



ACTS OF THE SUPERIOR COUNCIL

OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY

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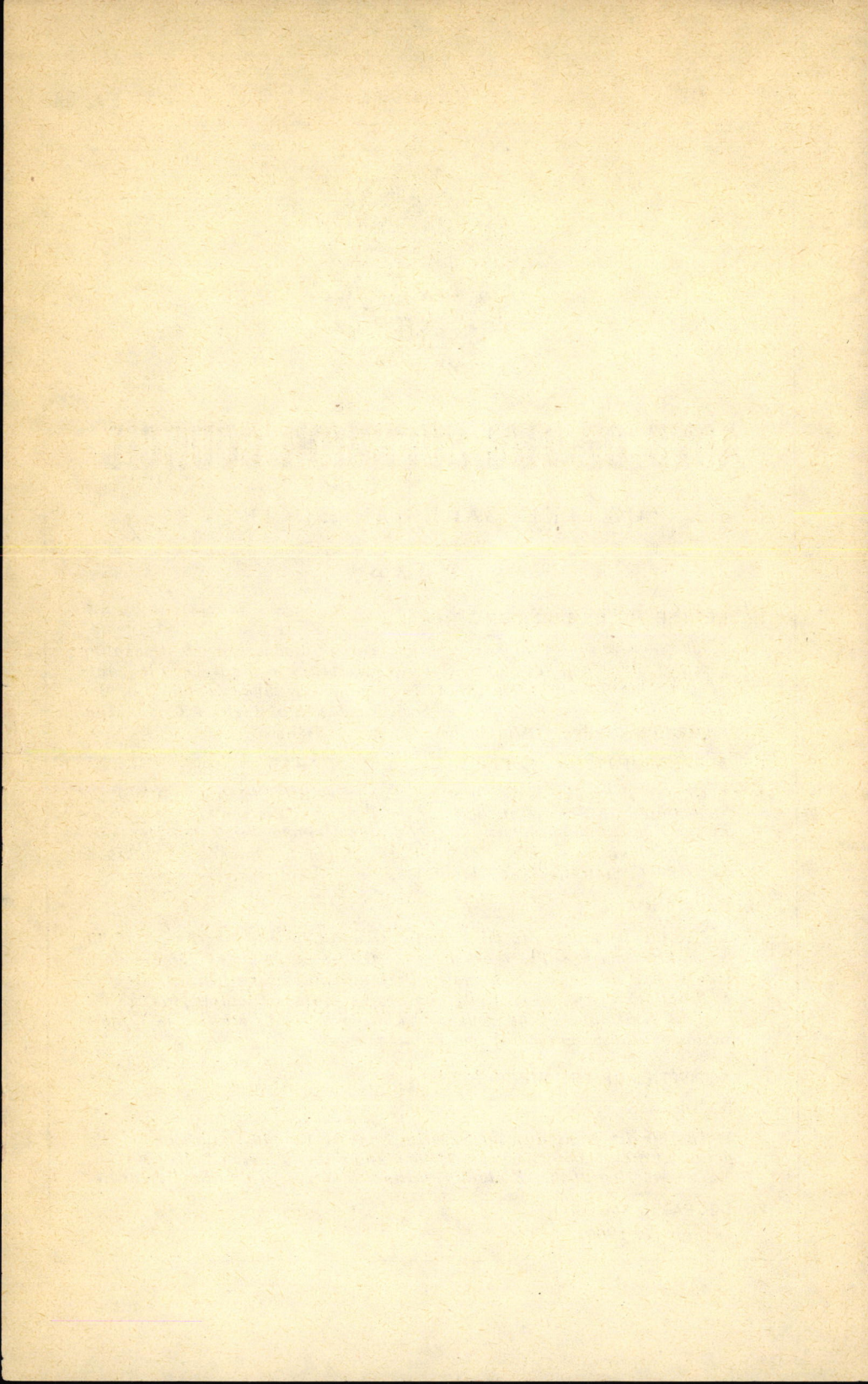
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1. LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Turin, 19th March, 1966

My Dear Confrères and Sons,

1. THE NEW SERIES OF THE «ACTS»

With this number of the *Acts* we begin the new series arranged on the lines provided by the General Chapter. You will also find an account of the Activities of the Superior Council in these first months. Everyone will be pleased to learn of the work and the problems facing the Superiors in the government of the Society, and it will help to make more close and vital the link between Headquarters and the Society throughout the world.

I sincerely pray that this innovation may be all for the best, and that it will especially help to make of our beloved Congregation one great family, which even while spread throughout the world, can live and work united by the bond of one heart and soul.

I am sure that our dear Provincials and Rectors, well aware of the important function in the Congregation of the *Acts*, will arrange that they may be read in such a way as is best and most convenient so that all the confrères may get to know them.

2. CONSOLING UNION OF HEARTS

I have been greatly touched by the numerous letters which have come to me during the last few weeks from so many confrères, from all continents. The celebration of the «Day of fidelity to Don Bosco», the first full day retreats, the solemn and fruitful celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the birth of our Father, the conclusion of the Provincial Conferences which have been held under the presidency of the Major Superiors concerned in all the continents, and lastly, the arrival of the first copies of the *Acts of the General Chapter* in Italian: all these have given rise to the spate of letters that were sent to the Superior General.

Provincials, Rectors, and many confrères have expressed their feelings of satisfaction, and their determination to be sincere and loyal sons of the Church which is renewing herself, and of Don Bosco who has spoken through the General Chapter.

May the Lord bless these expressions of good will and resolutions which are certainly shared by all the members of our family. A recurring note in all these letters is gratitude towards the Congregation, a Mother particularly concerned to give her children the food and comfort they need in these our times.

And it is this which is especially our concern as Superiors: to help you to be true Salesians, fully equipped for the needs of today.

The Members of the Superior Council have also celebrated the «Day of fidelity to Don Bosco». On the 24th of January, we were all at Colle Don Bosco; we spent a few hours in that humble homestead in prayer and meditation; we renewed our promise of fidelity to our dear Father, and in this we wished to associate that of all the members of our family. We finished with concelebration, in which all the Superiors and also our revered Don Ziggotti took part in the crypt of the Temple dedicated to Don Bosco.

The Italian «*Salesian Bulletin*» for March gives a full account of our fervent day of recollection.

3. OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN THE LIGHT OF THE «ACTS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER»

I referred above to the «*Acts of the General Chapters*».

I believe that the first copies have by now arrived everywhere.

Soon the translation will arrive in the different countries. Whoever glances through the book with all the material which it contains, will naturally experience that sense of admiration and gratitude which so many confrères have wished to express to the Superior General.

It is truly a «*gift*», a rich and timely gift which Don Bosco has given his sons in this age of change by means of the «*Acts of the General Chapter*».

Through its most qualified instrument, the Congregation has shown a providential appreciation of the needs of today, worthy of our Father, whose apostolate, by universal consent, is clearly marked, not only with a «*sense*» of the times, but with a positive foresight of the times.

We can then confidently say that we are travelling the road of authentic Salesian tradition, when, instead of insisting on certain formulae or practices, outworn and outdated by the inevitable passage of time and by the natural evolution of sociological and psychological conditions, we look for others which better correspond to the changing needs of individuals and their environment, and will be effective and practical in the conquest of souls which is the fundamental motive and constant aim of all our activities.

The Congregation (and even more so, the Church) is a sturdy old vine which at time can have some dead branches; evidently the vine dresser who wished to preserve these dead branches at all costs would jeopardize the fruitfulness of the vine; but it would be quite foolish to uproot the vine completely just because there are some dead branches on it.

The best way is always the balanced way, the truly practical and constructive solution, that equilibrium which was obvious in our General Chapter (as also in the Council, in the

authentic Council, I mean, as revealed in the Decrees), which far from any indiscriminate destruction of the past, knows how to face up with courage to what needs changing or introducing in order to maintain the century-old tree of the Congregation as something living and fruitful.

Every Salesian therefore, (and here we extend the vision of our work) in this historic and - as many say - decisive moment, with that sense of responsibility and of intelligent and balanced judgement which ought to distinguish him in the eyes of the Church and of the Congregation, ought to avoid two extremes both equally reprehensible and dangerous: the irrational attitude of one who would renew everything at all costs in a feverish rush towards what is new, discounting the past simply because it is the past; and the opposite attitude of one who would cling tenaciously to a collection of things which examined in the light of present day needs neither justify their existence nor fulfil that purpose nowadays for which they were once desirable and of value.

One can understand, therefore, the heavy responsibility which rests on each one of us: it is no exaggeration to say that whether the «*Acts of the General Chapter*» (or for that matter the Decrees of the Council) will become a live issue or a dead letter depends - in all due proportion - on the attitude and corresponding efforts of each one of us. It is needless to add that such responsibility increases as the authority of each Salesian increases.

4. DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE «ACTS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER»

The Superior Council, on its own part, well aware that its first duty is to carry out the deliberations of the General Chapter, and see that others also carry them out, has already got down to work.

The Consultors in charge of groups of Provinces have already held their first Provincial Conferences. They have been

in touch with each of our Provincials, and with them considered ways of putting into practice the deliberations of the General Chapter. These Consultors have also begun to task of taking stock of various local problems and reporting on them to the Superior Council, so that matters may be gone into at greater depth and, where necessary, arrangements made to meet the need.

Very soon these Superiors will take up their travels once more, with the constant aim of fostering that mutual exchange between Headquarters and the rest of the Salesian world that is showing itself so fruitful, and which is according to the guiding lines set by the General Chapter.

But I like to think, (and there are many indications to confirm my view), that you, dear confrères and sons, with that Salesian good sense which is a combination of intelligence, discretion, and sound judgment, have already begun your task of collaboration with both the Council and the General Chapter; you are convinced collaborators, and therefore active and patient, but above all resolute. I say «patient» advisedly, because it would be an ingenuous and mistaken notion to imagine that all can be achieved in a matter of months, or even a year or two.

We must begin at once, that is certainly true; we must work with clear ideas and with a well defined programme and method; each day we must take one step forward in carrying out the various points decided upon; we must never stop, still less lose hope, before foreseeable difficulties, or find in them an excuse for a passive attitude; however, we must also take it for granted that it will take time to arrive at a full and complete fulfilment, particularly of certain decisions. We must not look for immediate and miraculous changes.

Meanwhile I invite you all to appreciate at their true value *The Acts of the General Chapter*, which must be well known in our communities, and by each one of us, as will certainly be already the case with the Decrees of the Vatican Council. These Acts should be read in common at a time, and in a place most suitable for all the confrères. It would be useful, I should really say necessary, that conferences be given to illustrate, above all, the ideas that animate the deliberations, and some of the

documents (e.g. The Organization of the Congregation - Religious Life and Formation - The training of the young). I recommend, however, in a special way, calm, attentive, reflective individual reading of these Acts. A copy of the Acts is being given to each confrère, at considerable expense to the Congregation, precisely in order that each Salesian may draw spiritual nourishment from it. These Acts should always be at hand on your desk or table. They were never intended to be relegated to the archives.

Only with such habitual reading can the spirit of the Acts be absorbed, and the ideas assimilated which animate and circulate like living blood through their pages. These are the very ideas that bring conviction, form our minds, and influence our hearts. Without them, that work, carried out systematically, with persistence and in a spirit of confidence, that alone can bring to realization the organic plan traced out by the General Chapter, would be impossible. The Vatican Council also, in the vastness and variety of its teachings, has given expression to certain general directives which sum up its spirit of renewal. Our General Chapter has made itself the authentic interpreter of these.

5. CERTAIN FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS

I shall mention, by way of example, a few of these ideas that form the binding links of the Acts of our General Chapter, without giving chapter and verse.

I invite all to reflect on these ideas, It is these that when understood and accepted, will give new life to our mission, and confidence to our confrères.

a) *The person of the Salesian* in his entirety as a man, a religious, a priest and an educator, *is the centre* towards which all the attention and efforts of the Congregation converge in order to formulate the ideal Salesian in all his aspects, according to contemporary needs, so different from those of the past. This is, after all, what the Church of the Vatican Council requires (see the Decree «*Aeternae Caritatis*»).

For this reason, the selection of Salesians at every stage must be carried out in a spirit of seriousness, in a knowledgeable way, and with a sense of responsibility. Their formation therefore, must be organized and carried out in depth, in order that vocations may develop and grow in an environment which has a healthy and straightforward frankness about it that is absolutely indispensable in these days if we are to fashion and bring to maturity the authentic Salesian.

b) *Authority is a service* to be freely given. It cannot be inspired by selfishness, no matter how this finds expression, but only by an earnest desire for the good of all, and of each individual. It is the continuation of the work of the Good Shepherd. In this spirit also, authority is not meant to be overbearing, nor does it demand a purely passive obedience of the sort that suppresses the personal initiative, responsibility and abilities of the subject.

Even in religious life there is a place for dialogue; it is in fact necessary nowadays to make our whole mission effective. To encourage and welcome initiative on the part of their subjects is one of the qualities of good superiors. To put forward proposals and make suggestions to superiors is the sign of a rational human obedience. Comparing different opinions and judgments is the best way to collaborate efficaciously in an allotted task. Religious community life so understood not only offers the means for a joint ministry in the service of God's Kingdom, but also makes those means available.

In a more concrete way, the Superior is, and must be, first and foremost a Father to his confrères, to all the confrères, both the fervent and the less fervent, from the oldest to the youngest. Each of us Superiors has been given the task of serving with fatherly affection the confrères who are to be the chief object of all our interest and care. When the office of Superior is so understood, it will succeed in transforming a group of confrères into a real family of grown-up sons, who know they are loved and therefore understood and appreciated, and when occasion demands, can be corrected. For this reason the sons should feel they are pledged to give their joyous and generous collaboration to him

who, before being their head, is their father.

The Church and the Congregation above all else do not ask the Superior to construct building or collect funds or organize technical or scholastic undertakings; they ask him to look after the confrères with love. The ideal Superior, for the Church and the Congregation, is the one who in all charity identifies himself with the problems and interests of his brethren, and helps them to solve these problems for the good of their souls and the fulfilment of their apostolic vocation.

c) *The community as a whole has a joint responsibility for the educational work of the school, the Oratory, and the Parish. For this reason the members must be systematically interested sharers in any undertakings, lines of action, special activities etc.*

Whosoever has the task of governing a House, a Province, or the Congregation, particularly in these times with the enormous and complex accumulation of problems which have to be continually faced, cannot carry out his duties if he ignores those who, according to Canon Law, the Rule, and common sense, have to form part of a team with him, advise him, and lighten for him the heavy responsibility for decisions that can have grave and irreparable consequences from the pastoral, human, economic, or administrative points of view.

This collaboration is one of the great guiding lines that have sprung from the Council, and which appears again and again in the spirit and in the deliberations of the General Chapter. Here, for example, is how the Bishops of Germany addressing their priests express themselves: «We have much to learn about our diocesan apostolate; much more than ever before must we *listen to each other, reflect together, work in harmony*».

d) The Salesian's work for education must rise to the needs of our generation today, so that it may really reach the aims it sets itself.

To do this, after the example of the Church of the Council, we have to carry out a sincere examination of all our activities to see in what measure each of them has that educative, Christian, and formative vigour that our times demand. We must also see

what has to be done, in a methodical and courageous manner, to really reach those aims set by Don Bosco, and demanded, as never before, by the Church of our day.

This is an essential task which will be in great part responsible for the life and mission of the Congregation in the days to come. It is a task that requires systematic, patient, courageous and intelligent study with the collaboration of qualified persons. In this way we can take stock even of conditions that are less palatable to our traditional feelings; we can avoid being tied to mental habits, we can see much more clearly how best to employ our energies in the service of our Salesian vocation in the Church of today.

To carry out this work the General Chapter has assigned a period of two years. The standards of judgment and concrete aims of this research are already exemplified in the Provincial Conference, so that they may be known and applied through the media of communication assigned for the task in individual Provinces.

These and other ideas run like a theme throughout all the Acts of our General Chapter and they come to the surface to some extent on every page if they are read with attention. They are ideas that invite reflection, and consequently action.

We must all realise that we are personally committed to this work. It is true that it will be the task of the Provincial Conferences, and subsequently the individual Provincials, to issue practical instructions on how the findings of the General Chapter are to be carried out. We must in this matter avoid any arbitrary and inopportune action. At the same time we must all make our own personal, generous, heartfelt contribution to the task of readjusting, and I would add, reinvigorating our personal and community vocation; a task which is the aim of all our Chapter deliberations.

This aim will be fostered by taking as the basis of the meditations and instruction during our Retreats the Conciliar Decrees «*Perfectae Caritatis*» on the renewal of the Religious life, and «*De Institutione Sacerdotali*» on Priestly Formation, together with the valuable documents of our own Chapter on «*The*

Religious Life today», «*The Apostolate among the Young*», and «*The Training of Youth*».

For the Retreats for Rectors it will be well to bear in mind the part of the document on «*The Structure of the Congregation*» which regards them, as well as that on «*The Spiritual Direction of the Confrères*».

This will be a very effective way of putting these wise directives into practice.

6. THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION «POENITEMINI»

Allow me one word more.

The Apostolic Constitution *Poenitemini*, which has just been published, is clearly linked with the work of the Council, and while it regards us all as baptized persons in the first place, it concerns us even more as Religious, Priests, Educators and Pastors of souls.

I am sure this document and the spirit that is expressed in its every page will be the object of study and meditation in our Communities.

In the Apostolic Constitution *Poenitemini*, Paul VI recalls to the true sense of penance, that is, to interior mortification, the men of today, and ourselves among them, so strongly tempted by the prevailing lust for pleasure and eager to build up a society of material prosperity. Penance is called for as a means to the spiritual development not only of the individual, but of the whole community.

You can see that the document with its timely reminders concerns us both as individuals and as communities, as simple religious and as responsible superiors within the community.

Penance is not an end in itself; it is interior, religious and supernatural in character.

By doing penance the baptized Christian is made a partaker in Christ's victory over the world, over evil, over sin; and by sharing in Christ's sufferings, he is linked with the life of the Head.

Through penance the baptized person puts into effect his pledge of personal renewal, and does so not only individually and interiorly, but externally and publicly, for his own salvation and for the needs of Christ's Kingdom, so that the image of the Church may not be sullied in its members, nor the growth of God's Kingdom held back. It is our duty to recognize the fact that our own Salesian surroundings, perhaps without our being too clearly aware of it, often breathe in the atmosphere and adopt the style of life of so-called modern civilization, which has as its concrete ideal ease, enjoyment, and the cult of pleasure, which turns the whole pattern of our daily life into an eager quest for comfort, for all that is merely convenient and superfluous, at table, in entertainment, in travel and holidays, with a consequent, one might almost say loathing, of anything that entails self-denial, sacrifice, and austerity.

We must realize that all this leads to a draining away of the religious spirit. It makes for unrest and a dangerous unbalance in the Congregation. And the reaction it provokes among lay-people, nowadays more than ever sensitive to such inconsistency in persons consecrated to God, is far from edifying. Besides this it has a negative effect on the whole of our vocation and our mission.

As I write these lines, a letter reaches me from behind the Iron Curtain. I quote for you some words that are much to the point. The writer talks about the hardships of a life bereft of every comfort, and then says: «For Religious this is a time for meditation . . . ; a spiritual renewal was very much needed . . . ; *comfort makes one forget one's real purpose*».

It is natural to recall our Father's words of warning: «When comforts and luxuries begin to appear among us, our Congregation has had its day». (Last Will & Testament 1884, XVII, 272).

I call upon you all to dwell upon the lofty and fruitful ideas of the Constitution, to put them into practice in our life as consecrated souls, apostoles, and educators.

How much richness there is in these things! This realization should prompt each of us to affections and resolutions leading, especially during Lent, to a genuine personal renewal, by aspiring

to generous selfdenial and efficacious practical charity, which are the authentic expression of true penance.

The Holy Father's appeal on behalf of so many brothers who go hungry, reminds us to prepare ourselves worthily for the Resurrection by means of charity based on sacrifice.

I urge you, therefore, to remember my invitation to you in connection with the Pope's appeal for the India Famine Relief.

And I now wish each and every one of you, especially confrères in any way afflicted or in difficulties, an Easter full of the pure joy and undisturbed peace of Christ Triumphant in your hearts and in all your communities.

I shall be very grateful if you will kindly remember me in your prayers.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ.

FR. ALOYSIUS RICCERI
Rector Major