communities ... according to their respective roles and competence".

All Salesians have the same vocation, and we feel the life and mission of the Congregation as our own; each one in his own environment feels that he shares and is responsible for the life of his community and of the province, and is open to the whole Society. This was the thought of Don Bosco himself when he said that all should form "a family of brothers around a father".²

The article indicates in particular some concrete methods by which this sharing and co-responsibility should be practised by the confreres and encouraged by the superiors. Three significant moments are indicated at which the participation of all is needed; these are also pointed out elsewhere in the Constitutions, especially when shared responsibility in obedience is spoken of (cf. C 66):

— common research in programming and organization;
— common commitment in carrying out decisions; —
verification or revision of the communal project.

One of the best means for the exercise of the common responsibility is the Assembly of the confreres, which has among its precise duties "to draw up a programme each year covering the life, activities and updating of the community, and to review this programme" (cf. R 184).

Shared responsibility in the choice of superiors

The second paragraph points out a form of participation which is particularly important, expressly indicated by the Council,³ and codified in the Code of Canon Law: it is the active contribution that religious are called upon to give in the choice of members of chapters, councils, and of the superiors themselves.⁴

Our Constitutions adopt this criterion for the designation of both superiors and members of councils and chapters. The Constitutions themselves, in determining the structures at various levels, prescribe the concrete manner for participation in these cases, which we shall consider later at both provincial and local level (cf. C 162, 167, 177).

But taking part in the choice of superiors is not sufficient. The Rule urges a real sharing in the making of more important decisions by those responsible for government at various levels.

Art. 66, to which we have already referred, speaks of this explicitly in connection with the local community: even though at the end of the period of common

² BM VIII, 356

³ Cf. PC 14; ES II 18

⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 625, 633

research the decision belongs to the superior, the opinions of the confreres are first heard in a dialogue which aims at securing the greatest possible convergence of views.

At other levels, the following forms of participation are expressly indicated in the Constitutions:

- the possibility for provinces, local communities and individual confreres to send their proposals to the Moderator of the General Chapter (R 1 12; cf. can. 631 §3);
- on the occasion of the provincial chapter, the "common concern for the general problems" of the province on the part of local communities and confreres (cf. C 170);
- the ascertaining of the views of the local community concerned, before the provincial council makes a decision in its regard (cf. R 158).

The superior fosters the participation of all

All of this should not be considered a kind of concession or act of condescension on the part of the superior. Indeed the one who exercises authority has the obligation of promoting and guiding the responsible collaboration of all, by three principal means:

- *adequate information*, so as to involve the confreres in reflection on important matters (the Regulations insist on this: cf. R 33, 180, 184);
- *personal dialogue*, which is indispensable if each confrere is to be treated as a "responsible member"; this is another indication of the importance of the talk with the superior (cf. C 70, R 49);
- *communal reflection*: i.e. the common search for the Lord's will (cf. C 66), especially at the level of the local community, for which the Regulations recommend the rector to make effective the shared responsibility of the confreres and to bring about an appropriate functioning of the Assembly of the confreres (cf. R 173).

The structures of government therefore are not something which concern only a limited number of confreres. All are asked to take an interest in them, to study problems, to make comments and offer suggestions, whenever the life of the community or its apostolic activity is involved. And each one is called upon to offer for the benefit of others his own experience, personal talents, and the responsibility attached to his particular work.

It cannot be overemphasized that this sharing and co-responsibility for the realization of the common vocation renders fraternal communion more vital, the mission more efficacious, and the decisions to be taken better thought out. But it does not simplify the exercise of authority, and demands of all a permanent commitment to the growth of human and Christian maturity, expressed in the ability for communication and dialogue, in an open and discerning mentality, in a spirit of initiative (R 99), and even if necessary in not insisting on one's own point of view (C 66).

*God our Father,
grant to all salesians
zeal, generosity and the ability to work together,
so as to take part with a sense of shared responsibility,
in all the phases of study and realization
of the apostolic work you entrust to the community,
working actively and with humility for this purpose
in charity and peace.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 124 SUBSIDIARITY AND DECENTRALIZATION

Authority of any kind and at every level leaves to the initiative of lower levels and of individuals whatever can be decided and done by them, according to their respective competence. In this way the worth of individuals and communities is recognized, and more real involvement is encouraged.

The principle of subsidiarity implies decentralization which, while safeguarding unity, recognizes a proper autonomy and consequently a right distribution of powers between the different organs of government.

Two other important principles for the government of the Congregation are dealt with in this article: they are subsidiarity and decentralization, two concepts which are mutually related and which sustain each other.

The principle of "*subsidiarity*", in its essential formulation, may be expressed as follows: a proper ordering of authority in such a way that decisions be normally made and carried out at the same level as the responsibility for them; for this reason "authority of any kind and at every level leaves to the initiative of lower levels and of individuals whatever can be decided and done by them, according to their respective competence". Subsidiarity is based on true brotherhood and sharing: it turns to account the talents and abilities of each one, putting them at the service of the communal project, and brings it about that every member feels personally committed to the fulfilment of the mission. Far from lessening the value of higher authority, which retains the responsibility (which indeed it cannot renounce) of safeguarding unity, subsidiarity leads to real collaboration in activity, and even in decision making itself, by respecting the attributes and competence of each level of authority.

Understood in this sense, subsidiarity requires an effective "*decentralization*". This provides a due and efficacious distribution of powers, with appropriate details concerning the spheres of competence of the various organs, and of the objectives and means proper to them, so as to exploit their possibilities in the best way.

These principles, recommended by Vatican II,¹ have been taken up by the new Code of Canon Law, which states in general: "On the basis of the same principle (of subsidiarity), the new Code entrusts either to particular laws or to executive power whatever is not necessary for the unity of the discipline of the universal Church, so that appropriate provision is made for a healthy "decentralization" while avoiding the danger of division".²

As far as our Society is concerned, solicitude for unity, already affirmed in articles 122 and 123 and recalled also in the present article, does not detract from the value of situational pluralism, and so does not lead to the centralization of power.

¹ Cf. ES II 18

² Cf. CIC, Preface; cf. also *Principia pro recognition CIC* (1967), 5

Our Society is the bearer of a charism for the universal Church, spread all over the world, and which exists and works in diverse geographical, cultural, social, political and religious situations. Hence "unity of ministry requires as its indispensable, complementary and integrative element, decentralization, which is the concrete practical expression of subsidiarity".³

On the one hand provincial and local authorities must have appropriate authority and the necessary power for efficacious government in line with the demands of time and place. This implies decentralization, i.e an adequate distribution of power between the various organs of government. Thus we have a more rapid and less complicated solution of problems, increased efficiency and a more comprehensive valuation of personnel and communities.⁴

On the other hand higher authorities should not impede the exercise of this power, but should rather respect and encourage it. By leaving to lower levels what they can decide and realize on their own, the higher organs still have the possibility of intervening to see that any defects are made good or to correct deviations, as also to exercise those powers which are given to them by the Constitutions and cannot be left aside, for guaranteeing directly or indirectly the essential unity.

This is why in revising the Constitutions and Regulations the Congregation has provided in the various governmental structures an appropriate autonomy and adequate distribution of powers which correspond better to our particular charism. A glance at the various powers conferred by our own law on provincials and their councils, on provincial chapters, and also on rectors and their councils, will suffice to indicate the significance of the principles set out in this art. 124.

Here again, however, it may be well to point out that the acceptance of principles and their codification in the Rule is not sufficient; they have to be put into practice by authorities at the different levels.

And so we now have a panorama of the principles and criteria which underlie our government. Their very nature makes it clear to us that we are all involved: superiors and members, sharing responsibility in each community, in each province, in the entire Congregation.

These principles have now rightly "found their place in the renewed Constitutions. It is important that they be fully understood and put into practice for the realization of the purpose of religious government: the building of a community united in Christ, in which God is sought and loved above all else and the mission of Christ is generously fulfilled".⁵

³ SGC, 720

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Cf. *Essential elements of religious life*, CRIS, 31.5.1983, n. 52

In this way chapter X, in introducing the fourth part, illustrates the essential character of the structures very well: they are at the service of the individual members and the communities to help them to be faithful to their vocation.⁶

*Lord our God,
may the unconditional seeking of your glory
guide in their service
those to whom you have given authority among us,
so that the development
of each individual may be fostered
and the participation of all may be directed,
in line with their ability and competence,
to respond to the designs you make known
for our community and our young people.*

⁶Cf. SGC, 706

CHAPTER XI

SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN THE WORLD COMMUNITY

"Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock" (1 Pt 5,2-3).

The figure of the Lord, the one and only good Shepherd (Ezek 34,11.23), which opened chap. I of the Constitutions, now returns in connection with those who have a specific task of government at various levels of the Congregation, beginning with the Rector Major and his Council. All the rich content and power of the biblical "shepherd-sheep" motif are here taken up again and kept in mind.

To this the passage quoted from the first Letter of Peter makes an excellent contribution. The context is well known. The community has now been set up and so have its structures of government. Problems are not lacking, and not only those of suffering caused by persecutions. In the community itself the need is felt for better agreement between old and young, between those carrying responsibility and the others. Peter responds to the situation with a wonderful teaching about baptism aimed at generating truth and hope (1,6-9: 5,9-10).

Once again the mystery of Christ is presented as the first active element in the life of Christians.

The Apostle addresses the heads of the community (the elders or presbyters), and simply recommends to them a service as "shepherds", as though this classic biblical figure were already a model of conduct for those in authority (cf. Acts 20,18-35). His address begins once again with some convincing autobiographical details (5,1): Peter presents himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ and for Christ (without whom christian service has no meaning: cf. Mk 10,40-45); the two following verses (quoted as the heading to this chapter) make clear the qualities of pastoral service. The basic conviction is that the flock belongs to God, and is entrusted to the care of the elders. This therefore calls for a willing service without any coercion, entirely free and without any mercenary element or bossy attitude, in a word as credible "models" (5,2-3). In the background there is clearly the figure of Christ the Good Shepherd (Jn 10,11), of whom the pastors of the community are a sacrament, i.e. a visible sign and instrument, from whom alone can be expected the "unfading crown of glory" (5,4).

The biblical text is an excellent programme for shaping and guiding government at world level, exposed as it is to all sorts of technical difficulties, and which nevertheless must be centred on the world of persons, not immune from problems and difficulties and hence in need of true and strong goals. After the unforgettable example of Don Bosco!

After the general principles and criteria from which the service of authority must draw its inspiration, the Constitutions go on to outline and give some details of this service at various levels, beginning with the world community.

The reason for adopting the order of succession of the three levels was given in the introduction to the fourth part. The choice makes it easier to see the Congregation as a *living unity*, and the structures of government at world level as *'structures of unity'*.

This perspective gives to the salesian a deeper sense of belonging to the world community, in which he is incorporated by religious profession which makes him, in the words of art. 59, "a participant in the communion of spirit, witness and service that is its (the Congregation's) life in the universal Church".

In this way authority at world level is called to render first and foremost a service of ministerial unity, which must provide an organic foundation for all members in the same vocation.¹

This chapter, dealing with the service of authority at world level, is arranged under the following subheadings:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. The Supreme Pontiff | <i>art. 125</i> |
| 2. The Rector Major | <i>art. 126-129</i> |
| 3. The General Council | <i>art. 130-143; (154-155)</i> |
| 4. Three special assignments | <i>art. 144-145</i> |
| 5. The General Chapter | <i>art. 146-152</i> |
| 6. Regional structures | <i>art. 154-155</i> |

The commentary on the chapter will follow this division, with art. 154-155 linked with those on the General Council.

1. THE SUPREME PONTIFF (ART 125)

Reference has already been made to the place of the Pope in the life of the salesian in the chapter on "salesian spirit": among the latter's characteristics there is a living ecclesial awareness, expressed in an attitude of filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching (cf. C 13).

In the present article this loyalty is expressed in the fact that the Salesian Society has as its highest superior the Supreme Pontiff. The latter, in fact, because of his office as Vicar of Christ and shepherd of the universal Church, has ordinary power which is full, supreme and immediate over the whole Church.² For this reason Don Bosco himself, in the first article of chap. VI of the Italian edition of the Constitutions of 1875 (from which our own article takes its rise), had written: "The members shall recognize in the Supreme Pontiff their arbiter and absolute superior, to whom they shall be in everything, in every place and at all times, humbly and respectfully submissive".³ It is a submission "even in virtue of the vow of obedience",⁴ a *filial submission*, full of love, of which Don Bosco has himself given us the example. Quoting many adjectives which showed his love for the Pope ("supernatural, zealous and conquering, filial and sincere, obedient and submissive, self-sacrificing and

¹ Cf. SGC, 713, 720

² cf. CIC, can. 332

³ *Costituzioni 1875*, VI, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 113)

⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 590

heroic"), the Rector Major writes: "These are not just pleonastic expressions; they correspond to different aspects of a solid witness lived out through many long years".⁵

The Constitutions point out some attitudes of the salesian in respect of the Supreme Pontiff which are a consequence of the filial submission referred to above. They are:

- *availability for the good of the universal Church*, of which unity with Peter's successor is the visible sign; such availability follows directly from the "sense of Church" referred to it in art. 13;
- *docility to the Pope's teaching*: it is this that shapes and animates all our educative and evangelizing activity;⁶
- *the task of helping the faithful*, and especially the young, *to accept papal teaching*: our "devotion" becomes an "obligation" to be fulfilled, and leads us to bring all together in unity around him whom Jesus willed to be the centre of unity.

In this way is outlined an emblematic experience of faith in Peter's ministry, which was lived so strongly by Don Bosco and is deeply rooted in our tradition as one of the three columns of salesian spirituality (the central position of the Eucharist, Marian devotion, and conscious and practical supernatural adherence to the Pope).

When the Pope expressed a request, or even a desire or explicit thought, Don Bosco's docility was immediate and of the highest degree, sometimes even heroic. Love for the Pope was for him an "element of life", and at the same time an inducement to make the Papacy loved by others. By his writings, the witness of his life, his activity as an educator, through widely varying interventions which went even beyond the immediate interests of the Congregation, he was a true servant of the Church in the person of Peter's successor. All this Don Bosco passed on to his Society, which from its first beginnings he had put at the Pontiff's service: "The special purpose of the Congregation and the Salesians is to sustain the authority of the Holy See, wherever they may be and wherever they work".⁷

*Lord Jesus, you chose the Apostle Peter
to be in your Church,
the foundation, teacher of faith, and universal shepherd.
Grant to all of us, after the example of Don Bosco,
a filial love and convinced submission
to Peter's Successor.
Make us able to cultivate in youth
a living sense of membership of the Church,
which will incite them to collaborate generously
in the work of evangelization and advancement
of those most in need.*

⁵ Cf. VICANO, *Our fidelity to Peter's successor*, ACC 315, p. 8

⁶ Cf. AGC 315, p. 28-31

⁷ MB XVIII, 477

Right from the first approved text of the Constitutions (1875) the Superior General of the Salesian Society has been called the Rector Major.

In the present text his figure is presented in four articles, which specify respectively:

- his identity and function (*art. 126*)
- power and government (*art. 127*)
- the manner of his election (*art. 128*)
- the conditions for his election (*art. 129*)

2.1 The identity and function of the Rector Major (art. 126)

The identity of the Rector Major, the Superior of our Society, is presented through three characteristics: the connection with Don Bosco as his successor, his pastoral role as father, and the bond of communion as the centre of unity of the Salesian Family.

— *Successor of Don Bosco.*

In Don Bosco's "spiritual testament" we read: "Before leaving this world for eternity I wish to fulfil a duty towards you and so satisfy an ardent desire of my heart. First of all I thank you with the most ardent affection of my soul for the obedience you have given me... Your Rector is dead, but there will be another elected, who will have care of you and of your eternal salvation. Listen to him, love him, obey him, pray for him as you have done for me".⁸

These words provide the foundation and explanation of the tradition of seeing in the Rector Major, and calling him, the "Successor of Don Bosco": it is a concrete way of expressing the uninterrupted linkage with Don Bosco and rendering him present and active.

— *Father.*

If the Rector Major is called to be the "living Don Bosco" in the Congregation and the Salesian Family, his true identity cannot be visualized other than as the FATHER. "Our Founder", wrote Don Rinaldi, "was never anything else but a Father. His whole life was a complete reflection of the heavenly fatherliness of God... which he practised here below in the highest and even a unique degree. And since his life was always fatherly, so his work and his sons cannot exist without the same trait".⁹ In the Rector Major fatherliness is an essential characteristic: it demands kindness, a sense of responsibility, the giving of guidance in fidelity, and commitment for the flourishing of the salesian vocation.

⁸ From *Spiritual testament of Don Bosco*, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 207-208

⁹ ASC 56, 26 April 1931, p. 940

— *Centre of unity.*

The unity indicated in art. 122 as one of the general principles for the life of our Society needs a centre on which to converge and from which to radiate. This necessity was noted, emphasized and repeatedly and vigorously recalled by Don Bosco himself, who saw in it a basic element of life indispensable for his foundation.

Hardly had the Congregation been approved (1869) when Don Bosco, in a conference already quoted elsewhere in which he looked to the future, said: "If a Society such as ours is to prosper, it must of necessity be properly organized... Like the human body, a religious Congregation needs a head and limbs, the latter subordinate to one another and all subordinate to the head... But only one head is needed because our Society, like a body, would look monstrous with two or more heads".¹⁰

In a conference to the rectors on 3 February 1876, he explained: "Among us let the superior be our all. Let everyone help the Rector Major, upholding and assisting him in every way; let everyone rally about him as the sole focal point". And after recognizing the necessary autonomy in the fulfilment of each one's duty, he added: "but no one should be guided by his own whims but by the ideal of unity".¹¹

It should be noted that each of these three aspects is presented in the renewed Constitutions with reference not only to the Congregation but to the whole "*Salesian Family*"; this is a perspective rooted in the history of our origins and connected with the resources and relaunching of the Salesian Family brought about by the SGC and expressed in art. 5 of the Constitutions.

The three characteristics taken together give to the figure of the Rector Major a characteristic originality which goes back to the thought, desire and example of the Founder.

After presenting the identity of the Rector Major, art. 126 indicates in its second paragraph the principal task attaching to his role: "*To promote... the constant fidelity of the members to the salesian charism, so as to fulfil the mission confided by God to our Society*". It is instructive to see this task of animation and promotion in the light of the first article of the Constitutions, where fidelity to the Founder is based on fidelity to the Spirit, and of the second article which in the commitment to put into effect the Founder's apostolic project identifies the very nature of the Society.

2.2 The Rector Major's power of government (art. 127)

To carry out his mandate the Rector Major, as the supreme Moderator of the Society, receives from God through the ministry of the Church the necessary power of government.

¹⁰ BM IX, 268

¹¹ BM XII, 62-63

Art. 127 first presents this power in terms of can. 622 of the Code of Canon Law: it is a question of a power which is *personal* (as explained in the commentary on art. 120); *ordinary* (i.e. connected by right with the office); *extensive* to all the circumscriptions, houses and members of the Congregation in both spiritual and temporal matters; *to be exercised* in accordance with the common and our particular law.

Then are indicated three important ways in which the ordinary power of the Rector Major is exercised: visits to the provinces and houses further specified in art. 104 of the Regulations; the convoking and presidency of the General Council; and the official representation of the Congregation before the Church and civil society.

2.3 Manner of electing the Rector Major (art. 128)

Can. 625 §1 prescribes: "The supreme Moderator of the institute is to be designated by canonical election, in accordance with the Constitutions". To this prescription of the universal law corresponds art. 128 of our Rule which entrusts to the General Chapter the task of electing the Rector Major. This is an arrangement which has been found in the Constitutions from the time of Don Bosco to the present day, and is founded especially on two motivations: the importance of the role of the Rector Major for the whole Congregation, and the supreme authority in the Society which belongs to the General Chapter.

But we find in the present text of the Constitutions a change with respect to the previous norm concerning the duration of the Recto Major's mandate. The SGC reduced this from twelve to six years, but confirmed the possibility of re-election.

This modification was introduced to give to each ordinary General Chapter, which meets every six years, the possibility of reflect on the needs of the Congregation at a particular moment in history, and also on the best way of meeting the situation by the election of the Rector Major, which in this way coincides with the election of the general council.

As well as specifying the duration, the article also prescribes that the Rector Major may not resign his office without the consent of the Apostolic See.

2.4 Conditions for the election of the Rector Major (art. 129)

For the first condition indicated — that he must be a priest — the reflections already made in connection with art. 121 apply.

The second condition responds to the prescription of can. 623: "To be validly appointed or elected to the office of superior, members must have been perpetually or definitively professed for an appropriate period of time, to be determined by their own law or, for major superiors, by the Constitutions". Art. 129 of our Rule sets this period, in the case of the Rector Major, at ten years. The condition concerning the minimum age (40 years), which was still present in the Constitutions after the revision of the

65§ SGC, has been suppressed. What is important is the "salesian age", and the GC22

considered that ten years of perpetual profession, which would ordinarily have been preceded by six years of temporary profession, was a proper and valid criterion.

The third condition is a collection of talents and qualities which are required by the identity and constitutional role of the Rector Major. As well as exemplariness of life and ability and prudence in governing-talents which were already indicated in the Constitutions preceding the SGC — there are now emphasized love of the Church and the Congregation, and pastoral zeal. They are two additions which fully correspond to Don Bosco's thought and to the ecclesial and pastoral slant of the salesian vocation, which is evident all through the constitutional text.

*God our Father,
we ask you to bless, protect and guide
with the strength of the Holy Spirit
him whom in your Providence
you have chosen as the Successor of Don Bosco,
the Superior of our Society,
the father and centre of unity of the Salesian Family.*

*That in his life and activity
the Rector Major may be enabled to continue in our midst
the fatherly presence of Don Bosco,
Lord hear our prayer.*

*That the Rector Major,
with the collaboration of the general council may
have the light of wisdom and richness of faith to
promote full communion between all Salesians and
to guide the Society with courage and security
along the path traced out by Don Bosco,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the Rector Major may be efficacious in his work,
and see our Society grow in quality and quantity, in
faithful adherence to the Founder's charism and with
great openness to the needs of the situations in which
we must carry out our service,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

3. THE GENERAL COUNCIL (ART. 130-144)

In the commentary on art. 120, can. 627 §1 was recalled and briefly illustrated; it says: "Superiors are to have their own council, in accordance with the Constitutions, and they must make use of it in the exercise of their office".

And so the articles on the Rector Major are followed logically by the constitutional norms concerning his council.

From a historical point of view it may be recalled that from 1874 to 1965 the term used was "Superior Chapter".

In 1965 the GC19, to unify the terminology for all the organs of the Congregation, decided that the "Superior Chapter" should change its name to "Superior Council", and that the "House Chapter" should be called the "House Council".¹²

Finally the GC22, in the definitive drafting of the Constitutions, for greater juridical precision adopted the term "General Council".

The articles concerning the general council follow this order:

- nature and competence (*art. 130-132*) — composition (*art. 133-140*)
- particular prescriptions (*art. 141-144*)

3.1 Nature and competence of the general council (art. 130-132)

The general council is a *college or group of persons*¹³ which, throughout the period of the mandate of its members, constitutes a permanent organ, called to cooperate with the Rector Major in the animation and the government of the Congregation.

For the purpose of this cooperation three primary and indispensable tasks are assigned to the general council for the animation of the Congregation.

— The first is to identify and study the problems which concern *the common welfare of the Society*. Several times and in different contexts the Constitutions come back on the need for the salesian to have a practical outlook, to be attentive to the signs of the times, to the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church, in the conviction that the Lord manifests himself also through the urgent needs of the moment.¹⁴ The identification of the problems that emerge with the passing of time, so as to study them with a view to finding solutions in harmony with our charism at the level of a Congregation of worldwide dimensions, is no easy task; it calls for

¹² GC 19, p. 22

¹³ Cf. CIC, can. 127

¹⁴ Cf. for example C 7, 19, 41, 48

each other in a spirit of shared responsibility and universal perspective.

— A second task is to *promote fraternal union* among the different provinces. After what has been said of the Rector Major as the centre of unity of the Congregation, the importance is clear of this aspect of cooperation which the general council is called upon to give him, in ways and with initiatives suggested by circumstances, so as to make more marked the union between the various provinces and hence the sense of the world community.

— The third task is organizational in nature: the development of an ever more efficient organization of the service which the Centre is called upon to render to the Congregation. Extending to all the work of the council what is said in art. 107 of the Regulations, organisation of work implies structures for study, communication, programming, coordination, technical offices and consultant groups.

The article we are at present examining provides a pastoral criterion for the evaluation of organizational structures. The need for efficiency is recognized, but this is clearly for the purpose of the salesian mission in the world.

After setting out the principal duties of the general council, art. 131 goes on to indicate some of the *ways in which the councillors collaborate with the Rector Major*.

The first one is of particular importance: *by expressing their opinion and by voting*. From what has been said already about the nature of councils (cf. C 120, 123) and the details given in the present article, it follows that:

1. the Rector Major convokes and presides over the council, but strictly speaking he is not part of it: he does not vote, but receives the consent or opinion of his council;¹⁵
2. the council is not an organ of collegial government, because in itself it has no powers for making decisions; it can or must, in the cases foreseen by the general or our particular law, express its opinion or consent, but the decision is a juridical act of government performed by the Rector Major in virtue of his personal authority; when the consent of the council is required, the Superior would act invalidly if he did not seek the consent of the council or acted against its vote.

The second manner of collaboration specifies that the councillors fulfil not only the responsibilities entrusted to them by the General Chapter, but also those assigned them by the Rector Major. For this reason they have their domicile in the same house in which the Rector Major resides: this is necessary not only for the efficiency and coordination of their work, but also for communion of the councillors with the Rector Major and with each other.

¹⁵In connection with the norm of can. 127 §1, the Commission for the interpretation of the Code replied, on 14 May 1985, that when the law requires that a superior have the consent of his council for an act, the superior himself may not add his vote to that of the councillors, not even to give a casting vote when the votes are equal; cf. AAS 77 (1985), p. 771.

Can. 627 §2 of the Code of Canon Law says: "Apart from the cases prescribed in the universal law, an institute's own law is to determine the cases in which the validity of an act depends upon consent or advice being sought in accordance with can. 127".

In the salesian Constitutions the indication of these cases is given in the places considered most convenient for the matters to which they refer. Nevertheless art. 132 provides, for ease of consultation, a complete list of the cases spread throughout the Constitutions in which the consent of the general council is required; they are divided into three groups:

- the first paragraph lists the cases in which is required the consent of the council convoked according to law;
- the second paragraph lists the cases in which the consent is required of the councillors present at headquarters, even though they be fewer in number: these are cases of ordinary administration of frequent occurrence which cannot be delayed without serious inconvenience until the council's next plenary session (held normally twice a year) when all the councillors are present;
- the third paragraph contemplates the single case in which, in accordance with the universal law, the council and the Rector Major proceed in collegial fashion because they are acting as a "collegial tribunal", i.e. when there is question of the dismissal of a member from the Congregation.¹⁶ It is clear that in this case the Rector Major votes too.

Other cases in which the Rector Major must have the consent of his council are indicated in art. 106 of the General Regulations.

Art. 132 ends with an indication of a general character: the Rector Major will consult his council in other important matters whenever he considers it opportune to do so. It was not thought necessary to specify the individual cases in which the "opinion" of the council should be obtained. Given the full and precise indication of the cases in which consent is necessary, the GC22 considered that any further specification would have contributed nothing to brisk and expeditious central government.

3.2 Composition of the general council (art. 133-140)

In the course of time the composition of the council has undergone modifications, as regards both the number of councillors and the duties assigned to each of them. The worldwide expansion of the Society, attention to problems arising at different moments in history, deeper understanding of some aspects of the salesian mission, and criteria stemming from experience were the basis for the deliberations of various General Chapters in this connection. There is no point in going into details about all the changes that have taken place; the more significant of them will be pointed out in due course.

¹⁶Cf. CIC, can. 699 §1

revision of the Constitutions. Its members are: the vicar general, the councillors in charge of special departments (detailed in the second paragraph), and the regional councillors.

As regards composition there are two innovations of special importance.

In the first place, from the time of the GC19 the criterion applied for rethinking and defining the special sectors has no longer been that of "works" (schools, technical and agricultural institutes, oratories, aspirantates, printing works etc.) or of persons (salesians in formation, past pupils, cooperators etc.), but that of the *aspects and dimensions of the salesian life and mission* which apply to the whole Congregation.

The definition and description of these sectors was the object of progressively deeper analysis by the GC20, GC21 and GC22, with the purpose of clarifying the formal aspect which characterizes the "speciality" of each sector, and of defining the area of competence and interventions of each of them.

In this way was reached the present constitutional formulation of the different sectors and the councillors in charge of them.

The second important innovation was the insertion in the general council, alongside the councillors in charge of the special departments and with equal rights, of the figure of the *regional councillor*. This particular innovation dates from the GC19, which began a deep revision of the structures of central government and decided to experiment with the two kinds of councillor, without immediately inserting them among the constitutional norms, so that the experiment could be reviewed by the following General Chapter.¹⁷

In the light of the experience gained, the SGC recognized the substantial validity of the new figure and introduced it into the constitutional text, where we now find it in the definitive version after the approval by the GC22.

The motivations underlying this important innovation were summarized by the Rector Major as follows: "The requirements of unity and decentralization, the promoting of dialogue and of shared responsibility, fidelity to the identity of the salesian vocation and its embedding in different situations, environments and cultures, the accelerated pace of history and the new problems continually emerging in a time of epoch-making changes which present a constant challenge to society, to the Church and to religious institutes: this is the context in which structures of government have to operate at the present day. The regional councillor in such a context has a role to play as a "vertical link" and "horizontal link" (to use the expressions of the SGC), which in the past eighteen years has given a very important service to the Congregation".¹⁸

¹⁷Cf. GC19, p. 21-22

¹⁸GC22 RRM, 136

The Vicar of the Rector Major, or Vicar General (art. 134)

The present title was changed from the former one of "Prefect General" in the postconciliar revision of the Constitutions for greater uniformity at the three levels: local, provincial, world.

The specific identity of the Vicar General is found in the statement that he is "*the first collaborator of the Rector Major in the government of the Society*". For this reason he has power which is ordinary (i.e. not delegated to him by the Rector Major but connected with the office itself) and vicarious (i.e. exercised in the name of the Rector Major). According to the Code of Canon Law he is a religious Ordinary and a major superiorly,¹⁹ with the powers and faculties attributed by the Code to these ecclesiastical offices.

The Vicar General "takes the Rector Major's place whenever he is absent or impeded"; but his authority is not limited to such circumstances because he always has ordinary vicarious power and, when necessary, stands in for the Rector Major in the government of the whole Congregation.

The Constitutions assign to him in particular the "*care of religious life and discipline*". By this it is not intended to assign to the Vicar General a special sector in the sense used of councillors for the various departments. What it does indicate a particularly important aspect of the duties of the Vicar; as the first collaborator of the Rector Major and because of the power of government annexed to his office, he is in the best position to care for and promote overall religious discipline and to intervene, in appropriate ways and with due respect for the competence of provincials, in cases of special importance.

The councillor for formation (art. 135)

The formation sector was formerly entrusted to three members of the council: to the spiritual director or catechist general for the aspects of salesian religious formation, especially of the novices; to the prefect general of studies for the sector of literary, scientific, philosophical and theological instruction for the whole Society; and to the prefect general of arts and trades for the care of the qualification of lay confreres.

The GC19 instituted the new figure of "*councillor for formation*", but left in existence also that of spiritual director general, with responsibility for the formation of the novices.

The SGC and GC21 gave particular attention to the problem of salesian formation, and gave further specification to the figure of the councillor for formation.

¹⁹ Cf. CIC, can. 134 §1; can. 620

of these last General Chapters.

In the first place the unitary dimension of salesian formation is emphasized. Human maturing, intellectual and professional preparation, deepening of the religious life and gradual introduction to the apostolate are all factors which formation harmonizes in the vital unity of the salesian spirit. This is the unifying element which allows of the formation of authentic educators and salesian pastors.²⁰

Another important point is the unity of formation throughout all the phases of the formative process. This requires that the different aspects of salesian formation be present in every phase.

A third element of importance is the fact that the formation process continues throughout life and therefore commits the salesian, and with him the provincial and local communities, to a continuous ongoing formation process, so as to respond to the ever new needs of the condition of youth and the working classes.

These three elements provide the key for the understanding of the task assigned by the Constitutions to the councillor for formation: to further the integral (i.e. in all its dimensions) and ongoing (i.e. throughout life) formation of the members. It is a task of wide extension and decisive importance, and makes of formation "an indispensable priority for the future".²¹

The concept of formation as a unitary and ongoing process does not exclude, but rather increases, the need for particular attention to initial formation in its various phases. The article we are examining specifies in the second paragraph the objectives of this particular care: to see to it that the various phases — as regards content, studies, methods and structures — guarantee the conditions for growth in the salesian vocation. For this reason particular importance attaches to the "*Ratio fundamentalis institutionis et studiorum*" referred to in art. 87 of the Regulations.

All this involves the councillor for formation and his departments in tasks of information, study, guidance, contacts and meetings for coordination as regards formation communities, centres for ongoing formation, and formation commissions and groups for consultation at provincial and interprovincial level.

The councillor for the youth apostolate (art. 136)

Before the GC19 there were three councillors concerned in this area, with distinctions based essentially on the criterion of "works" and "kinds of presence" : to one was entrusted the schools of humanities (including the studies of confreres in formation); to a second were assigned the professional and agricultural schools (together with the care of the lay salesians); while a third was responsible for oratories and parishes.

²⁰Cf. GC21, 244

²¹ Cf. closing address to chapter: GC22, 87

The GC19, as already noted, distributed duties within the council using the 662 criterion of "dimensions" or "areas" of the salesian mission, and assigned to a

single councillor the whole sector of parish and youth pastoral work.

The SGC confirmed the figure of the councillor for the youth apostolate, but moved the parishes back into the sector of a "councillor for the adult apostolate".

Further experience and reflection led the GC21 to restore once again to the councillor for the youth apostolate the care of salesian work in parishes. And so it has remained in the definitive text of the Constitutions.

In presenting the content of art. 136 it is best to begin from a fundamental consideration. The special sector entrusted to the councillor for the youth apostolate constitutes the aspect which enters most directly into the identity of the salesian vocation: "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" (C 26). To continue the mission of the Founder we educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total well-being of man" (C 31).

This fundamental idea, which is present throughout the constitutional text is a guide to the understanding of the figure of the councillor for the youth apostolate.

The field of his work is "salesian educative and apostolic activity in its different expression". Among this variety of expressions are included both the essential content and objectives of the Congregation's educative and pastoral service (cf. C 31- 39), and also the activities and works through which we carry out our mission, such as the oratory and youth centre, schools and technical institutes, boarding establishments and houses for young people in difficulties (C 42).

Among these works and activities the GC21 included also salesian parishes; it may be useful to know why the General Chapter decided to entrust their care to the councillor for the youth apostolate:

- the necessity and importance of community pastoral work is emphasized: the whole ecclesial community in fact, comprising young and old, is both the object and subject, the beneficiaries and the agents of pastoral work;
- the specific nature of our work for youth, which has to be realized in the parishes, is better guaranteed when one and the same councillor is responsible for both;
- the strict bond which should unite all our different forms of pastoral work in the ecclesial community is made more evident: oratories, youth centres, schools, parishes.²²

This arrangement was endorsed by the GC22, which also confirmed the designation "councillor for the youth apostolate", to express the priority of the youth aspect of salesian activity in all our educative and pastoral work.

Within the area thus described, the article assigns to the councillor concerned the task first and foremost of *animating and giving direction* in a double perspective:

²² Cf. GC21, 400

ensuring that the priority of our commitment to youth, and the influence of the preventive system are both achieved in the various expressions of salesian pastoral activity.

A further important duty is also indicated: that of *assisting the provinces* in the development of their pastoral plans and undertakings, again with a double purpose: so that they may be faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco, and that their activities may respond adequately to the needs of the times and of different places.

The three lines of intervention — *animation, orientation, assistance* — find throughout the constitutional text the contents on which to work: education, catechesis, group activity, liturgical initiation, vocational guidance, pastoral criteria and the preparation of workers (C 31-48), are all different aspects of one and the same task. The General Regulations point out some practical applications, among which particular importance attaches to the drawing up the provincial and local educative projects (cf. R 4-10).

It is evident that so vast and complex a work requires from the councillor and the department for the youth apostolate the carrying out of surveys and studies so as to know the youth situation of the different regions and be able to offer an appropriate salesian response; the suggesting of objectives to pursue for the greater pastoral efficiency of the works and the development of the provinces and for the creation of channels for periodic communication and means for coordination and verification; and the offering of aids and the possibility of meetings with the pastoral organisms of the provinces.

For all these purposes liaison with the other departments is in-dispensable, and especially with the regional councillors to ensure integration and coordination in the work.

The councillor for the salesian Family and for social communication (art. 137)

The role of the councillor described in this article refers to the animation of two pastoral sectors. The commentary will therefore be in two parts, dedicated respectively to the salesian Family and to social communication.

a. Obligations concerning the animation of the salesian Family

In its reflection on the nature and mission of the salesian Society, the SGC stated: "The salesians cannot fully rethink their vocation in the Church without reference to those who share with them in carrying out their Founder's will".²³ In this way the SGC opened the way for the relaunching of the "salesian Family" and turning it to good account, and to a greater awareness of the role of our Society in it, now formulated in art. 5 of the Constitutions. In the revision carried out by the SGC, this article nevertheless lacked an appropriate counterpart in the structures of government at world level. The person with responsibility for the plan of renewal was the councillor

²³ SGC, 151

for adult pastoral work who, in addition to having charge of salesian work in parishes, ~~had also the task of promoting the organization and activities of the Cooperators and the Past Pupils, and liaison with other movements of salesian inspiration.~~²⁴

the then art. 141 more explicit as regards the task of sensitizing and animating the Congregation for the role entrusted to it in the salesian Family. It therefore modified in this sense the distribution of responsibilities within the general council by setting up a "councillor for the salesian Family" with the primary task of rendering operative art. 5 of the Constitutions.

We now find the same arrangement in the final version of the Constitutions, with the modifications and clarifications we shall see in due course.

For a correct understanding of the figure of this councillor, it will be well to clarify a point about his title. He is not the councillor "of" the salesian Family; the latter does not have, in the present state of things, a "general council" of its own, elected by groups belonging to the Family, and one cannot therefore speak of a councillor of the salesian Family. What happens is that a councillor "for" the salesian Family is elected by the SDB General Chapter as a member of the Congregation's general council with a mandate that is expressly linked with the responsibility that our Congregation has in the salesian Family (C 5).

And so art. 137, which we are at present examining, entrusts to the councillor as his primary task that of *animating the Congregation in the sector of the salesian Family*. This implies that he sees to it that the salesians:

- become ever more lively aware of this charismatic reality working in the Church as a result of Don Bosco's intuition;²⁵
- deepen their knowledge of its historical, pastoral and dynamic dimensions;²⁶
- respond efficaciously and in a practical manner to the responsibilities which by the desire of the Founder they have as regards the salesian Family.

But linked with this there is also another task entrusted to the councillor: that of *promoting communion* between the different groups, while respecting the specific nature and autonomy of each.

Communion is demanded by the charism, which characterizes the reality of the salesian Family (C 5).

Hence arises the obligation of the councillor for strengthening in all the groups the significance, sense of belonging and experience of the salesian Family by promoting practical initiatives for co-ordination, dialogue and collaboration "for a mutual enrichment and greater apostolic effectiveness", always showing respect for the specific vocational characteristics, statutes and autonomy of each group.

²⁴ Cf. *Constitutions 1972*, at. 141

²⁵ Cf. GC21, 402

²⁶ Cf. SGC, 151-177

Finally the councillor is entrusted with the *task of guiding and directing* the provinces, with a specific objective in view: that the Association of the Salesian Cooperators and the Movement of the Past Pupils may develop in their territories.

It should be noted that the task of animation has for its object the Congregation
665 (confreres and communities), the mandate of promoting communion is in respect

of all groups of the Family, while guidance and assistance are for the provinces, which are already directly committed by the General Regulations to interest themselves in the Cooperators and Past Pupils (cf. R 36, 38, 39, 147). There is a reason for the particular reference to the Association of the Cooperators and that of the Past Pupils. While all groups of the Family recognize in the Rector Major their centre of unity, the Cooperators and Past Pupils have him as their direct superior. The development of their Associations is therefore a particular and direct duty of the Congregation and of the provinces in their own territories.

b. *Obligations concerning social communication.*

We pass on now to the other sector assigned to the same councillor: that of social communication.

We know that the salesian Constitutions from their earliest editions have included among the purposes of the Society a wholesome press and the spreading of good books. But in the structures of central government a specific responsibility for the press (with which went the care of the Salesian Bulletin) was entrusted to a member of the then Superior Chapter only in 1948, after the GC16 had decided to increase the number of councillors from three to five.

In the GC19 the above-mentioned tasks were assigned to the "councillor in charge of the apostolate for adults" with a formulation, more suited to the times and wider in content: "to take care of salesian propaganda and public relations, and mass media of communication in general".

The GC22 was a time of particularly deep reflection on the commitment of the Congregation in the sector of social communication. Art. 6 of the Constitutions, as we have seen, emphasizes its importance for education to the faith, which is one of the purposes of the Society; art. 43 puts social communication among the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission, referring back to the intuition and example of Don Bosco.

This desire to relaunch and make effective our work in the area of social communication led the GC22 to consider this as one of the "special sectors" to be assigned to a member of the general council. It was however averse to increasing the number of councillors in charge of special sectors, and did not consider it an adequate solution to allot it to a central secretariat (in accordance with R 108). It therefore decided to entrust the sector of social communication to the councillor having already the responsibility for the salesian Family. Of the various combinations possible, the GC22 considered this one the most suitable, even though the realities concerned are distinct from one another.

From this historical preamble and from what is said in the text it is easy to deduce the principal tasks attributed to the councillor responsible for social communication.

In the first place he is called upon to *animate the Congregation* in this sector which has been assigned to him. This implies the development of a new awareness throughout the Congregation and a renewed cultural and apostolic commitment in the field of social communication, through the assimilation and realization of the constitutional articles already quoted (C 6, 43), with the further indications and integrations in the General Regulations (cf. R 6, 31, 32, 33, 82, 142). In these articles are found the lines of action for the councillor and his department so as to "*promote salesian activity in the social communication sector*". We mention some of them:

- the promotion of the selection and formation of animators and experts in social communication, and to stimulate the preparation and updating of salesians as communicators at the level of the ordinary people in the service of the mission;
- the preparation of appropriate aids for the renewal of Salesian activity in the use of the mass media as cultural, educational and apostolic instruments;
- the offering of assistance required for the organization of provincial offices for social communication;
- the fostering of surveys and analysis regarding salesian presence in the mass media;
- the care of the central and provincial press-offices.

All these are fields of activity which require a constant understanding with other departments, the regional councillors and the provincials.

Together with this primary commitment of animation and promotion, art. 137 assigns to the councillor the specific task of coordinating at world level the centres and structures operated by the congregation in the field of social communication. The management of these structures is entrusted to the direct responsibility and competence of the provinces. But this still leaves appropriate, not to say necessary, a collaboration between the different centres for a reciprocal enrichment in ideas, techniques and initiatives, and hence for a more efficient salesian presence in the sector.

The councillor for the missions (art. 138)

For a long time, and one might say even from the beginnings, the care of the missions at the level of the central government of the Congregation was entrusted to the Prefect (Vicar) General. There was no article of the Constitutions which prescribed this arrangement; the task was given to the Prefect General on the basis of art. 69 of the Constitutions of 1954 (which left the offices of each member of the Superior Chapter to be distributed by the Rector Major according to the need).

In 1947 the GC16 decided to increase the number of members of the Superior Chapter from three to five, and in the following year the Rector Major named two new councillors and assigned to one of them the specific care of the missions.

The GC19, nevertheless, in restructuring the Superior Council gave back the care of the missions to the Prefect General, with the introduction of two precise conditions: for the solving of local missionary problems the Prefect would be assisted by the regional councillor in charge of the region where the missions concerned were situated; and in his work of organization and co-ordination he would have a central missionary office to work under him.²⁷

The SGC reflected on the problems once again, and in the renewed constitutions included among the councillors in charge of special sectors the councillor for the missions, whom we now find in the definitive version of the Constitutions in the article we are at present examining.

These historical vicissitudes call for comment: the continued rethinking and the different solutions of successive General Chapters were all concerned with finding the most suitable structure, by means of which the Rector Major and his council could best attend to and promote salesian missionary activity. But every General Chapter which studied the theme of the missions was always unanimous in recognizing that the Congregation must live and constantly renew the missionary ideal of Don Bosco, who "wanted the work of the missions to be the constant concern of the Congregation in such a way as to form part of its nature and scope".²⁸ This ideal we find clearly expressed in the present constitutional text among the objectives of the Congregation (C 6) and in the articles which speak of those to whom our work is directed (C 30).

The domain of this "special sector" is the missionary action through which the Church carries out a work of patient evangelization and founding of the Church in a particular group of humanity.²⁹

In this area art. 138 assigns to the councillor for the missions four principal tasks.

The first is to *foster the missionary spirit and commitment throughout the whole Society*. Don Bosco, as we have seen, wanted his Congregation to be strongly missionary and considered missionary activity to be one of its essential characteristics (C 30). To preserve, deepen and give growth to the missionary spirit is therefore a dimension of fidelity to the original charisma. Through appropriate channels of missionary information, through the relevant history and the figures of the great missionaries of the Church and the Congregation, through a proper presentation of the missionary vocation, by means of meetings, contact with those responsible for the missions at provincial level, and the involvement of young people and members of the salesian Family, the councillor is called to foster the missionary fervour which Don Bosco was able to arouse at the beginning of his work. This missionary spirit, if it is

²⁷ Cf. GC19, p. 23

²⁸ SGC, 471; cf. GC19, p. 178 ff.

²⁹ Cf. AG 6

cannot neglect either aspect.

The second task is to *coordinate the initiatives* through which missionary interest is expressed and developed. It involves initiatives which, with respect to both the destination of new personnel and the financial and economic sector, extend beyond the boundaries of a province and call for a global vision of the salesian missionary presence.

The third is a *task of guidance* so that activity in the missions and the initiatives referred to above may meet in a salesian manner the urgent needs of the people to be evangelized. These two aspects are illustrated in art.30 of the Constitutions, which sees in missionary activity a work which must mobilize all the educative and pastoral skills proper to our charism, and which require of the salesian the ability to assume the values of the people among whom he is working.

Guidance given by the councillor in connection with the above mentioned aspects implies the need for a department which has at its disposal organisms for study, consultation and contacts with the other councillors in charge of different sectors, with the regional councillors, provincials, mission offices (cf. R 24) and with ecclesial organisms working in the missionary sector.

Finally a fourth task entrusted to the councillor is that of ensuring the *specific preparation and updating of the missionaries*. Initiatives in this sense may, as opportunity offers, be organized directly by the department in agreement with the provincials, or promoted at regional or provincial level. What is important is the promotion of valid means for a missionary pedagogy which will prepare the missionary to respond to the needs of evangelization at the present day.

The economer general (art. 139)

From the first draft of the Constitutions right down to the present day the council has always included the economer. In the present version he is found among the councillors in charge of special sectors.

The word can be applied to the administration of temporal goods not so much as a practical area of the salesian mission as rather a dimension which is present in every area of our mission. The latter is in fact entrusted to a community of men which has to live, act, get organized, set up and develop apostolic activities, and hence has need of economic means.

Three tasks in particular are assigned to the economer general.

— In the first place he has the *direct responsibility for the administration* of those goods which do not belong to any particular province or house but to the whole Society. On the basis of art. 190 of the Constitutions the economer administers such goods under the direction and control of the Rector Major and his council to whom he frequently renders an account of his administration (cf. R 192).

— Secondly, the economist has the task of *coordinating and controlling* the administration of the provinces. Both these aspects aim at ensuring that economic and administrative management at every level is in harmony with religious poverty and at the service of the salesian mission. These are two aspects which must characterize our administration of temporal goods which, while borrowing structures and methods from the world of civil administration, is carried out according to criteria which can never neglect the norms and moral principles of a religious congregation. And the criteria which distinguish a religious institute from an industrial or commercial society are precisely personal and communal poverty and the administration of goods for the purposes of the Society's mission.³⁰

— For this reason the economist is called upon to provide appropriate guidelines, to coordinate initiatives which have as their purpose the pro-per formation of economists, to evaluate projects of building development and other operations of an economic nature, to check on the implementation of art. 188 of the Constitutions, and to examine the annual financial report which the provinces must submit in accordance with art. 192 of the Regulations.

— The third task envisaged by the constitutional article for the economist general is *vigilance* to make sure that the norms necessary for sound administration are observed. The criteria referred to above demand at every level an administration which is well ordered, transparently clear, easily checked, and drawn up using modern techniques in proportion to its importance.

The structuring of the economist general's department, with its administrative, technical, estate and property offices, and with other services of various kinds, must be a supportive organization which renders possible and efficient the central service in a sector which is both delicate and indispensable.

The regional councillors (art. 140, 154, 155)

When speaking of the composition of the general council we have already referred to the important innovation made by the GC19 in introducing this figure into the council's membership (cf. C 133).

The role of the regional councillors is specified in art. 140.

They form the so-called "vertical link" in view of a constant and living communion between the centre of the Congregation and the province.

The first task of the regional councillors is in fact that of *promoting a more direct liaison between the provinces and the Rector Major and his council*.

Regional councillors are fully-fledged members of the general council and habitually take part in the meetings of the council's plenary sessions which deal with more important problems, study matters of general interest to the Congregation, examine and assess reports on extraordinary visitations of the provinces, and take part in the appointment of provincials and the promoting of activities. As councillors

³⁰ Cf. SGC, 726

they live in communion of life shared responsibility of work the Rector Major and the other members of the council, and acquire a knowledge of the Congregation at world level. They are thus in a condition to perceive and animate the great values of unity, communion and fidelity to the Founder's charism in the provinces entrusted to them.

From another standpoint the regional councillors make a contribution of particular value to the plenary sessions of the council in the identification, study, orientation and decision-making in connection with fundamental aspect of the life of the Congregation. Because of their direct knowledge of the situation of their region and through their periodic personal contact with the organs of government at provincial and local level and with the individual confreres, they are able to bring to the council a particular and specific sensitivity. One might say that the complementary relationship between unity and decentralization becomes in a certain sense personalized in the figure and role of the regional councillors.

The promotional work we have described does not imply in the regional councillors any power of government (except in the case of extraordinary visitations, for which they receive from the Rector Major delegated authority: cf. R 104): their task is one of *promotion, animation and liaison*, which does not place any limits on the constitutional competence of local and provincial superiors and their councils (R 137).

A second task of the regional councillors is listed in the Constitutions: that of *looking after the interests of the provinces assigned to them*. In addition to what has been said already about their first task, this means that matters concerning the provinces find in the regional councillor an intermediary who can throw light on the study of requests and speed up the giving of replies and decisions. The expression "interests of the province" is deliberately generic so as to admit of wide interpretation. Without prejudice to the possibility enjoyed by all superiors and confreres in the provinces of communicating directly with the Rector Major, the vicar general and the councillors in charge of particular sectors, the regional councillors have the precise task of interesting themselves in every aspect of the life and mission of the provinces and of bringing to the general council a sensitivity as regards certain problems.

The third task, which follows from what has been said and has already been sufficiently illustrated, is that of *fostering in the general council a knowledge of local situations*.

It would seem opportune to complement these reflections on the "vertical liaison" (i.e. between the centre and the provinces) by some considerations now on the "horizontal liaison" which the Constitutions assign to the same regional councillors in art. 154-155.

"Horizontal liaison" means *the linkage of the provinces with each other*. It will be clear to everyone just how necessary is such linkage or liaison, both because of the complexity and interdependence of problems and on account of the multiple ecclesial and civil structures which operate in the different sectors. Situations often exceed the possibilities of intervention by a single province and call for a full exploitation of personnel. These are all valid reasons for instituting a form of horizontal linkage, and it is precisely this that is entrusted to the regional councillors.

In this connection the distinction should be kept in mind between "*Groups of provinces*" and "*Provincial conferences*", two kinds of grouping, both of which foster exchange and sharing. In the "groups of provinces" it may be possible to bring about a certain horizontal liaison, but this is often conditioned by factors of a geographical, linguistic, cultural, social, political and ecclesial nature, which impose serious limitations. When on the other hand similarity of problems or parallel situations allow of a closer union between certain provinces, "provincial conferences" are established. One consequence of this distinction is reflected in the very constitution of the "groups" or "conferences". The constitution of the "groups" belongs to the General Chapter. This is readily understandable, because the number of groups affects the number of regional councillors and hence the composition of the general council, which is a very delicate matter and best left to the competence of the General Chapter.

The constitution of provincial conferences on the other hand belongs to the Rector Major with the consent of his council, after consulting the provinces concerned. It is clear that within a group of provinces there may be one conference, or several, or none at all. The determining factors in this case are flexibility and the functional nature of the structures.

A reflection of this distinction between "groups of provinces" and "provincial conferences" is found in the Regulations: for the "groups), the tasks of the regional councillors, already referred to in art. 140 of the Constitutions are given in greater detail (cf. R 135-137); for the "conferences" on the other hand all that are prescribed are the frequency of the meetings (at least once a year), who presides (the regional councillor or his delegate), the orientative nature of the conclusions (except in special cases endorsed by the Rector Major and his council) the participants and the tasks of the conference (cf. R 139-142).

For completeness the disposition of art. 138 of the Regulations should be noted; this allows for the possibility of detaching certain provinces from one or more groups, without constituting a new group entrusted to a regional councillor. In such a case the General Chapter can unite them in a delegation for which the Rector Major, with the consent of his council and after consulting the provinces concerned, can appoint a regional delegate with the attributes and tasks which he may judge appropriate to assign to him.

This delegate may be invited by the Rector Major to be present at meetings of the general council so as to carry out his duties adequately, but he is not a member of the council and has therefore no voting rights.

3.3 Election of members of the general council (art. 141-143)

After determining the composition of the council and the role of the individual members, the Constitutions dedicate three articles to the manner of their election.

First of all, art. 141 prescribes that the members of the general council *are elected by the General Chapter in separate ballots for each one.*

From the beginnings of the Congregation until the SGC the election of the prefect general, catechist general and economer general was made by a separate vote in each case, whereas the election of the other councillors (first three and later five) was made by a single ballot, with each member of the chapter indicating three (or five) names on the same ballot card; to the councillors thus elected the Rector Major assigned special tasks according to needs.

The SGC, in the light of the new criteria which had guided it in the restructuring of the council (a process already begun by the GC19), considered it necessary to revise also the norms for the election of councillors, arriving in this way at the arrangement given in art. 141.

There are two important innovations to note. The election, as already said, is made by a separate ballot in each case, which means that the General Chapter not only elects the members of the general council but elects each one for a precise task determined by the Constitutions.

The second innovation lies in the arrangement for the election of the regional councillors. They too are elected by the General Chapters by a separate ballot for each one, but the article says that each one is elected preferably from a list presented by members of the respective group of provinces concerned.

This is a solution which takes account of two elements. On the one hand, since the regional councillors are fully fledged members of the general council, who cooperate with the Rector Major in the animation and government of the whole Congregation, the SGC decided that they should be elected by the whole General Chapter.³¹ On the other hand the duties entrusted to the regional councillors, as regards "vertical" and "horizontal" liaison, made it reasonable and opportune to adopt some form of special indication on the part of the groups of provinces entrusted to each of them. This indication, nevertheless, is not binding on the General Chapter but is merely a suggested preference explicitly provided for by the Constitutions.

The required conditions for a member to be eligible for election to the general council, set out in the second paragraph of art. 141, follow the spirit of what was said in the commentary on art. 129 concerning the Rector Major. It will be noted that for the vicar general there has been added the condition that he must be a priest, since he is a major superior (cf. C 4, 123).

The duration in office of the members of the general council is indicated for both ordinary and special classes by art. 142, which does not present any departure from the previous legislation.

Art. 143 on the other hand contains an innovation introduced by the GC22, as a result of which, in the case of the death or cessation from office of the Rector Major, the General Chapter will proceed to the election of the Rector Major (which must take place within nine months) and the new council. This implies that at the passing of the Rector Major the mandate of all the councillors ceases.

³¹ Cf. SGC, 723

The new norm is based on two considerations.

In the first place it avoids the necessity of convoking two General Chapters within a possibly short space of time, one for the election of the Rector Major alone and another for the election of the councillors at the end of their term of office.

From another point of view it seemed to respond better to the nature of the mandate of the Rector Major and the tasks of his council that the election of the former should coincide with the election of the latter. The General Chapter is thus able, in electing the councillors, to take into account the person with whom they will have to collaborate in the animation and government of the Congregation.

3.4 Three special assignments

After the articles on the general council, we find two articles which refer to three particular appointments of interest to the whole Congregation.

a. The secretary general (art. 144)

The secretary general functions at the service of the Rector Major and his council and, because of his work, in full communion with them.

His role is described in the Constitutions as that of a "notary", as a result of which his signature gives public authentication to all the official acts of the Rector Major and his council. This naturally implies on the part of the secretary general the responsibility for seeing that the acts are properly drawn up in form and substance, in conformity with what is required by common and particular law.³²

His role requires that he be present, though without the right to vote, at meetings of the council: many of the official acts are, in fact, linked with the activities and voting of the council. To him is entrusted the drawing up of the minutes of council meetings. This is an important and delicate task, not only for ensuring the regularity of the acts, but because the minutes form a useful instrument of verification for the council, a source of documentation for matters in progress and a historical service for the future.

Of the various responsibilities connected with the role of the secretary general, the article of the Constitutions refers to two in particular.

In the first place he looks after the offices of the general secretariate (office of statistics and data of personnel, juridical and protocol offices): these provide an indispensable service to the Rector Major, the council, the particular departments and the regional councillors, and through them to the whole Congregation. The organization, functioning, efficiency and continual updating of these offices are the responsibility of the secretary general.

³² Cf. by analogy, CIC, can. 484

central archives, in which are stored all the acts and documents which relate to the central government of the Congregation. They are divided into four sections: the historical archives (with the documentation classified and in order); the storage section (containing documentation from any source and not yet classified); the current archives (with protocolled documents from the different headquarters offices; and the secret archives (containing documents which, of their nature, must remain secret: cf. can. 489).

For completeness it should be pointed out too that art. 110 of the Regulations entrusts to the secretary general the responsibility for the publication of the "Acts of the General Council", the official organ for the promulgation of directives of the Rector Major and his council and for giving information to the members.

After describing the figure and role of the secretary general, the article specifies that he is appointed by the Rector Major with the consent of his council and remains in office 'ad nutum'.

Given the importance of his role he takes part in the General Chapter with the right to vote (cf. C 151).

b. *The procurator general (art. 145).*

Art. 145 confirms what was already laid down in the Constitutions previous to the revision of the SGC concerning the figure of the procurator general. His principle task is that of dealing with the Apostolic See is "ordinarily" entrusted to the procurator general. This belongs to the Rector Major with the consent of his council, and he remains in office 'ad nutum'. Confirmed too is his participation in the General Chapter.

In the new formulation, which takes into account what is provided by can. 212 of the CIC, is added that the task of dealing with the Apostolic See is "ordinarily" entrusted to the procurator general. This means that he presents, explains, and follows up all the matters which, in accordance with law, the Congregation submits to the Apostolic See, and deals with business which arises between the Apostolic See and the Congregation. He is the ordinary channel for communication and relationships, without prejudice to the Rector Major's right to reserve to himself personally or to entrust to others particular matters (cf. R 109).

The new Code of Canon Law differs from the previous edition in making no reference to the procurator general³³, and implicitly leaves any norms in this connection to the particular law. The Apostolic See does in fact recognize the office at the level of the world community in the *Annuario Pontificio*.

The procurator general fulfils his office under the direction of and in dependence on the Rector Major.

³³Cf. CIC 1917, can. 517

c. *The postulator general (art. 145).*

The second paragraph of art. 145 presents the figure and task of the postulator general. His figure has existed in the Congregation ever since the first steps were taken in the process for the cause of the beatification and canonization of Don Bosco, and he now finds for the first time a place in the Constitutions.

This recognition was considered right and proper because of the importance in the history and life of the Congregation of the causes of beatification and canonization of our confreres and of other members of the salesian Family, and also because this is an official appointment of the Congregation at world level with the confrere concerned juridically accredited to the Apostolic See.

The duties of the postulator general are defined in norms issued by the Apostolic See itself.

Details of appointment and duration in office are identical with those for the procurator general.

*Let us implore the grace of the Holy Spirit
for the members of the general council and their work,
that their efforts for the good of our Society
may be fruitful
and they may fulfil their duties with zeal and joy.*

*That the members of the general council
may be able to collaborate in perfect unity
with the Rector major and with each other,
seeking in everything the good of our society
and guiding it in ever more incisive apostolic activity
especially in the field of the education of youth,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the members of the general council
may be promoters of a constant dialogue
with all the provinces and communities,
carried out with respect and courage
for a fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That salesians throughout the world
may listen willingly to the suggestions and directives
coming from the Rector Major and his council,
and contribute to the unity of the Congregation
in the necessary pluralism of situations,
and that the spirit of the Founder
may be preserved unblemished
in its originality and universality,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

4. THE GENERAL CHAPTER (ART. 146-153)

In the introductory chapter to the fourth part of the Constitutions great emphasis was laid on the fundamental importance of unity (cf. C 120, 122,124) "to keep intact, side by side with legitimate plurality, the original project of our holy Founder and maintain the life and efficiency of the Congregation".³⁴

The first and principal guarantee of this unity must be government at world level (cf. C 120). Now among the "structures of unity" priority of place goes to the general chapter. It is *"the principal sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity"*, as is stated in art. 146, which opens the section of the Constitutions dealing with the general chapter and describes its nature, mainly as regards its spiritual dimension.

4.1 Nature and duties of the general chapter

The general chapter is not primarily an event to be observed at fixed times because of a prescription of the Constitutions, nor is it in the first place a juridical assembly mainly concerned with canonical questions or short-term practical organization. It is first and foremost a meeting of brothers (C.146), a "sign of unity in charity".³⁵ It is a time of the Congregation's strong expression and deep experience of being a "world community" (C 59), which brings together representatives of all the circumscriptions and structures throughout the world. This is what art. 146 is referring to when it says: *"Through the general chapter the entire Society... seeks to discern God's for the purpose of rendering the Church better service"*.

The general chapter is a time when the ideal of the fraternal and apostolic community, described in chap. V of the Rule, becomes visible and can be experienced also at world level, not only for the members of the chapter itself but for all the confreres, since they are involved in its preparation (cf. R 112) and given timely information about its work (cf. R 124). All are therefore able to share in a practical way in the "communion of spirit, witness and service that is the life of the Society within the universal Church" (C 59).

This communion has, for the general chapter too, a spiritual foundation in the mystery of the Trinity (cf. C 49), as is recalled in the second paragraph of art. 146. The representatives of the Congregation gather together in the name of the Lord and are guided by his Spirit in discerning the will of God at a specific moment in history for a better service to the Church. They carry out a "communal reflection" which has as its terms of reference first of all the Gospel, our supreme rule (cf. C 196), then the Founder's charisma, "the principle of unity in the Congregation" (C 100), and finally the sensitivity to the needs of time and place which is characteristic of our spirit (C 19) and a criterion which shapes our mission (C 41).

³⁴ SGC, 720

³⁵ CIC, can. 631

The general chapter is therefore an assembly which is open to receive the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so as to enable the Society to bring its mission into line with the pressing needs of the time.

It may be useful to read again the recommendations made by the Rector Major in his letter convoking the GC22, which remain valid also for the future. The general chapter, wrote Fr Egidio Vigano, "must be totally aligned with the Holy Spirit; it must move the Congregation to take careful stock of the particular period of man's history we are traversing; it must inspire us with a practical sympathy for the needs of the world and the wants of the poor and the little ones; and it must proceed along the lines of Don Bosco's initial project with its transcendent values inspired by the Holy Spirit and destined to develop vigorously, sloughing off its merely transient guises. The Chapter must be characterized by certain spiritual aspects: a brotherly encounter of Salesians with the most diverse cultural and apostolic experiences; its members must be imbued with a radiant and radical sequela Christi, a pastoral predilection for the young, a united vocation-sense that bespeaks total fidelity to Don Bosco, a dedicated willingness to examine and assess with spiritual freedom and collaboration, and a personal and communal docility to the Holy Spirit who is the true source of that unanimity for which the Chapter will strive".³⁶

Every general chapter is a "gift of the Holy Spirit" to the Congregation and the Church. It is an "ecclesial event" that puts us before the People of God and at their service in our capacity as Salesians, and a "particular occasion for us to manifest our loyalty to our vocation".³⁷ "The celebration of the general chapter of an institute should be a moment of grace and of the activity of the Holy Spirit. It should be a joyful, paschal and ecclesial experience which is of benefit to the institute itself and to the whole Church".³⁸

In this light we can read again what Don Bosco said in opening the first general chapter of the Society in 1877: "Our Divine Saviour tells us in the Gospel that where two or three are gathered in his name he will be there among them. *Our sessions have no other purpose than God's greater glory and the salvation of souls* redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And so we may trust that the Lord will be in our midst and will personally lead our discussions to his greater glory"³⁹

Article 147 incorporates what we have said above, in presenting the nature of the general chapter in its juridical aspects: *its authority and competence*.

In the first place the text takes up again the point already made in art. 120 on the fundamental structures of our Society: "Supreme authority over the whole Congregation belongs to the General Chapter" (C 120): it is a principle which is confirmed also by the Code of Canon Law.⁴⁰

³⁶ ASC 305, p. 7-8

³⁷ Cf. ASC 305, p. 7

³⁸ Cf. *Essential elements of religious life*, CRIS, 31.5.1983, n, 51

³⁹ BM XIII, 183

⁴⁰ Cf. CIC, can. 631 §1

Major. The latter, in his capacity of supreme Moderator, has ordinary power of government over all the provinces, house and members (C 127; cf. can. 622); during his term of office his authority is personal, universal and permanent; immediate succession, and his substitution by the Vicar General in case of death, ensures the uninterrupted presence of such authority in the Congregation. Since however the Rector Major is elected by the general chapter and is obliged to carry out his office "according to law", the universal law of the Church and our particular law laid down by the general chapter itself, he may be said to be subject to the higher authority of the general chapter. The latter, on the other hand, is essentially an "ad hoc" organ of government: it is convoked by the Rector Major for a specific period (even though it may have more than one session), and exercises its authority only in the period included between the official acts of opening and closing (cf. R 1 17, 134). Its authority is supreme, because from it depends not only the election of the Superior General, but also the formulation of our particular law. Only the general chapter has in fact legislative authority for the whole Society. To the Rector Major belongs the interpretation of laws for the "practical direction of the Society" (cf. C 192).

Concerning the *duties of the chapter*, the previous article has already spoken of its general task, that of reflecting together so as to remain faithful to the Gospel and to the salesian charism, and to respond to cultural changes and the new requirements of those to whom we are sent. The Code of Canon Law confirms the same thing in other words: the functions of the general chapter are "to protect the patrimony of the institute ... and to foster appropriate renewal in accord with that patrimony".⁴¹

Art. 147 gives details of this task and specifies three particular duties which belong to the general chapter:

a. to lay down laws for the whole society.

The general chapter, as we have said, is the legislative organ of the Society. From the time the Constitutions, drawn up by the Founder, were definitively approved by the Apostolic See in 1874, all the modifications to the Rule have been made by subsequent general chapters. In particular we may recall the GC10 of 1904 (after the publication of the Church's new norms of 1901 for religious institutes), the GC12 of 1922 (after the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law of 1917) and, after Vatican II and by its mandate, the SGC (1971-72), the GC21 and GC22, which attended to the redrafting of the constitutional text in the light of the Council's directives. Further modifications are always possible in the future, but they can be made only by a general chapter with the subsequent approval of the Apostolic See (cf. C 148).

The general chapter has also exclusive competence in the matter of the general Regulations, which form with the Constitutions a single normative compendium and contain true laws of universal application.⁴²

b. to treat of matters of greater importance to the Congregation.

⁴¹ CIC, can. 631 §1

⁴² Cf. Introduction to general Regulations, this book p. 1039 ff.

The general chapter can give doctrinal guidelines concerning the life and mission of the Congregation (cf. for example, the documents of the GC19, GC20, and GC21), but it can also deliberate on particular problems and issue directives binding on all members, entrusting their faithful execution to the Rector Major with his council or to superiors at other levels. These deliberations must conform to the spirit of the Constitutions, as stated in art. 148, and be promulgated by the Rector Major to obtain binding force in the Congregation.

c. to elect the Rector Major and the members of the general council.

This is an act of the greatest responsibility before the Congregation, and one which must be prepared for by prayer and carried out in a spirit of faith (cf. R 127). The procedure is laid down in art. I S3 of the Constitutions: an absolute majority is required and there can be a maximum of four scrutinise. Other procedural details are found in the Regulations (cf. R 126-433).

4.2 Frequency of convocation

The general chapter meets ordinarily every six years (C 149), and the mandate of the Rector Major and of the members of the general council elected by the general chapter runs for the same period (cf. C 128, 142). This six-yearly rhythm may be modified in the case referred to in art. 143, i.e. when the Rector Major dies or ceases from office during the period of his mandate (cf. C 142), in which case it is necessary to proceed to a new election of both the Rector Major and his council.

The convocation of an extraordinary general chapter is possible whenever it is required by a grave reason recognized as such by the Rector Major, who must however obtain the consent of his council. The new Code of Canon Law no longer requires the approval of the Apostolic See.

4.3 Composition of the general chapter

Because of its nature as described above, the general chapter must be composed in such a way that *it represents the entire institute*.⁴³ What is laid down in art. 151 corresponds fully with this requirement.

The article lists first those who are members “*ex officio*” or by right: the Rector Major and members of the general council (both those leaving office and those newly elected during the chapter itself), the Rectors Major emeriti, the secretary general, the procurator general, the moderator of the general chapter, the provincials and superiors of vice provinces (both of whom in certain circumstances can be substituted by their respective vicars); then come the *delegates elected* from among the perpetually professed members of the various circumscriptions of the Congregation.

⁴³Cf. CIC, can. 631 §1

This composition ensures first of all the presence of all the ordinary central government of the Congregation in the persons of the Rector Major and his council.

Furthermore every ordinary circumscription (province or vice-province) is represented by at least two confreres: the respective superior and a delegate elected by the provincial chapter. Other possible juridical circumscriptions have the right to send an elected representative to the general chapter, according to norms defined in their decree of erection (cf. C 156, R 114).

To ensure that the number of elected members exceeds those taking part in the general chapter by right, our own law provides for the election of delegates according to a quantitative criterion, i.e. on the basis of certain proportionality with the number of confreres present in the provinces: a single delegate is to be elected by vice-provinces and provinces with fewer than 250 professed members, and two delegates by provinces with 250 or more confreres (cf. R 114). This procedure was introduced by the Rector Major with his council, and with the authorization of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in view of the SGC. The positive experience gained led to it being maintained and confirmed by the following general chapters as a valid norm for the future. It is to be considered a further practical application of the principle by which the confreres share in the selection of those responsible for government and in the elaboration of their decisions, "in the most suitable way" (C 123). This procedure, while giving additional voice to the confreres, does not jeopardize the chapter nor make it too difficult in the matter of number of members, ease of functioning, and efficiency of the assembly, and allows for the maximum simplicity in the manner of electing delegates.⁴⁴

A final observation concerns the significant presence at the general chapter of the two complementary components of the salesian vocation: clerical and lay (cf. C 4, 45). First of all it is evident that every member of the chapter represents all the confreres of his province or vice-province, be they brothers, deacons or priests. But in order to turn to greater advantage the presence of lay confreres alongside those who are clerics, the GC21 had already formulated the following guideline: "In electing delegates of the province for a general chapter, the members of the provincial chapter should keep in mind the possibility they have of choosing delegates among the brothers especially when the province has the right to send more than one delegate".⁴⁵ This indication was included by the GC22 in the new article 169 of the Regulations which emphasizes the desirability that chapters and councils should express by the significant presence of clerical and lay members the complementary relationship between them that is characteristic of our Society.

4.4 Norms for the functioning of the general chapter

⁴⁴ Cf. ASC 259 (1969), p. 6-7

⁴⁵ GC21, 210

determine the procedure of the general chapter's work and of the elections.⁴⁶ In our own law the principal norms are found in the Constitutions (C 150, 152, 153) and in the Regulations (R 111-134). Other norms are fixed by the internal regulations which every general chapter establishes at the beginning of its work: these are true capitular deliberations and form part of our law, even though in themselves they are valid only for the duration of the general chapter.

It may be helpful to quote briefly, in addition to those already mentioned, some of the norms in the Constitutions and Regulations which govern the functioning of the chapter:

— For the validity of the acts at least two thirds of the members must be present (C 152); this norm holds good for meetings for both elections and the making of decisions; it should be noticed that while the common law of the Church requires the presence only of an absolute majority, our own law demands the presence of a greater number (two thirds).⁴⁷

— A decision of the chapter has the force of law when it is approved by an absolute majority, with the exception of modifications to the text of the Constitutions for which a two thirds majority is needed, because of the quite special importance for us of our fundamental code (C 152, 191); it will be observed that the calculation of the majority is no longer made on the basis of valid votes, as in the preceding legislation, but on the number of those present with the right to vote.⁴⁸

— Not only the provinces and local communities, but each individual confrere too has the right to send to the general chapter his own desires and proposals (R 112). This very broad faculty is another example of the application of the principle of responsible and effective participation by all the members (C 123) in "matters of the greatest importance for our Congregation".⁴⁹

— The same principle is applied once again in the insistence on the duty of those in authority to foster the provision of adequate information on the work of the general chapter (C 124) : before the chapter, by informing the confreres of its place, date and general purpose (R 111); during the chapter, by providing full and timely information on the progress of the work (R 124); and after the elections by immediately making known the results (R 133).

— Again in the same context, it is laid down that at the beginning of the chapter the Rector Major shall present a general report on the state of the Congregation (R 119). This report is the responsibility of the Rector Major alone in its overall content and particular judgements, but evidently it will involve the collaboration of the members of his council who have assisted him during his mandate. This report will be the object of study and analysis on the part of the capitular assembly, also through

⁴⁶Cf. CIC, can. 631 §2

⁴⁷Cf. CIC, can. 119, 1-2

⁴⁸Cf. CIC, can. 119

⁴⁹BM XIII, 183

dialogue with the Rector Major himself, so as to develop the awareness of the world community, to identify and understand the main problems and needs of the congregation, to assess the level of our maturity and of the genuine apostolic nature of our work, and to discern future guidelines and commitments.⁵⁰ It is clear that even after the chapter has closed, this document will remain a valid instrument for personal and communal reflection on the Congregation "qualis esse debet et qualis esse periclitatur", and useful for animating all confreres and awakening in them an awareness of their common responsibility for the realization of the common vocation (cf. C 123).

*Let us pray for the general chapter,
the principal sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity,
that it may be docile to the Holy Spirit,
and be an instrument for extending
and propagating its work
in the course of time and changing events.*

*That the members of the general chapter may
be always aware of their obligations, and
seek in a constant atmosphere of prayer the
will of God
as regards both the persons of the confreres
and the development of our mission,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the members of the general chapter
may be enlightened
in all the choices they have to make,
especially in electing the Rector Major
and his more immediate
collaborators, Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the work of the general chapter
may lead to decisions which foster
harmony among the members and
promote greater efficacy in our work,
for the greater glory of God and
benefit of the young and the poor,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

⁵⁰ GC22 RRM, Introduction, p. 5-6

CHAPTER XII

SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN THE PROVINCIAL COMMUNITY

"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20,28).

The similarity of thought between this text and the one that headed the previous chapter is evident. What we have in this instance is a reminder of Paul's "spiritual testament" (Acts 20, 17-38), which could well form the basic document for all exercise of authority in the community.

In the first place it is the figure of Paul himself who bears witness, through the force of personal confession, before the elders of the Church of Ephesus: he reveals his humility, which is expressed in kindness and tenderness towards all; he refers to the sufferings he has undergone, foreseeing that he will have to suffer worse ones still, and always because of his fidelity to his preaching of the Kingdom of God (20, 18-25), with complete disinterest from a material point of view (20,33-35). Summing it all up he can say: "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (20,27).

The exhortation to the heads of the community is nothing else than an invitation to follow Paul's example of pastoral action; attentive care of the flock, which involves vigilance because there are fierce wolves about (recall John's words about the Good Shepherd: cf. Jn 10); the care of those whom he feels have been entrusted to him by the Spirit, those of whom he has been made the shepherd; the awareness of his tremendous responsibility in their regard, even though he is not their "proprietor", "the one and only Shepherd is Jesus Christ crucified (20,28).

We cannot fail to note the ecclesial nature of this pastoral service ("feed the church of the Lord"), which cannot be limited to the Bishops or those who work in parochial structures. It applies to everyone who, in communion with the Bishop and local Church, is in the position of a pastoral guide to a portion of the People of God. With greater reason can this be said of those who have a specific and practical responsibility with respect to local Churches, as have those with provincial authority.

* * *

Following the order adopted for the fourth part, after the chapter on structures at world level there follows that on provincial structures.

Such an arrangement is in harmony too with the specific role of the province which forms a bridge between the local communities and the world community, which is the entire Congregation.

The province "unites" the different local communities in one large community (C 157) and expresses the brotherhood between its members and those of other provinces and of the whole Congregation.¹

The internal arrangement of the chapter is similar to that of the preceding chapter, with one exception: before dealing with the provincial, the provincial council and the provincial chapter there are some preliminary articles which deal with the division of the Society into juridical circumscriptions of various kinds.

And so the chapter is divided up as follows:

1. *Juridical circumscriptions:*

- their erection, definition and suppression: *art. 156*
- the province: *art. 157*
- the vice-province: *art. 158*
- provincial delegations: *art. 159*
- enrolment of members in a circumscription: *art. 160*

2. *The provincial:*

- figure and duties: *art. 161*
- appointment and powers: *art. 162*
- duration in office: *art. 163*

3. *The provincial council:*

- general duties and composition: *art. 164*
- cases in which its consent is needed: *art. 165*
- conditions for appointment of councillors: *art. 166*
- designation and duration in office: *art. 167*
- the vice-provincial: *art. 168*
- the provincial economer: *art. 169*

4. *The provincial chapter:*

- nature and authority: *art. 170*
- competence: *art. 171*
- frequency: *art. 172*
- composition: *art. 173*
- election of delegates: *art. 174*

¹ Cf. SGC, 512; C 58

The commentary which follows deals with each of the four sections as a whole, emphasizing certain points in them without going into details about each separate article.

1. THE JURIDICAL CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS (ART. 156-160)

Since the Code of Canon Law requires that the Constitutions shall indicate the "*juridical circumscriptions*" into which an institute is divided and to whom it belongs to constitute them,² the chapter opens with a section which deals with this matter in its general aspects.

1.1 Juridical circumscriptions and their membership

A first article, of a general character, says that to divide the Society into circumscriptions belongs to the Rector Major with his council, and that normally these are *provinces and vice-provinces* (C 156).

The Rector Major is given wide faculties in the matter to meet the needs of the Congregation spread throughout the world; but in normal practice attention must be paid to what the Code prescribes concerning the government of a "province" or of a "part equivalent to a province": such circumscriptions are governed by a "major superior" who has ordinary power, proper or vicarious.³

The two kinds of circumscription indicated by the Code correspond in our own law respectively to the province, introduced by Don Bosco himself in 1879 when the expansion of the Congregation made a territorial division imperative,⁴ and vice-province, already contemplated in our privileges and by the Constitutions before the SGC.⁵ In the revision carried out by the GC22 the vice-province has been officially inserted alongside the province.

The "delegations directly dependent on the Rector Major" which had been established by the GC21 have disappeared from the definitive text, because they were "parts equivalent to a province" as was clear from their whole structure (union of several houses, a superior with a council, a delegation chapter, local superiors with their respective councils) and consequently they had to have a superior with ordinary (and not merely delegated) power. In fact, following upon the approval and promulgation of the Constitutions, the Rector Major suppressed the delegations dependent directly on himself, and erected them as vice-provinces,⁶ with the exception

²Cf. CIC, can. 581

³Cf. CIC, can. 620

⁴ Cf. BM XIV, 25-26; cf. also T VALSECCHI in *Origine e sviluppo delle Ispettorie salesiane*. in RSS n. 3, July-December 1983, p. 252-273

⁵Cf. Constitutions 1986, art. 83

⁶Cf. AGC 312 (1985), p. 60-66

of the Generalate, which is a single community and not a "part equivalent to a province" and has been made directly dependent on the Rector Major.⁷

The new Constitutions also clarify the *membership of the individual confrere in a particular juridical circumscription* (C 160). By his religious profession after the novitiate, the member is not only incorporated in the salesian Society (cf. C 59, 107), but is also enrolled in the particular juridical circumscription for whose service he asked to be admitted. This expression was chosen deliberately because the provincial who admits the candidate to profession does not always enrol him in his own province (as, for instance, in the case of inter-provincial novitiates).

A temporary or permanent transfer from one circumscription to another remains always possible; the competent authorities and manner of procedure in such a case are contained in the general Regulations (cf. R 151), where there is also an article concerning the assignment of a confrere to a particular salesian house (R 150) which in this way becomes his religious domicile for all juridical purposes.⁸

A final element that should be pointed out is that the principle of participation and shared responsibility (C 123) is explicitly applied when there is question of the erection or modification of juridical circumscriptions: the Rector Major will first make an adequate consultation among the confreres before making a decision (C 156). The same principle holds in the case of the transfer of a member from one circumscription to another: in this case the provincial must hear the opinion of the confrere concerned.

1.2 The province

The official Italian text preserves the terminology ("ispettoria", "ispettore") chosen by Don Bosco as being more in keeping with the Italian situation of his time.⁹

While the second part of art. 58 considered the province under the aspect of a fraternal and apostolic community, with a supportive and promotional role creating unity and solidarity, art. 157 puts the emphasis on the apostolic and religious structure, and on the canonical entity enjoying the autonomy given to it by the Constitutions.

"The province", says the text, *"unites the different local communities in one large community"*. It is characteristic of the province that it brings together the local communities in a wider union, following one and the same apostolic plan which applies the mission of the whole Society in the concrete circumstances of the particular Churches.

The province is a kind of "intermediate structure". On the one hand, being incarnate in a particular territory and a local Church, it is heir to the sense of the

⁷ibid. p. 60

⁸Cf. CIC, can 103

⁹BM XIII, 208

situations; and on the other hand the provincial community is a constant reminder of the necessary unity with the world community, by making the confreres aware of their membership of the entire body which is the Congregation, and by prompting a permanent examination of their fidelity to Don Bosco. "No province", wrote Fr Luigi Ricceri, Rector Major, "is loyal to its members if it does not lead them beyond the province into the unity of the world Congregation".¹⁰

It should be noted that although clarifying the canonical aspects, the Constitutions emphasize once again (as in art. 58) that the structure is at the service of communion and the apostolic mission in the particular Churches.

The article takes up again the idea, already expressed by art. 120 (cf. the commentary on that article), that the province makes incarnate in its territory the "life and mission" of the Congregation, i.e. our charisma or vocational identity. There must be the "*necessary and sufficient conditions*" for the realization of this objective, says the article (C 157), thus indicating a general criterion for the erection of a province, which refers back in fact to other more specific criteria, like those for salesian activity (cf. C 40-43), those concerned with the communal aspect of the mission (cf. C 44, and also C 58 mentioned above), and finally those dealing with insertion in the social and ecclesial environment (cf. C 7, 48).

1.3 The vice-province

The vice-province (as a "part equivalent to a province") resembles a province (C 158). For this circumscription it was decided to keep the term ('visitatoria' in Italian) already present in our particular law (cf. the "privileges" granted to the Congregation).

It is established when not all the necessary and sufficient conditions for the erection of a province are present. Some of the impediments are indicated: scarcity of personnel, insufficient financial resources; but there could also be another reason for the erection of a vice-province, as for instance that not every aspect of the salesian mission is represented but only some specific service (as is the case with the vice-province of the Salesian Pontifical University).

On the other hand the geographical situation, the number of houses or confreres, or other circumstances (of a social, cultural or political nature etc.) may require that a group of houses be dealt with as a separate entity, i.e. as a part equivalent to a province.

A vice-province may subsequently develop in such a way as to meet all the conditions needed for a province (e.g. through increase in personnel and the development of the salesian presence in the territory concerned), but it may also remain the same for a long period of time, as long as the reason endures for which it was constituted in the first place (e.g. a specific service entrusted to it).

1.4 The provincial delegation

The provincial delegation (C 159) is not a juridical circumscription of the Congregation, i.e. a part juridically autonomous, but is and remains an integral part of a province.

It consists of a group of communities within a province, which find themselves in a common and exceptional situation (e.g. in a distant area, a different country, a zone with a different language, a mission territory in the strict sense, etc.), but do not have the necessary requisites for erection as a juridical circumscription (province or vice-province) on its own. The constitution of such a delegation belongs to the provincial, who continues to be its ordinary major superior for all purposes. He appoints a delegate on whom he confers such powers, as he considers opportune. Since however a judgement on such situations may involve aspects which extend beyond the interests of the province and involve the Congregation (cf. C 156), the approval of the Rector Major is required for both the establishment of the delegation and the appointment by the provincial of the delegate.

2. THE PROVINCIAL (ART. 161-163)

2.1 Figure and duties

The figure and duties of the provincial have already been spoken of in earlier parts of the Constitutions and commentary. In particular, in art. 44 which dealt with the communal nature of the mission, the provincial was presented as a "promoter of dialogue and teamwork" who guides the provincial community in pastoral discernment with a view to the realization of the common educative and pastoral plan. In art. 58 on the provincial community, even though he is not named explicitly, it is evident that the provincial bears the first responsibility for carrying out the duties which are listed there. It could be said that the whole content of that article is summarized in art. 161 where it is stated that the service of the provincial is directed to the *"building up of a fraternal provincial community"*.

In the first place the provincial is the animator and pastoral guide of his provincial community. He "carries out his service... with love and pastoral zeal" (C 161). His animating activity is directed to the "religious life and apostolic action" of the provincial community, i.e. to everything concerning a salesian vocational identity as described in the first and second parts of the Constitutions; at the same time he has a particular responsibility as regards the formation of all the members (cf. R 101 for ongoing formation), but especially of the novices and young confreres (C 161).

As animator and pastoral guide he must be close to his confreres so as to know them, follow them, encourage them and keep them united: "a father whose task it is to help his sons manage their offices well, advising, helping and teaching them how to

get out of difficulties in critical situations".¹¹ For this reason the Regulations say: "The provincial will see to it that he has frequent personal contact with the members in a spirit of service and fraternal communion" (R 146). Once a year he will make the provincial visitation of each community, carrying out with the individual confreres and with the entire community a careful verification of the way in which the vocational identity is being realized (R 146). He will give special attention to the rectors, with whom he will maintain frequent contact (R 145).

His care extends also to the groups of the salesian Family (R 147) and to our lay collaborators (R 148): no easy responsibility this at the present day!

His presence in the province must be something like that of the soul in the body, a continuous and watchful presence, comprehensive and warm-hearted, directing and leading at the same time.

Here we may recall what the Code of Canon Law has to say about religious superiors as animators and guides of their confreres: "Superiors ... together with the members entrusted to them, are to strive to build in Christ a fraternal community, in which God is sought and loved above all. They are therefore frequently to nourish their members with the food of God's word and lead them to the celebration of the liturgy".¹² The Code is clearly referring to the *ministry of teaching*, which the superior is called to fulfil; the document "Mutuae relationes" says he has "the competency or authority of a spiritual director according to the evangelical tradition of his institute":¹³ the provincial is called to "direct" especially by his life, but also through his guiding and stimulating word. Alongside this task must be remembered another very important one for a salesian provincial, which finds its model in Don Bosco, that of "*sanctifying*" his brothers. At this level the grace of the provincial's priestly ministry is manifested in a particular way: in the celebration of sacraments, especially those of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, he brings to his brothers the gift of the Spirit and guides the provincial community in the perfect fulfilment of the Father's will.

After indicating these essential aspects, the Constitutions emphasize that the provincial "*animates by governing*": he is the superior of his community: to him the Church has given a specific personal authority: "He exercises ordinary power over all the houses and members of the province in both the internal and the external forum, according to the norms of the Constitutions and of the canon law" (C 162).

His power, both the ordinary ecclesiastical power of governance or jurisdiction and the so-called "dominative" power,¹⁴ is connected with his office for the whole period of his mandate and carries with it the final right (and duty) of the superior to discern and decide what shall be done.¹⁵

¹¹ GC1 (1877), BM X111, 209

¹² CIC, can. 619

¹³ MR 13

¹⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 596 § I, 2

¹⁵ Cf. *Essential elements of religious life*, CRIS, 31. 5. 1983, n. 49

Nevertheless the provincial does not exercise his authority in isolation. He is *assisted by a council*, whose members help him in the service of authority. This is already stated in art. 161 which describes the figure of the provincial, and will be taken up and developed in the articles concerning the provincial council.

Finally the Provincial carries out his office "*in union with the Rector Major*" (C 161): this is a reminder of the general principle expressed in art. 122 (cf. also C 58 and R 144).

2.2 Appointment of the provincial

In the postconciliar revision of the Constitutions our uninterrupted juridical tradition concerning the procedure for the appointment of the provincial was confirmed.

The SGC nevertheless introduced the *consultation* process, following the indications of "Ecclesiae Sanctae",¹⁶ to give to the confreres the possibility of an effective participation in the selection of those responsible for government. Here we find another clear case of the application of the principle of participation and shared responsibility (cf. C 123). The expediency of a consultation for the appointment of superiors finds explicit endorsement in fact in the new Code.¹⁷

The manner of making the consultation is specified in art. 143 of the Regulations. It is the immediate concern of the Rector Major himself, who can carry it out through a delegate; in the majority of cases it will be done by the regional councillor of the region to which the province concerned belongs.

In art. 162 are indicated also two necessary conditions for a confrere to be appointed provincial: that he be a priest which gives a particular tone to his service, as already explained,¹⁸ and an adequate period of rime after perpetual profession.¹⁹

2.3 Duration in office

The constant traditional period of office for the provincial has remained at six years. The SGC however introduced the norm that in ordinary circumstances he cannot be confirmed in office for a second period of six years in either the same or a different province: an interval of at least a year is needed. For particular reasons however a second mandate may be necessary or convenient; hence the stipulation "ordinarily" in art. 163.

This norm was confirmed in the definitive text and corresponds to the criteria, desired by the Code of Canon Law, that offices should be held for a limited period of

¹⁶ Cf. ES II, 18

¹⁷ Cf. CIC, can. 625 §3

¹⁸ Cf. commentary on art. 121, p. 878-884

¹⁹ Cf. CIC, can. 623

time and that there should be an opportune rotation: "An institute's own law is to make suitable provisions so that superiors constituted for a defined time do not continue in offices of governance for too long a period without an interval".²⁰

3. THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL (ART. 164-169)

3.1 Duties of the provincial council

Art. 161 has already spoken of the help the provincial receives from his council in carrying out his own duties. In art. 164 the subject is the council itself, which has the general task of *collaborating with the provincial in everything that concerns the animation and government of the province*. Here we find linked together once again the two ideas of "animation" and "government" (cf. C 130, in connection with the general council); they express the two aspects of leadership of the community which mutually complement each other and which concern the whole of the vast field of the life and mission of the Congregation in the territory covered by the province. In fact the Regulations describe the general duties of the provincial council in the following terms: "to collaborate with the provincial for the development of the salesian life and mission, to help him to gain knowledge of situations and to see that the provincial plan is being put into practice" (R 155).

It was decided not to specify further at Congregational level any specific sectors (apart from the administration of goods) to be entrusted to individual members of the provincial council, as was done on the other hand for members of the general council, so as to leave the greatest possible freedom to the individual provinces to provide as they thought best according to different situations.

The provincial for his part, recommends art. 165, must use the help of his council and "promote the active and responsible collaboration of his councillors". The Code of Canon Law insists expressly on this point: "Superiors are to have their own council, in accordance with the Constitutions, and they must make use of it in the exercise of their office".²¹

The Constitutions and Regulations provide practical indications as regards this duty. The provincial will call the council together regularly, at least once a month (R 155). He will always listen to his council in matters of greater importance before making a decision, but in certain cases he cannot proceed even validly if he has not previously obtained the consent or opinion (according to the case concerned) of the council. In these cases the help of the council becomes so indispensable that it conditions the very possibility of action by the provincial.²²

²⁰ Cf. CIC, can. 624 §§1,2

²¹ CIC, can. 627 §1

²² Cf. CIC, can. 627 §2

3.2 Composition of the provincial council

The council is presided over by the provincial (who nevertheless, as was said concerning the Rector Major, is not a member of the council and does not vote). It is made up of the vice-provincial, provincial economist and an uneven number of other councillors, three or five according to the needs of the province. In this way there is normally ensured that the number of voters is uneven, and the holding up of important business on account of a split vote will be avoided.

The members of the council are appointed by the Rector Major. Because of the large number of such appointments and the fact that they fall due at widely different times, the Rector Major can make such appointments with the consent of a reduced number of members of the general council (cf. C 132 §2).

Candidates are proposed by the provincial, who is also competent to carry out the wide consultation among the members of the province required by art. 167. The manner of making this consultation however depends on the Rector Major with his council (R 154); the details were laid down recently and came into force from 15 April 1985.²³

Because of the importance and responsibility which attaches to this office, not only for the general duty of collaborating with the provincial in the religious and pastoral animation of the province, but also because of the vote that has to be given in specific cases (which include admissions to professions and sacred Orders), it is required that candidates shall have been perpetually professed for at least five years²⁴ and have completed the entire curriculum of the initial formation period (C 166). For the vice-provincial it is also required that he be a priest, since he is a major superior in a clerical religious institute.²⁵

3.3 The vice-provincial

The figure of the vice-provincial was introduced by the GC19 and subsequently included in the revised text of the Constitutions. According to the new Code he is a religious Ordinary and major superior,²⁶ and therefore holds an office to which is attached ordinary vicarious power. This means that he fulfils his office not only when he takes the place of the provincial who is absent or impeded, but always has this ordinary vicarious power; he is always therefore the vicar of the provincial, a man of trust, "the first collaborator of the provincial" as art. 168 puts it. His general function is that of extending and complementing the action of the provincial, and involves "everything that concerns the ordinary government of the province" (C 168); he is called therefore to assist, advise and complement the provincial, without usurping his place.

²³ Cf. AGC 312 (1985) p. 54-55

²⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 623

²⁵ Cf. CIC, can. 620; cf. C 4. 121

²⁶ Cf. CIC, can. 134 §1; can. 620

The vice-provincial may be given by the provincial other special duties, so that he can exercise his powers in a more permanent and practical way, always in the name of the provincial.

The General Chapters did not want to go into further details in the Constitutions and Regulations, because experience in the period since the GC19 had shown that in different provinces the vice-provincial had been given charge of a wide variety of sectors: in one province it might be formation, in another youth pastoral work, in still others the promotion of vocations, the scholastic sector, the salesian Family etc. And so it preferred here also to leave the greatest possible freedom of action to the provincial, so as to allow for a greater adaptation of the office of vice-provincial both to the different and changing needs of each province, and to the personal capacities of the confreres concerned.

3.4 The provincial economer

The provincial economer is the one member of the provincial council to whom is entrusted, at the level of our own law, the immediate responsibility for a particular sector: the administration of the temporal goods of the province and the control and coordination of local administration. In the exercise of his duties he depends always on the provincial, who retains the ultimate responsibility even in this sector (cf. C 161, 190); he acts therefore in the name of the provincial but with personal responsibility in fulfilling the duties given him by the Constitutions and Regulations (cf. C 187-190 and R 193-197).

*Let us pray for our province (vice-province),
for its superiors and all its confreres so
that in the territory where it works it may
make present Don Bosco's charisma for the
benefit of needy youth.*

*For all the confreres of our province,
that all their works and activities
may be inspired and sustained
by fidelity to Don Bosco and his spirit,
by dedication to poor youth,
and by attention to the signs of the times,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For the provincial and his collaborators,
that they may be efficacious witnesses
among our confreres and young people,
of the fatherliness of Don Bosco,*

*and be a bond of unity between the province
and the salesian world community, Lord,
hear our prayer.*

*For, those in the province with particular responsibility
in the field of formation,
that they may fulfil their mission with zeal
and help each member to grow in his vocation,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For our young confreres, novices and aspirants,
that in the members of the province,
they may find elder brothers,
exemplary in their observance and apostolic fervour,
ready to understand and help them
in the realization of their own vocation.
Lord, hear our prayer.*

4. THE PROVINCIAL CHAPTER (ART. 170-174)

4.1 Nature and authority of the provincial chapter

Art. 170 describes in the first place the *nature* of the provincial chapter, taking up once again the concept, matured during the process of revision of the Constitutions, of the provincial community²⁷ which "unites the different local communities in one large community" (C 157). The local communities, "a living part of the provincial community" (C 58), find in the provincial chapter an outstanding occasion for living and intensifying the sense of their membership of the province, overcoming the somewhat restricted perspective of their own environment and particular activities so as to concern themselves with the general problems of the province.

Spiritually and fundamentally the provincial chapter is a *fraternal gathering* in the deep sense described in chap. V of the Constitutions (cf. in particular C 49, 50). The brotherhood finds its root in the call of God himself, made concrete in the convocation of this particular meeting, so incisive for the life and mission of the provincial community; its source is in the presence of the Lord in whose name the chapter members are gathered; its inspiration is in the Holy Spirit, actively present for guiding the communal discernment process, for helping to get to know God's will, and for animating a better service to the Church. ²⁸

Juridically the provincial chapter is the *representative assembly* of the confreres of the local communities.

Through elections at local and provincial level the proportionate presence of all the communities and all the confreres is ensured; in this way the chapter reflects the sum total of all the activities, works, experiences and talents of the whole provincial community.

The provincial chapter differs from the provincial council in being a collegial organism, in which all the members exercise together, with equal rights, the powers granted them by law.

The *authority of the provincial chapter* is indicated in the second part of art. 170. It is not a legislative authority, like that of the general chapter (cf. C 147), but is nevertheless not a simply consultative authority. The provincial chapter can "deliberate" on matters, which regard the province, within the competence given to it by the Constitutions and Regulations. The principal items, as we shall see, are indicated in art. 171; others are distributed throughout the body of our Rule. To the provincial chapter finally are given certain true powers (cf. C 120), but not in an absolute sense: its decisions need the approval of the Rector Major with his council before acquiring binding force within the province.

²⁷ Cf. SGC, 512

²⁸ Cf. by analogy, what is said of art. 146 on the general chapter, p. 936 ff.

4.2 Competence of the provincial chapter

Art. 171 lists the general and principal tasks which the provincial chapter is competent to perform:

— The first two concern the good running of the province, and in a particular way its "*religious and pastoral life*" (another expression for "life and mission", a phrase frequently found in the Constitutions). Of interest to the chapter members therefore is the whole vast field of our vocational identity. The provincial chapter can "decide on" and "inquire into suitable means for promoting" the life and mission, but always with due respect for what is entrusted by the Constitutions and Regulations to other organs of government (art. 170). It cannot therefore take the place of the provincial or the provincial council in dealing with cases in which the decision belongs to the provincial and council. The chapter's decisions do not belong to ordinary government, hut are general guidelines or lines of action for a longer period (normally three years).

— The third task for which the chapter is competent concerns the *study of the deliberations of the general chapter and the manger of their verification* at provincial and local level, and in particular of the most recent Chapter. The provincial chapter, in fact, is "the most opportune means for enlisting the participation of the confreres in the study and implementation of Chapter decisions".²⁹ It can happen not infrequently that a general chapter expressly leaves to provincial chapters specific points on which they must make decisions.

There is also a close connection between the provincial chapter and the next general chapter which will follow. It is stated in art. 112 of the Regulations: provincial chapters can send proposals and study contributions in preparation for the general chapter convoked by the Rector Major; in view of such general chapter the provincial chapter will proceed to the election of one or two delegates and their substitutes; this is in fact the fifth task of the provincial chapter.

— The fourth task falling within the competence of the provincial chapter concerns the formulation and revision of the "*provincial directory*". This forms part of the particular law of our Society within each individual province (C 191). It collects together norms which, at a subordinate level, contain dispositions for the application or putting into practice of our fundamental code, which is the book of the Constitutions. In accordance with the principles of subsidiary and decentralization (cf. C 124) various matters, as we have seen, have been left to provincial government. To lay down these norms is the competence of the provincial chapter which gathers them in a directory, which will nevertheless have binding force only after the approval of the Rector Major with his council (cf. C 171).

Some particular matters left explicitly to provincial directories concern religious poverty (R 58), prayer life (R 72, 74), salesian formation (R 87, 88, 106), and the administration of temporal goods (R 190).

²⁹ SGC, 760

The Rector Major with his council has given some clarifications and guidelines concerning the provincial directory, emphasizing its purpose: "the application to local realities of the principles and norms of the general legislation, so as to render more concrete and efficacious in the provincial community the commitment of fidelity to our Rule of life".³⁰

4.3 Frequency of Convocation

The ordinary frequency of convocation of the provincial chapter, after the revision made by the SGC, is every three years (formerly it had been every six years). The main reason for the innovation was that of offering the confreres and communities a greater possibility of responsible collaboration in the conducting of the affairs of the province (cf. C 123) through the provincial chapter, which is precisely the best qualified assembly and the one which represents all the communities of the province.

The three-yearly rhythm also fits in very well with some of the principal duties of the chapter itself: it allows for the making of a verification of the deliberations of the preceding general chapter (C 171,3) at a point midway in the six year period before the next one, and to formulate at the end of the six years proposals for the new general chapter (R 112).

The triennial rhythm of provincial chapters may be modified in the case foreseen by art. 143 of the Constitutions (death or cessation of office of the Rector Major) or that indicated by art. 149 (extraordinary general chapter).

An extraordinary provincial chapter is possible in a province when the good of the province requires it. The judgement on this point belongs to the provincial, who has the authority to convoke it; but he must obtain the consent of his council and is obliged to consult the Rector Major beforehand.

4.4 Composition of the provincial chapter

Art. 173 presents the composition of the provincial chapter. Its members can be distinguished into two groups:

1) *Members by right:*

- in the first place those responsible for the government of the province: the provincial and members of the provincial council;
- then the superior of every provincial delegation, who governs an important part of the province in the name of the provincial;
- the moderator of the provincial chapter, appointed by the provincial with the consent of his council (cf. R 168);
- the rector of each canonically erected house; if he is seriously impeded, he may be substituted by the vice-rector with the previous approval of the provincial;

³⁰ Cf. GC19, p. 35-43

— the director of novices.

2) *Elected members:*

The general Regulations provide for two elections at two different levels: the first is at the local level in every house or group of communities combined together (cf. R 161, 163), and then at provincial level from a list of eligible candidates in the proportion of one for every twenty-five or fraction of twenty-five confreres of the province (cf. R 165).

The quantitative criterion was first introduced by the SGC following an explicit vote of the GC19 in favour of "a wider and more representative composition of the provincial chapter",³¹ and was subsequently included in our law go as to guarantee that the elected members of the chapter would exceed in number those present "ex officio".

In these elections all the confreres, whether perpetually or temporarily professed, have active voice (C 174), but only the perpetually professed have passive voice (C 173, 7).

Finally it should be noted that in view of a more significant presence of the complementary clerical and lay dimensions of the salesian vocation (cf. C 4, 45), art. 169 of the Regulations recommends among other things that in the context of the elections the confreres keep in mind the desirability that the composition of the provincial chapter should really reflect this complementary aspect which is characteristic of our Society.³²

*Let us invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit
on the provincial chapter,
so that in carrying out the tasks entrusted to it
it may be a means of growth for the province (vice-province),
and a help to the confreres for an ever greater fidelity
to their own vocation and mission.*

*That the light of the Holy Spirit
may enlighten and guide the members of the provincial chapter,
and sustain them in the decisions they must make
to increase the fraternal life of the communities
and render their work more efficacious,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the celebration of the provincial chapter
may be an occasion for deep reflection
for fostering communion among the members of the province,
and revive in all of them the search for religious fidelity
and enthusiasm in their apostolic commitment,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

³¹ Cf. GC19, p. 20-21

³² Cf. GC21, 210

CHAPTER XIII

SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

"As each one has received a gift, employ it for one another; as good stewards of God's varied grace,... whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 4,10-11).

We are back once again with the first Letter of Peter (already quoted at the beginning of chap. XI), with its pressing recommendation to think of the coming of the Lord: "The end of all things is at hand" (4,7). It is a direct invitation to create the climate of eschatological expectation (of the just judgement and at the same time the reassuring reward) which formed the dogmatic basis for so many exhortations of the first Christians, and which at the present day has to some extent lost its force.

And so through the stimulus given to it by this vision of the future, the christian community (whom Peter was addressing in his letter) intensifies its life of prayer (4,7) and fraternal charity, "since love covers a multitude of sins" (4, 8). Charity gives style and purpose to many relationships in communal life, and hence also to the exercise of authority.

This is the style to which our Constitutions refer when they speak of the shared responsibility of the community (assembly) (cf. C 186). This shared responsibility results from the existence of a plurality of charismata of various kinds which are found in the community, as a consequence of which each one is in a certain sense superior to his neighbour because he has something which the other does not. Peter warns that these personal charismata should not be disregarded but exploited for the common service of all, since they have been received by each one as a gift and are not something belonging to him by right; consequently he can be only an administrator of them and not a capricious owner using them in arbitrary fashion (4,10).

There are some who have the specific duty of animating and exercising some office. What is looked for in these people is zealous action and witnessing to the words of God, to "oracles of God... by the strength which God supplies" (i.e. to the energy which comes from God's word: 2 Thess 3,1). Such action will be the sure sign of purity of intention on their part and of the manifest presence of the fatherhood of God. All glory will go in consequence to God alone for having made his presence in the community clear and credible. They should act in the same way as did Jesus Christ in exercising among us his word and his office (4,11).

What we have in this passage from Peter is a wonderful summing up of community co-responsibility, which is linked with the other text from Rom 12 which was quoted in connection with the fraternal and apostolic community (cf. Constitutions, Chap. V). It is a case of circulation in love, in which the specifically

different charismata, and hence also the offices of authority, are not played down but used to strengthen love itself. In fact, christian love is a love which leads to growth, because it comes from God, and from him takes its consistency and authenticity.

* * *

This chapter presents the third and final level of the organizational structure of our Society, the service of authority in the local community.

The reasons for the sequence of the different levels have already been explained in the introduction to the fourth part. There was no desire to belittle the values and more concrete and immediate character of the local community in comparison with those at provincial and world levels. In fact, the experience of living together in a fraternal and apostolic community under the guidance of a superior is something which forms part of the daily life of the confreres. But this aspect is dealt with explicitly elsewhere in the Constitutions, particularly in chap. V, which begins by describing at length the ideal of community life in the local communities (C 49-57), including the role of the rector, and concludes (in reverse order) with two articles on the wider provincial and world communities (C 58-59), which are more remote from daily experience but none the less real on that account. In reading the present chap. XIII what was said in chap. V should be kept in mind, as also the content of some other articles which will be mentioned in due course.

The layout of the chapter is analogous to that of the preceding one on structures at provincial level. It opens with an article on the local community as a distinct and canonically defined entity, and goes on to deal with the local superior, the local council and the assembly of the confreres.

And so the chapter contains the following sections:

1. *The local community (art. 175)*
2. *The rector*
 - his figure (*art. 176*)
 - his appointment and duration in office (*art. 177*)
3. *The local council*
 - nature and general duties (*art. 178*)
 - composition (*art. 179-180*)
 - cases in which its consent is needed (*art. 181*)
 - exceptional situations (*art. 182*)
 - the vice-rector (*art. 183*)
 - the economer (*art. 184*)
 - others holding local responsibility (*art. 185*)
4. *The assembly of the confreres (art. 186)*

1. THE LOCAL COMMUNITY (ART 175)

Art. 175 on the local community, which introduces chap. XIII, has a double purpose:

a. to collect together items dealt with in other parts of the Constitutions, which define the charismatic reality of the salesian community:

- the expression "a common life in unity of spirit" sums up the whole of chap. V on the fraternal and apostolic community;
- the article recalls the common shared responsibility in carrying out the apostolic mission, which is entrusted in the first place to the community (C 44);
- it recalls the authority of the rector, as a guide in pastoral discernment (C 44), as the centre of the fraternal community (C 55), and as the one responsible for making decisions after the common search for God's will (C 66). At the same time it takes up again the criteria concerning the exercise of the service of authority in our Society, described in the introductory chapter to the fourth part.

In this way the present article should be read in the light of what has been said already in the preceding chapters of the Constitutions.

b. in the context of the juridical structures, the article presents in particular the canonical entity of the community, with the constitutive elements laid down by the Code: "a religious community is to live in a lawfully constituted house, under the authority of a superior designated according to the norms of aw".¹

We may note that our awn law distinguishes between the two terms "*community*" and "*house*": the term "*community*" refers to the group of confreres who live in the same house or residence, while the term "*house*" has a wider connotation and indicates the whole complex of confreres and material objects (property, works, church, buildings etc.) The religious "house" is by ecclesiastical right a public non-collegial juridical person.²

On the basis of this canonical distinction can be understood the different uses of the two terms in our Rule: the term "house" is used when it is a matter of the whole complex, including personnel and material (cf. for example the ordinary power of the provincial over all the houses: C 162), or when dealing with the administration of temporal goods (cf. the appropriate chapters in both Constitutions and Regulations); the term "community", on the other hand, is used when dealing with the relationships between persons for instance (cf. art. 186 on the assembly of the confreres).

According to our Constitutions,³ the competent authority for the erection or suppression of a house is the Rector Major, who must have the consent of his council (C 132 §1,2), following a request by the provincial with the consent of the provincial

¹ CIC, can. 608

² Cf. CIC, can. 634 §1

³ Cf. also CIC, can. 609 §1

the Bishop of the diocese.⁴

Canon law (art. 132,§1,2 of the Constitutions says "in accordance with canon law") lays down other conditions as well,⁵ among which are those "necessary for the members to lead their religious life in accordance with the purpose and spirit proper to the institute".⁶ By this the Code emphasizes, as does our own art. 175, that it is not sufficient to set up a canonical entity, but all the spiritual reality of the religious community must be created.

Except for the case of a community dependent directly on the Rector Major, every local community forms part of a juridical circumscription which is normally a province or vice-province (cf. C 58 and 156-158), and depends on the respective major superior (C 162). The latter is also the competent authority for the assignment of confreres, by a precept of obedience, to a particular salesian house (R 150). The Regulations indicate that for each house the number of confreres shall normally be not less than six (R 150).

2. THE RECTOR (ART 176-177)

For a group of person to constitute a religious community there is necessary the presence of a superior, designated according to the norms of law (C 175 and can. 608).

Throughout all the time of renewal the importance was often emphasized of the participation and shared responsibility of the members of a community (cf. C 123), but no doubt was ever cast on the traditional fact of religious life concerning the authority of the superior, and no proposal was ever made that there should be a collegial government of the community in an ordinary manner.⁷ Our Constitutions do not contemplate the lack of a local superior, even by way of exception. The provincial can modify the ordinary structure of government of a community when particular circumstances require it (e.g. a reduced number of confreres), but "provided always that the figure of the rector is safeguarded" (C 182).

2.1 Duties of the Rector

The local superior, following the salesian tradition which goes back to the Founder takes the name in Italian of "*Direttore*". He has ordinary power of government within the domain of the house of which he is superior, both over the community and

⁴Cf. CIC, can. 609 §1

⁵Cf. CIC, can. 610-612

⁶CIC, can. 610 §1, which says literally: "In establishing religious houses, the welfare of the Church and of the institute are to be kept in mind, and care must be taken to safeguard everything that is necessary for the members to lead their religious life in accordance with the purposes and spirit proper to the institute"

⁷Cf. Note of the CRIS, 2 February 1972, AAS 69, 1972, p. 39

every part of it and over the individual members.⁸ He can command in virtue of the vow of obedience (C 68) and has the right and duty of making the final decision as to

what is to be done (C 66).

The various aspects of the figure and duties of the rector have been already mentioned at various points of the Rule, both in connection with the fraternal community (chap. V) and when speaking of the apostolic mission and religious obedience: he "represents Christ" among his brothers (C 55), he is the centre around which the community unites (ibid.), and the animator and guide of the pastoral mission of the community (C 44); he is the father and spiritual guide, who encourages and leads each confrere and the community in the seeking of God's will and in fidelity to the common vocation of each one (C 55, 66).

Art. 176 describes in particular the figure of the rector as the "*first in order of responsibility*" as regards the religious life of the community, its apostolic mission and the administration of its goods. It relates therefore precisely to the rector's task of "governing", and echoes the words of our Father Don Bosco: "The rector must command: he should know his own regulations well and also those of the others; he should know what they all must do, but everything stems from a single principle.... There can be only one person with ultimate responsibility".⁹

What has been said of superiors at other levels is true also for the rector: his task is not exclusively one of governing; he *governs by animating and animates by governing*. The familiar twin concepts of animation and government enter at this level too. It should be noted that it was precisely at local level that the specific function of the superior was first described by the word "animation": the GC21 dealt at length with the rector as the "animator" of the community with a view to the education and evangelization of the young.¹⁰ The function of the rector, said the GC21, makes one think of "the inner energy and activity of the soul, which gives life, harmony, growth and cohesion to all the parts of a living organism sharing in the life functions of the various members of the body".¹¹

This is what the Constitutions have in effect already said, when presenting the rector in the context of the fraternal community: "His first task is to animate the community so that it may live faithful to the Constitutions and grow in unity" (C 55). In dealing with communal obedience too the Rule says: "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" (C 66). We refer the reader to the commentary on art. 55, and also to that on art. 66 dealing with shared responsibility in obedience, which describes the whole process of communal research before the final decision is made by the superior.

⁸ Cf. C 120 and DC, can. 129, 131

⁹ Words of Don Bosco to Superior Chapter, 4 July 1884: cf. MB XVII, 189. Don Albera referring to this aspect in the "Rectors' Manual", wrote that "from the time of his appointment the rector becomes in the house the head to which everything should be referred, the centre and source of all vitality, the firm hand at the helm to prevent anyone going astray"

¹⁰ Cf. GC2I, 46-57

¹¹ GC21, 46

Two means should be noted in particular which the Constitutions indicate as being very valid for this animation: the friendly talk for personal dialogue, but which is nevertheless of concern to the whole community (cf. C 70, R 49); and the assembly

of the confreres for communal dialogue, which involves each and every confrere (cf. C 186, R 184). To help the rector in his task, but also to enlighten the community on the figure of the rector, the GC2 I asked that a "Rector's Manual" should be published, which would provide an ample commentary on the "harmonizing of spiritual leadership with religious authority".¹²

The corresponding articles of the Regulations contain some other indications for the rector to enable him to fulfil his animating function well: he is asked to be sure that he is present in the community and be available to the confreres (R 172), to make effective the participation of the confreres according to their personal abilities and talents, and to encourage fraternal meetings (R 173), to attend well to communal spiritual direction (R 175), to show concern for the individual confreres, especially the young ones, the old, the sick and those who may be in difficulty (R 176).¹³

In all this task of animation and government the rector is assisted, as we have seen for superiors at other levels, by a council.¹⁴ Its composition and duties will be specified in art. 178-181.

It should be observed that in particular circumstances, e.g. in the case of the number of confreres being very small, the provincial can modify the internal structure of the community, and even dispense from the necessity of a local council (C 182), but in this case the rector must consult the provincial in cases in which the consent or opinion of the local council is required (R 181) ; i.e. the rector is bound to ask the provincial for his advice or consent (according to the nature of the case) before the can act validly.¹⁵

Finally the strict bond should be noted which unites rectors with the provincial. While the Regulations recommend the provincial to give special attention to his rectors (R 145), the rectors are asked to give the provincial clear and simple information about the progress of the community, in the awareness of belonging to the same provincial community.

2.2 Appointment of the rector and his duration in office

As for the provincial, so also for the rector the procedure of *appointment* has been confirmed, but with the innovation (introduced by the SGC and later codified in

¹² Cf. GC21, 61 d. The manual, published in 1982 with the title *The Salesian Rector: a ministry for the animation and governing of the local community*, has been revised and brought up to date after the approval of the Constitutions

¹³ In the commentary on art. 53 reference was made to Don Bosco's concern for the sick. To the rectors he said: "I recommend to the rectors in a particular way that they see to it that nothing is wanting for those who are sick". Also in his confidential memoranda to rectors he wrote: "Be thrifty in everything, but make sure that the sick lack for nothing" (cf. BM X, 452). In general for the more needy confreres Don Bosco recommended: "Rectors should often reach out to those who need help so as to encourage them in their efforts to improve themselves, discover their personal needs and provide for them" (BM X, 1048)

¹⁴ C 176; cf. CAI (A), (all. 627

¹⁵ Cf. CIC, can. 127 §2

the text of the Constitutions) of a previous consultation among the confreres (C 77). The appointment is made by the provincial, who must have the consent of his council and the approval of the Rector Major; but this latter approval is necessary only in the 705 case of a first appointment, and not in the case of confirmation in office for a

second three-year period (cf. R 170).

The consultation is made among the confreres of the whole province, and not only among the members of the community concerned. Through it is realized the dialogue which is fundamental for proper discernment and for the exercise of shared responsibility; the superiors listen to the community so as to understand its needs for the fulfilment of the mission, and all the confreres take part by making their own contribution to indicate whom they consider most suitable in the Lord for the guidance of the community.

The practical details for the making of the consultation are to be decided by the provincial with his council, with due regard to any indications which may have been given by the provincial chapter. As for the appointment of provincial councillors, here too the rhythm of consultation could be every three years, i.e. by asking the confreres to indicate suitable persons for the office of rector as they fall due at the end of the three-year period.¹⁶

Art. 177 specifies two conditions that must be satisfied for a confrere to be appointed rector: that he be a priest (as has been already seen in the commentary on art. 4 and 121), and an adequate period of time spent in the Congregation after perpetual profession.¹⁷

The traditional *duration in office* has also been maintained: a mandate of three years which can be prolonged for a further three years in the same community (C 177). After this period the confrere shall "normally" cease from holding the office of rector for at least a year.¹⁸ The confirmation of the rector in office for a third term remains possible as an exception, but in this case the provincial must once again seek the Rector Major's approval (cf. C 177, R 170).

3. THE LOCAL COUNCIL (ART. 178-185)

At the local level too the superior has his council.¹⁹ We find this canonical disposition affirmed in art. 176, which speaks of the rector. It is repeated in art. 178 as a norm for every community, unless the provincial considers it opportune to make an exception in particular circumstances (C 182).

¹⁶ Cf. AGC 312 (1985) p. 54-55. Here there are other useful guidelines, e.g. concerning voting forms and their counting and scrutiny, as well as the reserve to be maintained concerning results, which because of their nature cannot be made public.

¹⁷ Cf. CIC, can. 623

~~¹⁸ Cf. CIC, can. 624 §2~~

¹⁹ Cf. CIC, can. 627 §1

Art 178 explains the general duty of the council: *to collaborate with the rector in animating and governing the community*. It is a task which concerns the whole field of the religious life and apostolic mission.

Everyone is aware of the importance of the council, which the whole tradition of religious life recognizes as the principal instrument at the superior's side in his role of animator and guide. As the name itself suggests, it belongs to the council to assist the rector by giving him "council" or advice, helping him in discernment: but in more general terms it assists the rector in whatever pertains to the exercise of his office, sharing in this way his responsibility.

From this point of view the essentially 'pastoral' importance of the council must be pointed out: more than an administrative organism, the council is a team which shares responsibility with the rector as regards the realization of the mission. To this end the council reflects on the community situation, studies appropriate directives for the different pastoral sectors, and feels directly committed and co-responsible for all the areas of activity.

For his part the rector is obliged to make use of this help,²⁰ and to listen to his council in all questions of importance (C 1S1; R 1-3). In some cases he must obtain the consent of the council if he is to act validly; these cases are listed in art. 181 of the Constitutions. At the present time however there are no explicit cases in our law where the 'opinion' of the council is needed for validity. In any case, the Regulations prescribe that the rector must convoke his council at least once a month (R 180).

It should be noticed that the rector, even though he convokes the council and presides over it, does not vote (cf. the comment on this point in connection with the general council). An exceptional case is that of admission to professions and sacred Orders (C 108). Here it is not the rector but the provincial who admits the candidates; nevertheless the rector with his council have previously to give their opinion, and in this case he votes together with his council: he may also explain his opinion to the provincial separately.

3.1 Composition of the local council

In the new Constitutions the composition of the local count become much more flexible and adaptable to different practical needs. This elasticity was introduced deliberately by the SGC as a necessary application of the general criteria of subsidiarity and decentralization (cf. C 124).

In the first place the number of councillors is not rigidly fixed by our law, but it is said that its number must be "proportional to the number of confreres in the community and to the requirements of their activities" (C 178).

The Constitutions then distinguish between three categories of councillors (art. 179):

²⁰ Cf. CIC, can. 627 §3

a. Ex-officio members: *the vice-rector and the economer*;

b. A certain number of *confreres responsible for the principal sectors of the community's activity*. Here the SGC did not wish to prescribe and maintain at a universal level the figure and tasks of these confreres, as was the case previous to the postconciliar revision when certain of them belonged to the local council by right. Instead it has been left to the provincial chapter to define the roles and duties of those responsible for the principal sectors of the community's activities (C 185), so that the roles and structures within the community may correspond with the needs of situations which may differ to a very great extent from one province to another. The Constitutions then leave to the provincial and his council the faculty of deciding, after hearing the opinion of the community concerned, which of these shall form part of the local council.

c. Possibly a certain number of *members elected annually by the assembly of the confreres*. This faculty is applied in local communities with numerous confreres, according to the judgement of the provincial¹¹ who will decide on the number of confreres to be elected (C 180).

This composition of the council, with the possibility of representation of different sectors of activity and of election of members by the confreres, could lead to a certain heterogeneity which could in turn lead to difficulty in reaching a convergence on particular problems. Very fittingly art. 180 of the Regulations reminds the members of the council that they must "remember their solidarity as regards decisions taken, and that in any case they are obliged in conscience to have respect for persons and to be discreet regarding matters discussed".

It is the right and duty of the rector to inform the confreres about decisions of common interest (R 180; cf. C 123).

3.2 Appointment of councillors

The appointment of the vice-rector and the economer belongs to the provincial. He does not need the consent of his council in this case but must first hear the opinion of the rector.

The appointment of those responsible for the principal sectors of the activities of the house, and hence implicitly their appointment as councillors, also belongs to the provincial (R 183).

To be appointed or elected a member of the local council it is necessary that the confrere be perpetually professed and no longer in initial formation (C 178). For the vice-rector it is also required that he be a priest: this follows from the fact he takes the place of the rector when the latter is absent or impeded, and can also act for him habitually in matters of ordinary government.

3.3 The vice-rector

In the revision of our Constitutions the vicar of the superior has also been introduced by our own law at local level. Between his figure and those of the vicar general and the vice-provincial there is a certain analogy, in so far as the vice-rector is the first collaborator of the rector, whose action he extends and integrates in such a way as to form one with him; he too possesses within the domain of the house ordinary vicarious power. Nevertheless he is not a "religious Ordinary". His vicarious power is in fact limited; it is habitual only "in matters, which have been especially entrusted to him", while it becomes unlimited "in everything concerning the ordinary government" only if the rector is absent or impeded, as also in the case of the death of the rector, "until the provincial provides otherwise" (C 183).

Our own law also provides that, if the rector is seriously impeded, the vice-rector can substitute him as a member of the provincial chapter, with the previous approval of the provincial.

On the basis of the same criterion of subsidiarity and decentralization, which inspires all the norms concerning the structural organization of the local community, the assignment of any specific task to the vice-rector was avoided in the Rule. This was deliberately left to the initiative of superiors on the spot.

The Regulations nevertheless provide some general criteria in this regard, which serve to ensure for the figure of the vice-rector a proper habitual consistency (R 182). It is customary for him to have the responsibility for one of the principal sectors of the educative and pastoral activity of the community, with the proviso that his office should not ordinarily be combined with that of economer. The community must be informed of the habitual faculties that the rector has given to his vice-rector.

It should be noted that in the figure of the vice-rector, the Rule offers the rector the possibility of entrusting to him whatever would be an obstacle to him or take him away from his fundamental task as rector (cf. C 55, R 172).

3.4 The local economer

At local level too the administration of temporal goods is assigned by Our law to the responsibility of an economer in the first instance. He carries out his service in dependence on the rector with his council.

In chap. XIII of the general Regulations are found the concrete dispositions concerning the management of the goods of the house (R 198-202). Art. 184 of the Constitutions recommends in general that the economer should carry out his service in a spirit of charity and poverty.

4. THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CONFRES (ART. 186)

Before the SGC the Constitutions did not speak explicitly of an assembly, though they did in fact provide for an official meeting of the members of the

community, but for the sole purpose of electing the delegate for the provincial chapter and his substitute.²¹

In the revision made following the guidelines of Vatican II, on the basis of the principle of participation and shared responsibility, there has been introduced into our own law the organism of the assembly of the confreres. "Our common vocation requires the responsible and effective participation of all the members in the life of the local community", says art. 123. As we have seen more than once, the expressions "life and action", "life and mission", indicate all our vocational identity. And in fact at various points the Constitutions emphasize that participation extends to all the essential aspects of our vocation (cf. C 3):

— The apostolic mission entrusted to the community ("the members are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility": C 44);

— The fraternal community: all the confreres together and each one individually are called to build communion between persons (C 49, 52);

— The practice of the evangelical counsels ("we seek the will of the Lord together in patient brotherly dialogue, with a deep awareness of shared responsibility": C 66).

The assembly, which unites all the confreres to consider the principal questions which concern the community's religious life and activities" (C 186), is a special occasion for participation. It is a suitable instrument for the coordination of the community's apostolic endeavours, the communion of persons, and the common seeking of God's will. It is a means of common discernment and verification of growth in fidelity to our vocation in the concrete circumstances of daily life.

The article of the Constitutions gives a clear indication of the competence of the assembly of the confreres:

a. It is an assembly with powers to elect: to it belongs the election of the delegate to the provincial chapter and his substitute, and the possible election of members of the local council (cf. C 181).

b. It is a consultative organ: the assembly cannot make decisions about the matters it deals with (as a chapter can), but its general task is to examine, analyse and study the principal questions, be informed about them and discuss them, to discern and as far as possible reach a convergence of views, of lines of action, of programmes and verification. Although it does not have the right to make decisions, its role is indispensable as a responsible and effective participation in the government of the community. If it functions well it is a preparation for the decisions of the superior, which result from the common research (cf. C 66).

Art. 184 of the Regulations further specifies the tasks and duties of the assembly by giving details concerning the competence assigned by the Constitutions; they are listed as follows:

²¹ Cf. *Constitutions 1966*, art. 100

— to seek means or lines of action for fostering religious and apostolic life, or in other words a fuller realization of our vocation;

— to examine the more important problems that can surface in a community;

— to draw up a programme each year covering the community life, pastoral and educative activities, and ongoing formation and to review this programme at suitable periods (cf. also R 174);

— to participate in the elaboration and verification of the community's pastoral and educative project (cf. R 4);

— to be informed and reflect on the financial situation of the house; this can be done, for example, when the balance sheet is drawn up, about which the economy is of interest to the whole community (cf. R 202); here too enters the verification of communal poverty referred to in art. 65 of the Regulations.

The assembly itself is to decide on the frequency of its meetings. The minimum laid down by the Regulations is at least three times a year; this corresponds to the above-mentioned tasks, in particular to the programming at the beginning of the year, the revision towards the end of the year, and the reflection on the financial situation and observance of communal poverty when the balance sheet is presented.

From the manner in which the structures are set up at the level of the local community, it is clear that the confreres are invited to deepen their sense of shared responsibility, to learn to dialogue and contribute to the meetings in fraternal fashion, and to augment the sense of the common good and union between the members of the community. The structures must offer favourable conditions for responsible participation, but the confreres themselves are asked to do their utmost to put them into practice and render them efficacious.

*Let us pray for our community,
that in fidelity to Don Bosco and his spirit,
and in the dedication of all its members to apostolic work
it may respond generously to the mission entrusted to it
for the benefit of the young and the poor.*

*That our community may live,
in a family spirit and reciprocal self-donation,
a life of zeal and charity
which will render clearer and more convincing
its gospel witness,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For the rector of our community:
may the Lord assist him and give him
the light of his Spirit,
so that he may render incarnate among us*

*the presence and fatherliness of Don Bosco,
and guide the community
in seeking and fulfilling the Father's will,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For the members of the community council,
that with salesian apostolic discernment
they may be able to organize and direct the work of all,
for a more living and effective presence
among those to whom we have been sent,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For the younger confreres that they may develop,
and for the old and sick confreres,
that they may find in the community
the support they need,
in an atmosphere of brotherhood and sincere friendship,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

CHAPTER XIV

ADMINISTRATION OF TEMPORAL GOODS

"Be content with what you have; for God has said 'I will never fall you nor forsake you'.... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13,5.16).

All through the Bible worldly goods are considered under three aspects: they are recognized as gifts of God and therefore good in themselves; vigilance, must be shown in their regard lest they become idols; and they are to be shared with others, and especially with the poor. In the New Testament in particular Jesus lays down a radical distinction between God and mammon (Mt 6,24) and insists strongly on their use in almsgiving.

In the context of Heb 13,1-17 this motif emerges in the context of a catechism of community life. But the same teaching also forms part of a new and much deeper line of thought which pervades the whole Letter, and especially the passage that heads this chapter: Jesus' teaching on authentic worship. What practical effect does the Lord's teaching have on the life of the community? As elsewhere in the New Testament the new kind of worship implies brotherly love (13.1), a love which in certain circumstances involves the use of temporal goods: freedom from greed, the living of a simple life with trust in God, whose property we are (13,5). Knowing what has been said in the preceding chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews, we may quite reasonably say that the concrete model being offered is not that of an enlightened stoic, but the generous love shown by Jesus in the unlimited offering of himself (cf. 10,5-10; 12,2).

The same thought appears again towards the end of the quotation in terms more directly linked with worship. After noting once again the total oblation of Christ (13,10-13), the text recalls that Christian worship is performed in two ways: through the sacrifice of praise, i.e. the making of offerings and thanksgiving to God, to be carried out continually as we make our way to our future home (13,14-15); and as a secondary act endorsing the first through the practical exercise of charity, expressed in giving help to those in need (13,16).

"Such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13,16). Even something so apparently down to earth as the administration of temporal goods is enveloped by the most lofty inspiration, and for this reason such a task is no insignificant expression of the liturgy of life.

We were not caught unawares by the prescription of the Code of Canon Law: "Each institute is to establish suitable norms for the use and administration of goods, so that the poverty proper to the institute may be fostered, defended and expressed"¹.

The general lines for the administration of goods, as will be seen from an examination of the individual articles, had already been made clear by Don Bosco from the very first drafts of the Constitutions. They enter into the concept of poverty which

¹ Cf. CIC, can. 635 §2

our Father wanted to be one of the characteristics of his Congregation.² They are key elements, even though for obvious reasons they are expressed in a different form in the renewed text of the Constitutions.

A good idea of the importance Don Bosco attached to the careful administration of temporal goods can be gleaned from what he wrote in his spiritual testament concerning the election of the new Rector Major after his death: "After attending to these most important duties" (i.e. to thank the electors for their trust, to inform the Holy Father of the election, to inform the confreres and the F.M.A., and to write a letter to cooperators and benefactors), "let the new Rector Major make every effort to get to know the exact financial state of the Congregation".³ Don Bosco had his feet firmly on the ground!

Whatever Don Bosco was able to do he always attributed to the goodness of divine providence and the assistance of Mary Help of Christians. But he spared no effort in seeking the necessary means for his work. How much labour and perspiration went into his continual appeals to public and private charity: requests, letters, lotteries, journeys etc. He undertook even humiliating tasks on account of his boys. And at the end he said: "What we have is not ours; it belongs to the poor; woe to us if we do not use it well".⁴

And use it well he did, not least because of his natural instincts gained in a peasant family. He had the careful eye of a cautious administrator. He not only kept a check on things from day to day and had a list of the dates when bills were due for payment, but he carefully preserved every document, from deeds of ownership, lease and use of property, public and private agreements, official letters etc. right down to bills from the baker!⁵

Can we say then that Don Bosco is a point of reference for us also in the matter of regular and thrifty administration? Certainly we can — but always in accordance with his own way of doing things. An example will be sufficient to show us what was always in the forefront of his mind, something more important than evident economic problems.

- "Take the invoices and pay the bills", said Don Bosco.
- "We need to keep something back for meeting unforeseen eventualities", replied Don Rua.
- "No. The Lord will provide".
- "The Lord has already worked miracles for us, but there is a big bill to be paid in a few days time and then..."

² Don Bosco once said: "Poverty is our asset; it is God's blessing! We should even ask the Lord to keep us in voluntary poverty" (BM VI, 177). On the importance of poverty for the future of the Society, cf. in particular MB XVII, 272

³ MB XVII, 260; cf. also "Spiritual writings of Don Bosco", English edition (New Rochelle), p. 351-352

⁴ BM V, 450; cf. C 79

⁵ Cf. P STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, LAS Rome 1980, p. 8

— The Lord will provide again when that happens. Earmarking money for future needs closes the door to Divine Providence".⁶

And it is in this salesian perspective that we now examine the four articles (187-190) of chap. XIV which deal with the 'Administration of temporal goods'.

⁶BM XIV, 81

ART. 187

The Salesian Society may acquire, possess, administer and alienate temporal goods. This is true for the Congregation as a whole, for individual provinces and for each house. Such goods should not be held in the name of an individual person, and should be retained only to the extent that they are directly useful for our works.

Acquiring and holding real estate with the sole object of producing income, and every other kind of interest-bearing investment is forbidden, except in the cases referred to in art. 188 of the Constitutions.

1. Capacity of acquiring, possessing, administering and alienating temporal goods

The mission of the Church is supernatural but is inserted in human structures, and for its realization temporal means are necessary.¹ To attain its proper objectives it has the inherent right to possess temporal goods, independently of any secular power.²

The objectives for which the Church claims its rights over temporal goods are:

- the regulation of divine worship;
- the provision of fitting support for the clergy;
- the carrying out of works of the sacred apostolate and of charity, especially for the needy.³

The strict connection needs to be emphasized between the right to temporal goods and the reasons (i.e. the purposes) for which the Church claims this right, as an indication that there are no other reasons why the Church should possess temporal goods.

If the Church claims that the possession and use of material goods is necessary for the attainment of her spiritual purposes, the Congregation does likewise. It is able to do so because it is a "public juridical person" in the Church, a living part of it.⁴ But it can do it only in accordance with canon law,⁵ i.e. because it participates in the mission of the Church, is submissive to its laws, acts in its spirit, in communion with and under the control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The Congregation, in order to live, act, organize itself, begin and continue apostolic activities, must have economic resources.⁶ For us therefore poverty does not

¹ GE GS 76: "There are close links between the things of earth and those things in man's condition which transcend the world, and the Church uses temporal realities as Am as its mission requires it"

² Cf. CIC, can. 1254

³ Cf. PO 17; C1C, can. 1254 §2

⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 116, 1258, 1259

⁵ Cf. CIC, can. 1255

⁶ Cf. SGC, 726

consist in not possessing, but in being able to harmonize the commitment to our mission with the economical requirements involved. In this field too we have a prophetic role to play (cf. C 77). In all our activities we look upon temporal goods as means for attaining the ends for which the Society was founded. In this connection the SGC warns: "The structures must be at the service of the community and of the individual members so that they may be able to fulfil faithfully their vocations".⁷

It can happen that an individual may become attached to such goods, misuse them, be deceived by their complex mechanism, or waste them through lack of ability or preparation, or through neglect or deliberate abuse. It will be a good thing to remind those responsible for financial management that in addition to taking scrupulous care to keep their administration in order, they should remember that they are acting as custodians of the goods of the Church and must not allow any arbitrary or personal use of them.⁸

2. This is true for the Congregation as a whole, for individual provinces and for each house

It is interesting to note how from the beginnings (it is already in the text of the Constitutions of 1864, submitted with a view to obtaining the "decretum laudis") there occurs the idea that every house can possess goods; and how Don Rua cleverly extricated himself from a dispute with the tax officials by showing that "our property is no longer in the name of the Oratory... but of individuals who are joint owners of the land and buildings where our institutes are situated".⁹

The Constitutions emphasize: "Such goods should not be held in the name of an individual person", and the reason is obvious! As well as giving us secure and unchallenged ownership, this norm takes from individuals any temptation to independence or to act as an owner. Exceptions to this rule are very rare, and are dictated exclusively by the rigidity of civil laws in some countries which deny to private or religious associations the right to own property.

3. "They should be retained only to the extent that they are directly useful for our works"; hence "acquiring and holding real estate with the sole object of producing income is forbidden"

Art. 59 of the Regulations says the same thing but with greater force and clarity: "The Society should not retain possession of any real estate apart from its houses and the property needed for its work".

The Biographical Memoirs tell us that Don Bosco had made it a rule for his followers that "since we depend on God's daily providence, our Society shall never hold stock or

⁷Cf. SGC, 706

⁸Cf. SGC, 726

⁹D. RUA, Letter of 31.12.1891, *Circular letters*, p. 81

real estate beyond its houses and their dependencies".¹⁰ And to Mgr Cagliero Don Bosco wrote on 6 August 1885: "Recommend to everyone to avoid building or the acquiring of property which is not strictly necessary for our use. Never buy anything so as to sell it again, neither territory or dwellings, for the purpose of making financial profit".¹¹

Whenever Don Bosco received something as a beneficiary under someone's will, "he used to sell the property and convert it into cash, of which only a tiny part went into the bank; the greater part went at once into building programmes, the defraying of the costs of maintaining his institutes and young pupils, and in obtaining equipment for the workshops in the schools of arts and trades".¹²

In his "spiritual testament" in the part dedicated to the "Superior Chapter", our Founder laid down the following principle, which he considered vital for the Congregation and which he described as one of the "two things of the greatest importance": "It must be considered an unvarying principle that we do not keep any real estate except for our houses and whatever goes with them that is necessary for the health and well-being of the confreres and pupils. The keeping of property for the purpose of making money is an insult to Divine Providence which always comes to our aid in a wonderful and I would even say almost miraculous way". He came back again on the same point at the end of his "testament" when, evidently concerned about the future of the Congregation and as though to emphasize the more important points that must not be forgotten after his death, he wrote again: "let no real estate be kept, apart from the houses we need".¹³

Fr Ricaldone made the following comment on this phrase: "He (Don Bosco) considered it to be a real offence against Divine Providence to own houses, estates and property of any sort. If we rid ourselves of such things and apply their value to doing good to souls, we shall gain for ourselves and our works abundant new blessings. If, on the contrary, God sees that instead of relying entirely on him we place our faith in the revenues and interest produced by investments and real estate, he will leave us to the mercy of our miserable resources which, since they are only human, lack solidity and lasting security. This complete trust in a loving providence, this total and generous detachment from earthly things, have been the reason and the cause of the marvellous expansive force of salesian work and constitute our richest endowment".¹⁴

4. "Every other kind of (permanent) interest-bearing investment is forbidden, except in the cases referred to in art. 188 of the Constitutions"

The emphasis here is on the adjective "permanent", which was unfortunately omitted in the English translation. We must get rid of any idea that the salesian can

¹⁰ BM VIII, 388

¹¹ MB XVII, 626-627

¹² P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, LAS Rome 1980, p. 157

¹³ MB XVII, 273

¹⁴ D. RICARDONE, *Poverty*, ASC 82 (1937), p. 40

live or find Providence by permanently investing money in any interest-bearing way, i.e. in a stable, fixed and perpetual or long-term manner!

It is quite a different matter to keep money temporarily in the bank and make use of the interest it gains. The primary reason for putting it in the bank in a current account is security and the facility for carrying out financial operations, even though the account may gain interest. But the primary concern is not, and should never be, to keep the money there untouched, so that it will gain more and more interest!

This holds good for sums of money already needed for work that has been programmed or kept in reserve for purposes foreseen over the next few years at the most. It should be noted too that in short or medium-term investments in securities, there should never be any idea or semblance of speculation, and risk or imprudence should be avoided.

When you think seriously about the matter, it would seem almost impossible that in a well-managed salesian house there should be any surplus money for investment. There is always the maintenance of the work to be attended to, and always a pressing need for the means necessary for it to attain its objectives. But if in fact there does happen to be some money left over, it should be given to the provincial (cf. R 197) or to the Church or to the poor.¹⁵ It is certainly not meant to be saved up or capitalized.

Still less can this be done with whatever comes to us for charitable purposes! The only exceptions allowable are those foreseen in the following art. 188, 4, which must always be submitted for the appraisal and "authorization of the Rector Major with the consent of his council".

The GC21 for greater clarity deliberately made no mention in this present article of the contents of art. 188,4 so as to emphasize that temporal goods are kept in the Congregation only to the extent in which they are directly useful for educative and pastoral activity, excluding every kind of interest-bearing investment; and because the cases expressed there of "student burses, legacies for Masses, life annuities and charitable foundations", are matters of true economic operations involving extraordinary administration with burdens attached, and hence are subject to the normal need for authorization.¹⁶ The GC22, in the definitive revision of the Constitutions, added here the phrase: "except in the cases referred to in art. 188 of the Constitutions", solely for the purpose of avoiding an apparent contradiction with the following article, but by so doing has also emphasized the need for proper authorization for the cases contemplated by art. 188, 4.

Personal and community discernment on art. 187 could usefully concentrate on the following two aspects:

¹⁵ Cf. CIC, can. 640

¹⁶ Cf. GC21, 416-418

1) See whether the structures are at the service of the community and of the individual members, so as to help them to fulfil their vocations faithfully.¹⁷

There are five guidelines which will guarantee the attainment of this objective:

- a proper relationship between a sound administration and religious poverty;
- the priority of institutional aims over material goods;
- the awareness of being custodians of the goods of the Church;
- the functional relationship between witness and temporal goods;
- financial solidarity among all the works of the province so as to help those in greater need, and to meet the cost of extraordinary works and acquisitions programmed by the provincial chapter and/or provincial council.

2) Avoid any counter-witness to poverty in the possession and use of property, keeping in mind the circumstances of the local neighbourhood, and checking whether in the structures we are really moved by criteria of simplicity and functionality (cf. C 77).

Mamma Margaret said to her son on her deathbed: "Do not seek pomp or splendour in your work. Seek only the glory of God and let the foundation of your work be true poverty".¹⁸ Don Bosco, in his "Spiritual Testament" from which we have already quoted, recommended to the Superior Chapter that "great care be taken when authorizing new building work or repairs to houses that any suggestion of extravagance, grandeur or panache be avoided". And he concluded: "When the desire for ease and comfort begins to appear among us as regard our houses, our rooms or ourselves, from that moment our Congregation will begin to decline".¹⁹

*Lord our God,
free us from the stupidity of men of this world,
who accumulate goods with the sole thought
of enjoying them in this life;
and grant that the example and exhortations of Don Bosco
may prompt us to place all our trust
in the Providence "which has always come to our aid
in a wonderful and almost miraculous way".*

¹⁷ SGC, 706

¹⁸ BM V, 371

¹⁹ MB XVII, 258

ART. 188

The authorization of the Rector Major with the consent of his council is needed for:

- 1. acquiring, alienating, exchanging, mortgaging or renting real estate;**
- 2. contracting loans with or without mortgage;**
- 3. accepting inheritances, bequests or donations to which obligations are attached; (when no obligation is attached it is sufficient merely to notify the Rector Major);**
- 4. establishing annuities, student burses, Mass obligations, special or charitable foundation;**
- 5. constructing new buildings, demolishing existing ones or making major alterations.**

When such authorization is applied for either at the provincial or local level, adequate documentation must be submitted together with the opinion of the provincial and his council, and also that of the rector and his council when a local house is concerned.

The article makes it clear that certain important financial operations which increase or diminish the patrimony of the Congregation are subject to control, in the sense that authorization is necessary before the operations can take place.

This throws further light on the fundamental principle that in the Congregation no one can act as a sole proprietor but that we all, according to our different degrees of competence, are administrators of goods that do not belong to us. It may be a good thing to repeat once again, to hammer the point home, that our goods belong to the juridical person which has lawfully acquired them (i.e. the Congregation), but fall under the supreme authority of the Supreme Pontiff because they are ecclesiastical goods and hence regulated by the norms of canon law and of our own Constitutions.¹

Now our Constitutions say very clearly that for the financial operations referred to in art. 188 *"the authorization of the Rector Major with the consent of his council is needed"*.

The five points listed in the article are clear and easily understood. They do not call for detailed explanation. The only comment necessary concerns a point that the members of the GC22 decided should be added to point 3. They distinguished between inheritances, bequests or donations to which obligations are attached, and those free of any such obligations. The first need the usual authorization; for the second it is sufficient to inform the Rector Major. With this slight addition it was possible to meet the requirement expressed in can. 1267,2, which says that offerings made for the Church's works cannot be refused except for a just reason, and also make the desirable provision that the Rector Major and his council be always aware of significant additions to the Congregation's patrimony.

Requests for authorizations have to be accompanied by "adequate documentation" which the provincial and his council, and when the case so requires also the rector and his council, must send in accompanied by their own opinion. In practice this documentation comprises:

¹Cf. CIC, can. 1256-1257

1. a formal request from the provincial with the opinion referred to above, for the purpose of completing and explaining the content of the various accompanying documents;
2. an extract from the minutes of the provincial council indicating the opinion of all the council members; if the request concerns a house, the same is required from the council of the local community concerned;
3. any other documents which may make the request more clear.

In addition, in the case of constructional work an estimate of the cost must be submitted, together with an explanation of how the project will be financed; if it exists, a technical report should also be included with constructional details, at least in outline.

If real estate is to be purchased, the cost must be stated together with the means by which it will be met and by whom. Complete documentation also calls for detailed blueprints and an indication of the house or organization making the purchase.

In the case of the sale or donation of goods, a precise statement is required of the goods being sold or given away and their estimated value; the use to be made of the money that will be received must also be clearly stated.

When it is a question of short or long-term loans or bank credits, the following must be stated: the amount involved, the rate of interest, the form of repayment and the time stipulated, property mortgaged to guarantee the loan, how the loan will be serviced.

It should not be thought that all this is a matter of so much red tape and a tribute to the bureaucracy which is the guardian angel of modern society. We come back rather to that basic principle that we are not the owners and masters of the goods of the Society, but only careful and faithful administrators.

In the draft of the Constitutions made in 1864 Don Bosco had expressed all this in a significant way: "every house may possess and administer goods... but always within limits fixed by the Superior General". Later on he insisted: "the rector has no power to buy or sell real estate without the consent of the Rector Major", to which he added in the text of 1875: "nor to construct new buildings, nor to demolish those already in existence, nor to make innovations of any importance".²

²Cf. *Costituzioni 1864*, XII, 4. 12; *Costituzioni 1875*, X, 12 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 160, 165)

*Lord our God,
grant that in our dealings,
with those responsible for financial matters,
we may act with delicacy of conscience,
without concealment or deception,
not keeping back what is due to others;
in the certainty that
sincerity and clarity in worldly affairs
is a reflection of our awareness
of being attentive and faithful servants.*

ART. 189

With regard to all the operations referred to in article 188, it belongs to the Rector Major with the consent of his council, after hearing the opinion of the provincials with their respective councils and in the light of relevant decisions of the Apostolic See, to determine the financial limits within which each provincial with the consent of his council is competent to grant authorizations by an analogous procedure.

In the case of operations which exceed the amount laid down by the Apostolic See, or of things donated to the Church as the result of a vow, or objects which are precious by reason of their artistic or historical value,¹ the permission of the Apostolic See itself is required.

¹ cf. CIC, can. 638.3

This article completes the preceding one, by stating to whom it belongs to lay down the limits for the operations spoken of in art. 188: the competent authority is the Rector Major with his council, who will however keep in mind the indications and norms given in this regard by the Apostolic See.

Speaking at this point of authorization (or "nulla osta", as it is known in Italian), we may draw attention to the duty of "rendering an account" which is repeatedly emphasized in our own law. The two aspects are closely connected: the fact of dependence because of the need for authorization, or the fact that limits have to be imposed, mean that I have to give an account of my administration in respect of ecclesiastical and civil laws. All of us in the Congregation, at one level or another, have to give an account of the goods entrusted to us. The Code of Canon Law reminds us that we have to do this at the times and in the manner laid down.¹

For this reason the general Regulations include several norms which relate to this point². It has been like that since the early days of the Congregation: as early as 1864 the constitutional text reminded the confreres that they should be always ready "at any moment to render an account to God and their superior of their own administration".³

No one should think that to ask for an account implies a lack of trust and confidence in the one who must give it. It does not indicate any distrust of the person concerned; as the words of art. 56 of the Regulations show, there is a lot of trust implicit in the receipt of money by the members "for small individual needs" and which it is assumed that they will use "with a sense of responsibility". The conclusion of the article was only to be expected: "and (they will) give an account to the superior", and this for the obvious reason that "everything must be placed among the common goods". Still less should the rendering of an account be considered superfluous at community level. The importance of the financial report — an obvious requirement which is taken for granted in every administration at a civil and economic level — has

¹ Cf. CIC, can. 636 §2

² Cf. R 56, 65, 192, 196, 202

³ *Costituzioni 1864*, X11, 6 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 162)

for us an extra motive in the appraisal that has to be made in connection with our institutional objectives, and in the witness to poverty and charity asked of us by the Church.⁴

It is not out of place either, in this context, to recall the observance required in respect of civil, social and fiscal laws, which is in a certain sense an open financial report to the civil community (e.g. laws concerning the declaration of income, work contracts, social insurance", etc.). If we are trying to educate youngsters to be "upright citizens", we must not fail to set the example ourselves!

A final suggestion is offered us by the SGC:⁵ administration and economy are the task of the whole community, i.e. all the confreres should feel truly responsible for and involved in the economic running of the house. Because of this the means of community sharing in the administration must be developed (cf. R 184, 202).

We must foster in ourselves a proper evaluation of the economic aspects both within our community and in the wider social environment in which we live.

*Lord my God,
when I am asked here on earth
to give an account of my stewardship,
grant that I may be able to respond
with the openness you will one day demand of me
when I come before you.*

⁴Cf. CIC, can. 640; R 65

⁵Cf. SGC, 615

ART. 190

All temporal goods are administered respectively by the economer general and by provincial and local economers, under the direction and control of the appropriate superiors and councils, in conformity with canonical dispositions, in accordance with the Constitutions and general Regulations, and in compliance with the laws of each country.

The article refers to those members to whom is entrusted the responsibility of taking care of the administration of temporal goods in agreement with the superior: the economer at various levels, whose office is a stable one contemplated by the Constitutions; at world and local levels he was at one time called the "prefect".¹

Here we have another practical example of the decentralization called for by art. 124 of the Constitutions. The corresponding articles of the Regulations then go on to express in greater detail the tasks at the different levels: art. 192 for the economer general at the level of the general council; art. 193 for the provincial economer in the province, and art. 198 for the local economer in the individual house. The adverb "respectively" clarifies, if need be, that each one administers temporal goods only at his own particular level.

The importance of the task involved calls for:

- the selection and preparation of suitable personnel;
- the setting up of an office which will be methodical and efficient, with everything exact and nothing overlooked, where everything is done in accordance with the norms of canon law, our own Constitutions and Regulations, and the civil law of the country concerned;
- direction and supervision on the part of the respective superiors and councils, not for inquisitorial purposes but in the role of helpful collaborators, especially in adopting an economic policy which will ensure a proper relationship between temporal goods and our constitutional objectives;
- the possibility of occasional professional assistance by experts in various sectors of the economic, financial, taxation and insurance fields (cf. R 185);
- the setting up of consultant bodies of confreres to give guidelines and advice in the various financial and administrative sectors (cf. R 185);
- the formulation by provincial chapters of detailed norms for administration (R 190).

Scrupulous and prudent care to provide a sound administration not only ensures a proper evaluation of goods for the service of man, but is also a guarantee for the observance of individual and collective poverty; it therefore becomes a means for a clearer witness of poverty.

In the economer, to whom is entrusted administrative responsibility in a special way, we have a characteristic figure of the salesian house, whose traditional roots are

¹Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, IX, 10-14 ("Prefect" general), and X, 14-15 (local "prefect") (cf. F. MOTTO P. 151-153; 167)

found in Don Bosco and Don Rua, true models of administrators who were wise from a human point of view and endowed with solid faith in divine providence.

On the one hand, the salesian economist must display qualities and attitudes which make him professionally competent:

- an up to date knowledge of the laws which concern the economic sector in its various aspects: book-keeping, financial principles, taxation, etc.;
- diligence, order and comprehensiveness in economic operations like keeping registers, filing documents, preparing financial reports;
- prudence in making decision, which must always be made in agreement with the rector and his council;
- integrity as regards social prescriptions and in fulfilling the requirements of both ecclesiastical and civil law;
- the ability to deal with other people, both inside and outside the community.²

But above and beyond these human and professional qualities, the economist must appear in the salesian house as the one who, in a family spirit, helps the confreres and the community as a whole to live their vocation in fidelity to the Rule, and in a proper relationship with worldly goods and with the means necessary for educative and pastoral work. One with the rector, he is the guardian of the spirit of poverty that Don Bosco wanted to find in his family, a spirit based on sound economy and trust in providence, which accepts the means we need for our work and administers them in such a way that all may realize they are being used for the service of others (C 77).³

It may be well to recall yet again that what we administer is not ours. As we have said before they are goods of the Church! We cannot permit any arbitrary or personal use of them. Neither must we forget that what we have in our hands is the fruit of the work of the confreres and a tangible sign of that providence which, through their generosity and sacrifices (sometimes beyond all calculation), enables us to carry on our work.⁴

We end by noting that the taking on of administrative tasks is a true service, always laborious and tiring and sometimes unrewarding and little appreciated. Our confreres therefore, who sacrifice their time and strength in a demanding work to create for the community the conditions needed for a more efficient pastoral work, deserve all our encouragement.

² Cf. D. RICCERI, *Our poverty today* ASC 253 (1968), p. 46 ff.; cf. also on this theme *The Salesian Rector* (1986), Appendix

³ On the figure of the salesian economist, cf. also D. LA, *Religious basis in economic and administrative activity of the salesian*, in ASC 300, p. 47-51

⁴ Cf. SGC, 726

*Let us pray for our confreres
who have been called by obedience to the delicate task
of administering the material goods of the community,
that as they carry out for us and among us
the hidden and sacrificing work
performed by St Joseph in the Holy Family,
they may be given through his intercession
the support of the Father's Providence.*

*That our economers may be strengthened
by the collaboration and gratitude of the confreres,
and so be encouraged to work
as ministers of Divine Providence,
we pray to the Lord.*

*That our economers and their collaborators
may be able to link a spirit of evangelical poverty
with a brotherly and solicitous concern
for the needs of their confreres and the young,
and above all for those who require
special care and attention,
we pray to the Lord.*

*Lord our God, give to our economers
the shrewd business capacity of the wise administrator,
that they may be able to induce trust in the confreres,
arouse the charity of benefactors and friends, and bring
down divine blessings on our Society.*

CONCLUSION

"I will run the way of your commands; you will give freedom to my heart" (Ps 119,32).

The Constitutions come to an end. They have set our Rule of life as a process of growth "into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4,15; C chap. VIII), and it is fitting and efficacious that the final biblical text should remain open. We recognize and acknowledge that for us the articles of the Constitutions are a grace of God to be numbered among his "commandments" and we affirm that they signpost the path we want to follow. Behind this there is a profound and substantial reason which we have been gradually discovering: the presence of a mysterious other Person in intimate contact with us, who "gives freedom" to our heart.

This whole line of thought finds in Psalm 119, a hymn and meditation in honour of the Law of the Lord, as indeed in the whole Bible a solid foundation: the law of God is the way he traces out and shows to man. It is first and foremost the great plan of salvation he has established for the world, in which the indications of his grace (God's powerful interventions) and his moral commands are inseparably woven together. A man will follow the right path in life it coincides with the one God has marked out, and hence he will follow it sincerely and willingly in loving fidelity to the "law" of the Lord.

The word "run" indicates the great yearning and willingness of the pilgrim who is prompted by the thought of the goal at which he is aiming ("let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith", Heb 12, 1-2). To linger on the way, or worse still "to look back" means to be "unfit for the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9,62).

To *give freedom to the heart* means in Biblical terms to fill it with courage and consolation (Ps 25,17; Is. 60,5). St Augustine notes: "We must not allow ourselves to be hemmed in by fear of punishment, but open ourselves in the joy and love of righteousness", and this all the more because God has written his law in our hearts (Jer 31,33), and the Spirit gently guides our steps in the law's fulfilment.

* * *

The text of the Constitutions written by the Founder and approved by the Apostolic See contained a concluding article, placed immediately after the formula of the vows. It recalled the personal responsibility for the observance of the Rule, and at the same time provided an implicit stimulus to fidelity to the promise made before God and the Church.¹

This conclusion remained practically unaltered right down to the edition of 1966.²

¹Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, F. MOTTO, p. 209

²Cf. *Constitutions 1966*, art. 200

The SGC, in revising the text according to the criteria given by Vatican II, preserved the substance of the earlier text but widened its perspective, basing the faithful observance of the Rule on its deep ecclesial and salesian significance. Art. 200 of the Constitutions approved "ad experimentum" by the SGC, referring back to the Foreword, was an invitation to find in the text of the Rule "the spiritual riches of our tradition" as a true evangelical way of life which the Church, by its approval, had authenticated for the growth of every member and of the whole Society according to the spirit of the Founder.³

The GC22 made its own the thought of the SGC and decided to broaden the content of the "conclusion", after receiving various requests to do so from provincial chapters and individual confreres.⁴

As a result the Conclusion is now made up of six articles which, in addition to certain general observations about our particular law, present some global considerations on the sense of the Constitutions and the responsibility of observing them, emphasizing especially the values of fidelity and perseverance "as a response which we continually renew to the special Covenant that the Lord has made with us" (C 195).

Details of the concluding part are as follows:

- a first article (C191) lists all the items that go with the Constitutions to form the "particular law" which regulates the life and activity of our Society; this article corresponds substantially to art. 123 of the Constitutions of 1972;
- two articles (C 192, 193) provide a general description of the constitutional text from both a charismatic and juridical point of view; they also deal with the question of the authentic interpretation of the Constitutions and the moral obligations that derive from their profession and approval by the Church;
- *art. 194* deals with the possible separation of a confrere from the Society; this is a delicate matter which touches the conscience of the individual and our communal responsibility; appropriately it has been placed in a context which treats of commitment and fidelity;
- *art. 195* is a stimulus to fidelity and perseverance, founded entirely on God's fidelity and sustained by love for the young; it is at the same time an incentive to gratitude for the gifts offered us by salesian life which have been described in the constitutional text. This article corresponds to art. 119 in the text of 1972, and finds a fitting place in the concluding section;
- finally the text closes with an article (C 196), deeply spiritual in tone, which serves as a worthy crowning synthesis of the whole. It reproduces in large part the content of the Foreword to the previous edition (1972), which finds here a very meaningful location. In it Jesus Christ is proclaimed as our supreme living Rule, Mary our guide, Don Bosco our model, and the Constitutions "*a way that leads to Love*".⁵

³ Cf. *Constitutions 1972*, art. 200

⁴ Cf. *Schemi precapitolari*, II, p. 293-297

⁵ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC; 312 (1985), p. 27

ART. 191 THE PARTICULAR LAW OF OUR SOCIETY

The life and activity of communities and confreres are regulated by the universal law of the Church and the particular law of the Society.

The latter is expressed in the Constitutions, which represent our basic code, the general Regulations, the deliberations of the general chapter, the general and provincial directories, and in other decisions made by competent authorities.

This article, essentially juridical in character, sets the "*particular law*" of the Salesian Society into the background of the universal law of the Church, and at the same time provides a synthesis of the sources of our law.

It must be remembered in the first place that the new Code of Canon Law, while providing a more general legislation, respects the principle of decentralization. One of the criteria underlying the reforms of the laws concerning consecrated life was, in fact, that of leaving to the different institutes the possibility of making more elastic norms, adapted to their needs and the style of life corresponding to their charismata. For this reason the Code frequently says that as regards certain aspects of their life the institutes themselves can and must lay down their own legislation.

And so the first paragraph of the article indicates the kinds of norms, in order of priority, which regulate the life and activity of communities ad confreres.

They are:

- *the norms of the universal law*, emanating from the Apostolic See and contained mainly in the Code of Canon Law;
- *the norms of particular law* promulgated by the diocesan Bishop in matters in which even Religious are subject to him. For example, can. 678 states: "In matters concerning the care of souls, the public exercise of divine worship and other works of the apostolate, religious are subject to the authority of the Bishops".¹
- *the norms of our own particular law*, i.e. the norms of the legislation which the Society itself, through the competent authority, lays down for its members and communities at world or provincial level.

The second paragraph specifies what is meant by our own particular law, and indicates its sources. It is "expressed in the Constitutions, the general Regulations, the deliberations of the general chapter, the general and provincial directories and in other decisions made by competent authorities".

We may note that the universal law of the Church distinguishes between the Constitutions, regularly called the "basic code", and the other sources of an institute's own law which must exist and be approved by the institute itself, and which by the same authority can be revised, adapted and brought up to date. When it is said, for example, that the supreme Moderator is to be elected in accordance with the norms of

¹ CIC, can. 678 §1

the Constitutions,² it means that the details of the manner of making the election must be inserted in the basic code and hence must be approved by the Apostolic See. When, on the other hand, it is said that an institute's own law is to make suitable provisions so that superiors constituted for a defined time do not continue in offices of governance for too long a period without an interval,³ it means that an indication in this regard must appear in some part of the institute's law. It may be placed in the Constitutions if so desired, but it is not obligatory to do so, it may be simply placed among the Regulations or some other part of the particular law.

Let us look at the matter in a little more detail.

1. The basic code

This means the book which contains the essential elements which define the Institute's identity and mission, the purpose it seeks to achieve, its animating spirit and the way in which it is organized. In the Constitutions the evangelical and theological elements relating to consecrated life and union with the Church must be harmonized with the juridical elements needed to provide a precise definition of the physiognomy, ends and means for attaining them that the institute has available. The Code of Canon Law, however, warns that the norms should not be multiplied without real necessity, because it is not the multiplicity of laws that guarantees that they will be observed.

It is characteristic of the basic code that it must be approved by the Apostolic See: this approval, which is necessary in addition for any subsequent modifications, has the purpose of guaranteeing fidelity to the institute's proper character.

2. The other sources of an institute's own law

Of their nature the Constitutions must contain whatever is of stable significance and importance in time and space; but there are other subsidiary elements of a practical nature, which apply the Constitutions and are relatively stable, organic and complementary in nature, and are approved and promulgated by general chapters or other competent authorities. In these sources or collected documents, which are at the same time both normative and spiritual, are contained everything that is necessary for the life and activity of the Society or of a province, but which can be more easily revised when necessary for adaptation to times and places.

The GC21 gave a concise description of these texts containing our own law:⁴

— The *general Regulations* represent the collection of prescriptions which apply the general norms of the basic code in a manner adapted to changeable situations. Thus they contain the concrete, practical applications of the Constitutions to

² Cf. CIC, can. 625 §1

³ Cf. CIC, can. 624 §2

⁴ GC21, 380-384

matters of universal import and are consequently valid throughout the Congregation.

- *General and provincial directories*: these are a collection of practical norms, based on constitutional principles and salesian tradition, which regulate the life and mission of the Society in certain specific sectors: at world level they are promulgated by the Rector Major with his council, often by the mandate of a general chapter (an example is the "Ratio fundamentalis institutionis et studiorum"); at provincial level they are formulated by the provincial chapter, but acquire binding force only after approval by the Rector Major with his council.
- Finally there are *decrees or deliberations*, promulgated by the general chapter or by competent authorities at world or provincial level; they are dispositions which relate to precise aspects of specific matters, and are sometimes valid only for a stated period of time (e.g. for the following six years).

All these normative texts, together with the Constitutions or basic code, constitute the "*Rule of life*" of the salesian, using the term in its widest sense.

*Almighty God,
your law is our Word of life;
grant that we may accept as a gift from your hands
the precepts by which you indicate
the path we are to follow,
and that we may fulfil them with fidelity
as a response of love;
so that like your Son Jesus Christ,
we may fully correspond
with your plans in our regard,
and be called your sons.
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 192 MEANING AND INTERPRETATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

The present Constitutions enshrine the spiritual riches of the traditions of the Salesians of Don Bosco, and define the apostolic project of our Society.

The Church, in approving them, assures us of the authenticity of the gospel way of life traced out by our Founder, and recognizes in it "a special benefit for the whole People of God".¹

The Apostolic See alone is their authentic interpreter, but for the practical direction of the Society and the good of the confreres the Rector Major with his council, as well as the general chapter, can give interpretations.

¹RD 14; cf. PC 1

Art. 192 completes and enriches the preceding article by concentrating our attention on the deep significance of the basic code or Constitutions in the life and mission of the Society. It connects up with the ideas expressed in the Foreword and in the first article of our constitutional text, which linked the Rule directly with Don Bosco the Founder: in the general introduction to this Commentary many elements were pointed out which help in the discovery of the meaning of the Constitutions.

Here emphasis is laid on two elements in particular:

— *The Constitutions "enshrine the spiritual riches of the traditions of the Salesians of Don Bosco"*: this means that in the Constitutions the life of the Congregation and the holiness of its members coalesce with the spiritual experience of the Founder: all the gifts and blessings by which the Holy Spirit has enriched the salesian charisma have found a place in the text, which has rightly been called the most precious patrimony of the Society.¹ At the end of the work of revision, the Rector Major was able to say in all truth to the members of the GC22: "We are neither the only nor even the principal agents in the production of the new text of the Constitutions and Regulations: we are heirs of Don Bosco and have inherited a wealth of lived experience from generations of witnesses; the revision is the result of active participation on the part of the entire Congregation".²

— *They "define the apostolic project of our Society"*: this aspect has already been dealt with in the general introduction to this Commentary.³ It responds to the prescription of the Code of Canon Law that the fundamental code or Constitutions of an institute are to contain "the intentions of the Founder and all that the competent ecclesiastical authority has approved concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute, and of its sound traditions".⁴ The Constitutions will also contain the basic norms about the governance of the Congregation, the discipline of the members, and their formation and admission.⁵ The evangelical, theological and

¹Cf. CIC, can. 578

²GC22, 58

³Cf. general introduction p. 28-29

⁴Cf. CIC, can. 578; can. 587

⁵Cf. CIC, can. 587 §1

juridical elements combine to provide a satisfactory description of the Society's plan of life and activity, the "particular style of sanctification and apostolate"⁶ which "has its proper field of competency and a measure of real autonomy".⁷

The second paragraph speaks of the *approval of the Constitutions by the Apostolic See*: this is a specific characteristic of any religious institute recognized as being of pontifical right (cf. C 4).

This approval takes on a particular importance because it "assures us of the authenticity of the gospel way of life traced out by our Founder"; it guarantees the ecclesial nature of the charism to which the Spirit has given rise. We may note the meaningful phrase taken from the Apostolic Exhortation "Redemptionis donum": the Church, in approving our Constitutions recognizes in the Society "a special benefit for the whole People of God,"⁸ i.e. recognizes that this form of life "belongs to her life and holiness".⁹ We recall what Don Bosco said when presenting the first approved text in 1874: "We should welcome this fact as among the most glorious in the annals of our Society, since through it we have the assurance that, in observing our rules, we rest upon a firm, secure and, I may add, infallible basis, since the judgment of the Supreme Head of the Church who has sanctioned them is infallible".¹⁰

Finally, the third paragraph of the article dwells on the *interpretation* of the Constitutions.

We know that interpretation is a mental process by which the relationship is established between a linguistic sign and a thought or a fact. Now, since the Constitutions are ecclesiastical laws and, when approved by the Apostolic See, become pontifical laws, it follows that only the Apostolic See can interpret them authentically.

The text nevertheless, with the approval of the same Apostolic See, lays down certain spheres for the interpretation of the next in the life of the Society:

1. The General Chapter, lawfully and correctly convoked and assembled according to the Constitutions (cf. C 146 ff.), can by an absolute majority of votes:
 - authentically interpret any doubt about the meaning of the Constitutions, and resolve any difficulty that may arise about their observance and application;
 - modify the text itself of the Constitutions by either abrogation or derogation, or by adding new prescriptions; but in such a case the modifications will have no binding force until they have been approved by the Apostolic See.¹¹
2. The Rector Major can interpret the Constitutions "for the practical direction of the Society and the good of the confreres"; he can also suspend or modify a constitutional norm with, however, the consent of the Apostolic See. Both of these

⁶ MR 11

⁷ MR 13

⁸ RD 14

⁹ Cf. LG 44

¹⁰ D. BOSCO, *Introduction to Constitutions*, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 227

¹¹ Cf. C1C, can. 587 §2; C 148

are possible in cases of urgent necessity and with the consent of the general council, and will remain in force until the following general chapter.

*Lord our God,
you have called us to serve you
in the salesian Society;
grant us an understanding heart
to discover in our Rule of life the
sure sign of your will for us.*

*Help us to understand and love
the spiritual riches of our salesian traditions,
so that we may be zealous followers
of the gospel way of life
authentically indicated by our Founder,
and be for your people in our life and works
true witnesses to holiness.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 193 BINDING QUALITY OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

The Constitutions are binding on every member in virtue of the obligation he has freely assumed before the Church by religious profession.

Without prejudice to what is laid down by universal law,¹ major superiors can dispense temporarily from individual disciplinary articles.

¹ cf. CIC, can 85-87; 90; 92; 93; 1245

The binding force of the Constitutions

In the concluding article of the 1972 Constitutions it was stated: -When approving them the Church does not intend to impose obligations under pain of sin". This was substantially a repetition of the more explicit declaration in the previous edition: "For the tranquillity of souls, the Society declares that these rules do not of themselves oblige under pain of either mortal or venial sin". A similar declaration is found in the Constitutions of nearly all the institutes that have come into being during the past two centuries. The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had indeed prescribed such a declaration in the "Normae secundum quas" of 1901.

Significant therefore is the change of language introduced in the recent revision of the Constitutional text; the intention was to place more clearly the duty of the practice of the Rule at its true level, which is not that of simple moral obligation and formal observance, but one that stems from the loving option made at profession.

Indeed it makes no sense to speak of "obligation under the pain of sin" in the case of a religious who has freely and deliberately chosen to give himself completely to Christ. Obligation under the pain of sin would expose us to the risk of falling back into a sterile legalism, to see the law as something in itself and forget the call that lies behind it forget that its observance requires the freedom of sons and that its purpose is to entrust ourselves in love to a Person: "And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him: ... come, follow me" (Mk 10,21).

This is an indication that the Church takes our profession seriously: we have no need to be bound under pain of sin because such an obligation would be inadequate in the case of one who had made profession to seek total love. The final article will emphasize that "for us, the Lord's disciples, (the Constitutions) are away that leads to Love" (C 196). "Our living Rule is Jesus Christ... present in Don Bosco..." (ibid.): the Constitutions put before us a Rule of life which we accept and welcome with gratitude and docility so as to attain the fullness of charity.

Summing up, we may say that the Constitutions carry with them an obligation of loyalty to the profession made, an obligation which is the more gratuitous and demanding because it stems from the law of love. The salesian is zealous in observing them, because he knows in faith that they are an authentic expression of the way of the Gospel to which the Lord has called him and which he has joyfully accepted.

Docility to the Constitutions is an obligation incumbent on each and all: on those whose duty it is to animate others to be faithful (cf. C55), and on every confrere who wants to contribute to the building of the community; even when it seems to run contrary to his own judgements and ideas, the Rule is a sure and certain shining path to follow. The members humbly bow to the Constitutions in a spirit of loving faith in the will of God, "bringing their powers of intellect and will and their gifts of nature and grace to bear on the execution of commands and on the fulfilment of the tasks laid upon them".¹

And what about a salesian who does not observe the Rule? What happens in the case of one who through weakness or negligence, or perhaps even through contempt, fails in matters which are serious or even only light? He realizes that he has sinned, because by transgressing one or other of the norms, he has tried to turn aside from the path of his vocation and from the solemn obligation he took on before God, the Church, his confreres and young people. Every act of infidelity slows up his own progress and that of the community as well. The intensity of his desire to be a true salesian will be the measure of his humble and courageous efforts to be faithful day by day. The simple truth is that he will always feel that he is a sinner; each evening his examination of conscience will reveal faults. He will never love as much as he should and could do! St Paul warns us that we shall never finish paying off our debt of love (cf. Rom 13,8).

For this reason the Constitutions themselves (C 90) urge us to continually renew our will for conversion and the purification of our heart, seriously but without anxiety, in the peace and humble joy of having been called by One who will never desert us.

Dispensation from prescriptions of the Rule

Related to the obligation to practise the Constitutions is the problem of dispensation from some requirement. This point is dealt with in the second part of the article.

Dispensation is an act by which the appropriate authority takes away the obligation of observing a norm or a precept.

In general it is the doctrine of canon law that a superior can dispense:

- in cases of factual doubt in respect of laws from which the Apostolic See is accustomed to dispense (in cases of juridical doubt the law does not bind at all);
- in urgent cases, i.e. when it is difficult to have recourse to the Apostolic See (or to the appropriate authority) and delay would be seriously harmful, always supposing that it is a question of a law from which dispensations are customarily given.

It is in this sense that the article must be interpreted. The major superior, i.e. the provincial and vice-provincial (in addition obviously to the Rector Major and the

¹

Constitutions which contain disciplinary norms. The dispensation is given provisionally, i.e. for a certain period of time, and only in connection with norms which are not essentially constitutive of the Congregation.²

This in no way limits the dispositions of the universal law in virtue of which, for example, the superior:

- can grant a dispensation in particular cases from private vows, for a just reason and always provided the dispensation does not injure the acquired rights of others, to members, novices and those who reside day and night in a house of the Congregation;³
- can dispense the same people from the obligation of observing a holyday or day of penance.⁴

*God our Father,
you have given to man the sublime gift of free will
and have made possible for him
an unforced service of love.*

*Grant that
by the loving acceptance and faithful observance
of the Rule of life we have freely professed,
we may be assimilated to Christ, the obedient Servant,
to the praise of your glory
and the salvation of our neighbour.*

Through Christ our Lord.

²Cf. CIC, can. 85

³Cf. CIC, can. 1196, 2

⁴Cf. CIC, can. 1245

ART. 194 SEPARATION FROM THE SOCIETY

Should it happen that a member believes in conscience that he should withdraw from the Society, he shall do so before God after he has taken the advice of prudent persons, and with the support of the understanding and charity of his confreres.

He may not however leave the Society until his temporary profession has expired or he has not been admitted to further profession, or until he has been lawfully freed from the vows and obligations he assumed at the profession itself by passing to another institute, by dispensation or by dismissal in conformity with the universal law.¹

¹ cf. CIC, can. 685; 688; 689; 691-704

It may seem surprising that this article, dealing with the case of a member who in conscience believes that he should leave the Society or who for just reasons is separated from it, should appear in a context which speaks of fidelity to the Rule. The placing of the article, after being discussed in the general chapter, was in fact decided on after consulting the Congregation for religious and Secular Institutes, and is motivated by the fact that while reflecting on fidelity one must keep in mind the very real problem that arises when a member makes a different option.

Separation from a religious institute is always a serious and delicate matter. In it are interwoven lawful rights and interests, and involved too are lofty values of freedom and conscience in the natural order, and in the supernatural order man's eternal destiny. It is not a matter that can be approached either superficially or unilaterally, neither on the part of the confrere who might tend to make his own choice without a serious discernment in dialogue with his superiors, nor on the part of the institute which might be tempted to expel a member too hastily to free the Congregation from a difficulty. Both these unilateral ways of going about the matter could prove prejudicial both to the individual concerned and to the community itself.

Sometimes repugnance is experienced in dealing with norms concerning separation from the institute or dismissal, or even in speaking of correction, admonition or penance. One gets the impression that such things are considered as alien to the spirit of charity and brotherly understanding, while on the other hand it can happen that complaints about a confrere whose conduct proves harmful to the peace or mission of the community lead to requests for his removal being made without much reflection. An intelligent following in a spirit of rectitude of the laws that are laid down, without giving way to pressure or anger, will enable matters to proceed with harmony and balance, and will safeguard the legitimate interests and concerns of all the parties involved.

The confrere who leaves the Society

The first paragraph contemplates the case of a confrere who believes in conscience that he should withdraw from the Society: this could happen, for example,

because he wants to enter another institute, or a diocese, or perhaps return to the lay state, because by remaining in the religious life or in a community he would encounter obstacles that in practice turn out to be insuperable.

In a case of this kind the Constitutions first invite the member to act in full sincerity before God, i.e. not for negative reasons, not through weariness or escapism, but because mature reflection has led him to the conclusion that God wants him to follow a different path. A sign of this sincerity is recourse to competent and prudent persons for advice, and particularly the willingness for fraternal discussion with superiors. In such circumstances Don Bosco use to recommend openness with superiors and the avoidance of any hasty decisions: "In times when your heart and mind are agitated by doubts, I recommend you not to come to any decision, because in such decisions there cannot be the will of God. 'Non in commotione Dominus'. At such times I urge you to approach your superiors, lay open your heart, and follow faithfully the counsel they give you".¹ This is, in any case, the practice throughout all religious tradition: in a field of such importance it would be an enormous risk to take decisions without prior consultation.

In addition the confrere is asked to act in full loyalty with regard to the Church and the Congregation. Mindful of the commitment that he made freely and in all seriousness, he must not leave the Society until he has been freed from his vows and from the commitments assumed at his profession. The Regulations recall that this loyalty extends also to precise commitments concerning material goods (cf. R 54).

But the article also emphasizes the attitude of the community in a sad circumstance like the departure of a confrere. Already art. 52 had pointed out that the community has a special duty of support in respect of members who are suffering doubts or difficulties regarding their own vocation; now the article says that the member who is leaving the Society will be strengthened by the "understanding and charity" of the confreres. The latter will be careful not to make rash judgements nor assume hostile attitudes, and will remember that this is a very needy brother who must still be shown love. The practical expression of this love and charity is expressed in art. 54 of the Regulations which, after saying that the member leaving shall not have the right to demand anything for the work done in the Society, adds in the same breath that "fraternal help will be afforded him to face the initial difficulties of his new situation". In the house of Don Bosco there are many mansions... God grant that no confrere may leave us for false motives or through our own fault!

Manner of separation from the Society

The second paragraph of the article, which was made more complete at the request of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, presents a concise summary of the different ways in which separation from the Society can come about. They can be summed up as follows:

¹ D BOSCO, *Introduction to Constitutions*, cf. OF, XXVII, p. 48

1. *Transfer to another institute.*

This is a possibility offered to confreres in perpetual vows. The subject remains a religious but changes his Congregation. In such a case the agreement of the supreme Moderators of both institutes with the consent of their councils is required. After a suitable period of trial the candidate may make his profession in the new institute, without the need for a new novitiate.²

2. *Separation from the institute at the end of temporary profession.*

This happens when a member does not renew his vows,³ or because he is not admitted to the renewal of temporary vows or to perpetual profession.

3. *An insult to leave the institute with dispensation from vows.* Such an insult can be granted, for grave reasons and after serious discernment:

- to the temporarily professed by the supreme Moderator with the consent of his Council;⁴
- to the perpetually professed by the competent authority, in accordance with law, after hearing the opinion of the supreme Moderator with his council.⁵

In the case of deacons and priests, the indult can be granted for passage to the secular clergy ("*secularization*"): in this case it is necessary that a Bishop, after weighing up the reasons for the request, be willing to incardinate the cleric or at least receive him into his diocese on trial; after an experimental period of five years the religious becomes automatically incardinated, or he may be sent back earlier to the Congregation.⁶

It should be noted that in every form of dispensation, the indult when granted and notified, if not rejected at the time of notification, includes by virtue of the law itself a dispensation from obligations arising from the profession.

4. *Dismissal from the Society.*

This is a very serious measure, for which canon law gives detailed norms for different cases:

— There is an immediate dismissal ("ipso facto"), contemplated by the Code of Canon Law, as a consequence of certain facts diametrically opposed to religious profession: in this case the major superior with his council need only make an official declaration of the fact after obtaining the necessary proof.⁷ For other facts, gravely

²Cf. CIC, can. 684

³Cf. CIC, can. 688 §1

⁴Cf. CIC, can. 688 §2

⁵Cf. CIC, can. 691

⁶Cf. CIC, can. 693

⁷Cf. CIC, can. 694

opposed to religious behaviour, the superior is obliged to set in motion the process for dismissal, after notifying the confrere concerned of the gravity of the situation.⁸

— The dismissal of a confrere can be decided on by the supreme Moderator with his council for reasons which are "grave, external, imputable and juridically proven". Because this is a very serious procedure (which must be ratified by the Apostolic See), the Code gives examples of the grave reasons which can justify dismissal, and indicates the procedure to be followed.⁹

Clearly every form of dismissal carries with it the dispensation from the vows and obligations arising from religious profession.¹⁰

In conclusion we may recall that those who, after finishing the novitiate, have left the institute can be readmitted by the supreme Moderator with the consent of his council, without the obligation of repeating the novitiate.¹¹

As was said at the beginning, all this should be considered in the light of fidelity to God's gift, but also with understanding and charity towards members who in conscience make a decision which is a serious one and frequently causes them a great deal of suffering.

*God, our loving Father,
send your Spirit of Light,
Wisdom and Fortitude,
to your confreres who are suffering doubts,
to help them to overcome their trial
and discern the way you want them to follow.*

*Grant that all the members of our community may
accompany them with greater prayer and love, to
help them to serve you
wherever you may call them.*

Through Christ our Lord.

⁸ Cf. CIC, can. 695

⁹ Cf. CIC, can. 696-700

¹⁰ Cf. CIC, can. 701

¹¹ cf. CIC, can. 690

ART. 195 FIDELITY AND PERSEVERANCE

Fidelity to the commitment made at our religious profession is a response which we continually renew to the special Covenant the Lord has made with us.

Our perseverance is founded entirely on the fidelity of God who loved us first, and is nourished by the grace of his consecration. It is sustained too by love for the young to whom we are sent, and is expressed in gratitude to the Lord for the gifts that salesian life offers us.

The Constitutions end with an invitation to fidelity (C 195), through the generous practice of the Rule (C 196). The two final articles are closely connected by their content, in which is found once again the fundamental source of inspiration of the Constitutions, already expressed in art. 3 and 23-25, on God's consecrating initiative and the salesian's response in faith, an initiative and response which is seen most clearly at the moment of religious profession, made publicly before the Church (C 23). Both articles speak of our "response", the first to the "special covenant" with God the Father, and the second to the "predilection of the Lord Jesus". And this response is our life itself, generously given for the young!

Art. 195 is certainly one of the most important in the Constitutions. It contains expressions of great spiritual significance: "special covenant", "grace of his consecration", "fidelity to the commitment made at profession", "a response we continually renew", "love for the young"; noteworthy too is the decisive character of some of the expressions: "continually", "special", "entirely". The fidelity of the salesian is described from two standpoints: as a personal relationship with God, and then as a reality which involves our relations with youth and the whole of our salesian life.

Our fidelity, a response to God with the help of his Spirit

The first part of the article (the first paragraph and the introductory phrase of the second) speaks of "fidelity" and "perseverance". It is really a question of the same reality seen under two different aspects: "*fidelity*" is the continuation of the relationship freely established at the moment of profession: fidelity to oneself, to the Congregation, to young people and especially to the Lord; "*perseverance*" is the continuity of the efforts necessary to keep oneself faithful ("daily efforts to grow", as art. 25 puts it).

A comparison of content and expressions makes it clear that this article is a prolongation of articles 23 and 25: It is a matter of fidelity "to the commitment made at our religious profession" and to the significance inherent in that fundamental act of the life of the salesian.

There are many motivations and highly esteemed human virtues which, without any doubt, enter into the concept of fidelity: personal rectitude, respect for a promise that has been made, brotherly friendship, concern for a common good in which one is involved, etc., but our fidelity as consecrated Salesians has roots which go much

deeper: we remain faithful first of all to a Person, to one who has "loved us first", who has called us, consecrated us to himself by his grace, established a "special covenant" between us and himself. "Profession", said art. 23, "is a sign of a loving encounter between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds". "Father, I offer myself totally to you" (cf. C 24), was the response that each of us made. Fidelity is nothing else than the continual renewal of that response, which we meant to be "total". For us therefore, being faithful means living the logical consequences of the decisive act of profession, "one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make" (C 23).

But the consciousness of being faithful to God and to the self-donation made to him on the day of profession is not enough. It is also indispensable to be clearly aware that *one cannot be faithful without him*. If fidelity were nothing more than the result of an indomitable will to persevere in the chosen direction, there would be the possibility that at times of darkness and depression such determination might give way. But fidelity is founded on faith: it is absolute trust in One who deserves it and who has preceded us with his own fidelity. The whole of Scripture indeed sings the praises of the faithful God: He is the rock of Israel (Dent 32.4); his word will stand for ever (Is 40,8); his promises will be kept (Tob 14,4); he has spoken and will fulfil what he has said (Num 21,19); God's loving designs will be infallibly realized (Ps 31,11). St Paul reminds the Christians of Corinth: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son"(1 Cot 1,9). To the totality of our gift corresponds therefore the total support we find in him and in the covenant of love he has deigned to establish with us.

There is an important detail in the text: "Our perseverance ... *is nourished by the grace of his consecration*". In the consecrating act of God "through the gift of his Spirit- (C 3), we discover the profound reason for our fidelity: God has taken us for himself; he has bound us to himself in his Son and in the strength of his Spirit: it is an enduring Gift, and one that is infinitely dynamic: a living Presence, "a lasting source of grace and a support for daily efforts to grow towards perfect love" (C 25).

In the eyes of the world perpetual profession may seem a rash or senseless thing, and to persevere in it doubtful or impossible. But the salesian, knowing "in whom he has believed" (2 Tim 1,12), goes quietly and surely ahead, leaning from one moment to the next on the anticipating love of the Father, on the saving presence of the risen Son and on the strength communicated by the Spirit, trusting also in the motherly assistance of Mary. All this evidently supposes a basic attitude of prayer and watchfulness.

Our fidelity is sustained by love for the young

Articles 24 and 25 refer to another important support for our fidelity: *the help of the confreres* the Lord has given us. "Father, may your grace ... together with my brother salesians keep me faithful day by day" (C 24). "The confreres ... are for us a stimulus and help on the path to holiness" (C 25).

Art. 195 emphasizes too an aspect directly concerned with our mission: our fidelity to God includes in practice *fidelity to those to whom he has sent us*, because God has consecrated us to himself so as to send us to serve the young wherever he wishes (cf. C 3). When making his profession, the salesian says to the Father: "I offer myself totally to you, and pledge myself to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me".

This is an endorsement of the traditional image of the salesian: he is never presented without a group of youngsters around him. Don Bosco spoke frequently of this primary commitment, which gives sense to the salesian's whole life. Two of his more significant statements were: "The Lord sent me to look after boys. I must therefore cut down on other work and keep myself fit for thee."¹ "Our primary goal is the care for youth, and consequently no concern which takes us away from that can be good".²

Experience shows us how true this is: the salesian who has little love for the young is in danger of abandoning his vocation; one who sincerely loves them, even though on that account he may suffer difficulties and trials, will never fail in his duty to them. Humble daily dedication to the young is for us a practical form of being faithful to God!

The article concludes with a final consideration: our fidelity is *sustained also by the experience of interior joy* which the salesian plan of life offers us: this experience is expressed in an attitude of thankfulness to the Lord.

Don Bosco has assured us that the salesian who is faithful in God's service will always be happy. And this is indeed the case! In community life and in the apostolate he receives from the Lord so many gifts of grace, possibilities for personal growth and brotherly friendship, and opportunities for doing good. God is a good master. The mission he entrusts to us and the family of which he invites us to form a part are sources of great joy: the one who is faithful will indeed be a happy man, and these gifts of God are themselves an encouragement to persevere in fidelity.

Here therefore we have an invitation to the action of grace. We should not be surprised if an occasional doubt comes along. Or we find that fidelity is not immune from temptation and trial (Scripture provides abundant evidence of this), but the love of God is greater than any difficulty. It is a good thing to keep in mind the promise of fidelity of the pioneer Salesians: "even if all our companions should be dispersed, even if only two, or even one, should remain, that one would strive to promote this Pious Society's growth and, as far as possible, always keep its rules".³

¹ BM VII, 171-172

² BM XIV, 216

³ Cf. BM VI, 361

*God of grace and fidelity
you have consecrated us to your service
in the youth apostolate,
and have given us in abundance
the gifts of your Spirit.*

*Grant that we may persevere
in our covenant with you,
so that our love for you who first loved us,
and for the young to whom you have sent
us, may be the expression of our gratitude
and foster a devotion pleasing to you.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART 196 AWAY THAT LEADS TO LOVE

Our living Rule is Jesus Christ, the Saviour announced in the Gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world, and whom we find present in Don Bosco who devoted his life to the young.

In response to the predilection of the Lord Jesus who has called us by name, and led by Mary, we willingly accept the Constitutions as Don Bosco's will and testament, for us our book of life and for the poor and the little ones a pledge of hope.

We meditate on them with faith and pledge ourselves to put them into practice; they are for us, the Lord's disciples, a way that leads to Love.

The final article of the Constitutions is a pressing invitation to the faithful practice of the Rule, but before this it expresses some thoughts which broaden our outlook in this respect and direct our gaze to the Person of Jesus Christ himself. Each of the three paragraphs reflects his light: "Jesus Christ the Saviour..., the Lord Jesus who has called us..., we the Lord's disciples".

In the light of Christ "our living Rule"

The first paragraph recalls a fundamental truth which expresses the absolute originality of Christianity: for the Christian there is only one law, the law of love. Jesus himself, in fact, summed up all the commandments in just one: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength; and you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (cf. Mt 22, 36-40). But there is more to be added: this concise and supreme law is not only an objective rule, expressed in happy and forceful terms Christian morality and holiness consist in resemblance to a Person, in whom the law of Love is incarnate, because "he loved to the end" (Jn 13,1): "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (On I 5,1 2).

The text of the Constitutions, after setting out the complete evangelical project of salesian life, turns to him who is our "living Rule", the perfect Model, seen in the complexity of his mystery:

- to the Christ of yesterday, such as the Gospel presents him;
- to the Christ of today, the risen Christ who lives in the Church and the world, who sends us his Spirit, who makes it possible for us to model ourselves little by little on him (cf. Jn 15,5);
- finally to the Christ present in the "Gospel in practice", the Saints, and for us in Don Bosco who, as an authentic disciple of the Good Shepherd, loved youth to the extent of being willing to give his life for them (cf. C 14); in Don Bosco we discern the countenance of Jesus and the fruits of his grace.

The Rule itself, therefore, invites us to read all the text of the Constitutions in the light of Christ and its "salesian translation" made by Don Bosco: "The salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ" (C 11).

Willing acceptance, meditation and practice of the Constitutions

The text began by presenting the initiative of the love of God who, through the Holy Spirit and the motherly intervention of Mary, raised up St John Bosco to carry out a project for the salvation of youth. Now, after describing that plan, a gift of the Father for the Church and for the world, we are reminded that it is still God's love that guides each salesian in a generous and faithful response for the salvation of the youth of the present day. Once again the greatness of our vocation is highlighted, enveloped as it is in God's loving initiative. Each of us has been the object of a love of predilection on the part of the Lord Jesus: "And Jesus looking upon him loved him" (cf. Mk 10,21); each of us has been called personally "by name": "Come, follow me" (ibid.). Each of us has been guided by Mary, as was Don Bosco from his dream at the age of nine.

The Constitutions have the purpose of helping us to live to the full this vocation of ours. For this purpose three fundamental attitudes are recommended to us: to accept them willingly as a precious gift; to meditate on them in faith so as to understand them well, and to practise them so that they will bear fruit.¹

- We must "*accept*" the Constitutions willingly for three specific reasons; they are:
 - "*Don Bosco's will and testament*": this thought connects the final article with the Foreword, and indeed with the first expression which opens the text: "For us Salesians our Rule Book is Don Bosco's living testament"; now at the end it is said that we truly welcome it as such, aware that the renewed text is in faithful continuity with that written by the Founder, and is imbued with his life and spirit;
 - "*our book of life*": the Constitutions are not an historical treatise nor simply a "fine book", but a concrete description of our vocation and an indication of the means by which we can realize it; in other words the Rule is a map of our salesian road through life, a book therefore which is practical and of vital importance;
 - a "*pledge of hope for the poor and the little ones*": young people too, and especially those who have been abandoned, have an interest in this book of the salesian Constitutions, where they are present in so many articles; it is quite clear in fact that the more fervently and courageously the Salesians follow the path here set out for them, the greater will be the number of "the poor and little ones" who will be loved, helped and saved!

- Then we must "*meditate on them with faith*". Of itself the text of the Rule is a dead thing. It becomes significant and useful only through a conscious believer in whom it comes to life. It must be read with faith and pondered over: it is a highly

¹ Cf. comment on these attitudes in general introduction, p. 29-31

it is a demanding text which will be fully understood only after its meaning has been allowed to sink in, and has led to prayer. It is of great importance for the salesian to take the Rule frequently in hand as a text for meditation and prayer.

□ Finally we must set about *putting the Constitutions into practice*: they were written to be lived, to shape and animate all our life. And we must practise them with that interior enthusiasm indicated by the biblical text that inspires the concluding part: *"I will run the way of your commands; you will give freedom to my heart"* (Ps 119,32): we practise them with love and so as to increase our love ever more. This is the great wish contained in St. Augustine's "Regula ad servos Dei": "May the Lord enable you to observe this Rule with love, enthralled with its spiritual beauty, entranced with the sweet odour of Christ, convinced of the excellence of your way of life, not as slaves suffering beneath the yoke but as sons established in grace".²

The final phrase reminds us that the way along which the Rule leads us is precisely that of love: it takes us back to Christ and his Gospel. "Love", says St Paul, "is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13,10). "The holiness of the Church is shown forth in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful".³ And for us, pastoral charity is the centre and synthesis of the salesian spirit (C 10).

To know, love and practise the Constitutions is truly the way in which we follow the *"way that leads to Love"*, and the capital letter indicates that the reference is to infinite Love: Jesus, the "living Rule" and his Father: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4,16).

We are accompanied by Mary our Mother, the Help of Christians, "the star of our future inviting us to trust and optimism". "With her motherly help we can translate into our practical life Don Bosco's evangelical plan defined in the Constitutions", "so that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love" (C 8).⁴

*Father, you have loved us from all eternity,
and have begun and ended all things in love;
you have chosen us in Christ
before the foundation of the world
and have destined us to be holy and spotless in love,
for the praise and glory of your name.*

*Grant that by joyfully accepting your eternal
designs, with the guidance of your Holy Spirit
and following the example of Christ our Saviour,*

² St. Augustine, "*Regula ad servos Dei*", ch. VII, 1

³ W 39

⁴ GC22, 89

of his most holy Mother and of all our Saints, we may follow the path indicated by our Constitutions as a way which leads to the fullness of your Love. Through Christ our Lord.

Or

*Lord Jesus, we choose you
as the living centre of our faith and life,
and we want you to be our living Rule.
You are the Saviour proclaimed in the Gospel,
living today in the Church and the world,
and whom we find present in Don Bosco
who dedicated his life to young people.*

*Grant us, we pray, through Mary's special intercession,
to accept our Constitutions
as Don Bosco's will and testament,
our book of life and a pledge of hope for little ones,
and to be faithful to the option we have made.*

*Give freedom to our hearts,
that we may run in the way of your commands.*

You live and reign for ever and ever.