

acts

**of the General Council
of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco**

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

Nº. 320

Year LXVIII

january-march 1987

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Editrice S.D.B.
Edizione extra commerciale

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THE GUIDE TO THE CONSTITUTIONS

The Commentary on the Constitutions. - Some criteria for reading the volume. - More important aspects: The growth of the interior man; Don Bosco "father and teacher"; Formation; The present challenge of inculturation; Pastoral creativity. - Clarification of the "Rule of life". - Invitation to interior assimilation. - A valid "aid" for fostering hope. - The beginning of an improved ecclesial and Marian outlook.

Rome, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception,
8 December 1986

My dear confreres,

I am back in Rome after some long journeys undertaken for purposes of animation. In September I was in Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil; in October in North Belgium and Holland; in November I took part in two important "Team visits", at Delhi with the Indian provinces, and in Thailand with those of the Far East. I also made a brief visit to Japan to convey the greetings and represent the whole Congregation at the celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the first Salesians in that noble country. Everywhere I was able to observe the will that exists to grow in fidelity to Don Bosco, through the enthusiastic and profound preparations for the celebrations of 1988. There was the feeling of being caught up in an atmosphere of convinced adherence, of serious programming, and of renewed commitment to our mission for youth.

One feels a joyful and industrious communion with Don Bosco, who from heaven lets us feel his genial presence, the charm of his kindness, and the stimulation of his oratorian creativity. 1988 is already beginning to appear on our horizon as a year overflowing with grace.

The Commentary on the Constitutions

On my return to Rome I had the satisfaction of witnessing the publication of the long awaited volume: "The Plan of life of the Salesians of Don Bosco – A Guide to the Constitutions".

This is the Commentary desired by the GC22. Among the Chapter's Practical Directives and Deliberations we read: "Let the Rector Major with his council study the desirability of preparing a commentary on the renewed Constitutions which will serve to deepen their sense, make the spiritual content easier to grasp, and encourage the confreres to live them".¹

¹ GC22, 4

The confreres now have available this important aid, drawn up to meet the triple objective desired by the capitular assembly:

1° the deeper doctrinal and historical analysis of the content of the Constitutions;

2° a lively perception of the spiritual implications for the necessary personal assimilation;

3° a stimulus and invitation to bear witness to them by their practice in our daily life.

We can rightly rejoice at this event! I speak for all of you in thanking the 17 competent confreres who collaborated in preparing the text, and especially the Secretary General, Fr Francesco Maracani, who coordinated all the work, rendered the

different parts of the text homogeneous, and saw to the compiling of the basic documentation.

Some criteria for reading the volume

The volume runs to many pages, but no one need be apprehensive on that account. It is not a useless abundance of words, but a serious study and presentation of dense material. In presenting it, I myself have pointed out that "this is not a book to be read through at one sitting like a novel, but rather a text for meditation following on the reading of selected articles made either personally or in community".²

² cf. Ital.edtn. p. 7

The Constitutions are the "basic charter" of our Rule of life;³ reflection on them is therefore important for keeping our conduct in line with the plan determined by the Spirit.

³ cf. C 192

It will be useful to keep in mind some criteria which will help in the understanding of the volume and in making good use of it.

— *The first criterion* is to grasp the unitary sense of the entire text of the Constitutions. For this purpose it will be particularly useful to read the three introductory Studies. They present the overall significance of the Constitutions in our consecrated life, they offer a synthetic account of the historical evolution of the text from Don Bosco to the present day, and they also provide an indispensable organic survey of the "structure" desired by the GC22 for the redrafting of the entire constitutional text.

To the careful reading of these studies should be added also a consideration of the brief syntheses found at the beginning of each of the Parts, which

emphasize the way in which each Part fits organically and harmoniously into the whole.

A plan of life cannot admit of being broken up in such a way that the implications of a project which is in itself unitary and organic become concealed or distorted. The understanding of our Constitutions requires as a basis a knowledge and awareness of the vital synthesis which animates them and which constitutes the light and support for the interpretation of each article.

The need of methodical analysis obviously calls also for a detailed understanding of the content of the individual articles; but as a prerequisite for an objective reading and a subsequent comprehensive review (two points which are in fact complementary), attention must first be concentrated on the three important initial keynote disquisitions and on the presentations of the individual parts and chapters.

—*The second criterion*, which is really the principal one, is the salesian spiritual standpoint from which the Commentary should be read. Here one should have in mind at the same time the three objectives indicated by the GC22 which we have already noted.

It is a matter of understanding in depth the implications of our religious profession, the elements which constitute it and the “grace of consecration” which ensures its application and our perseverance.

This criterion presupposes the fundamental attitude of faith centred on the mystery of Christ, on the explicit will (on the part of both the individual and the community) to follow him daily, and on the evangelical values to be witnessed to in our new times, in the orbit of renewal marked out by Vati-

can II and the diligent directives of the magisterium. Such an attitude ensures a correct interpretation of the doctrine concerning the religious life which has been copiously renewed, made deeper and developed by Vatican II and subsequently.

This is a criterion which calls specifically for a constant and objective reference to the Founder and to the living and authoritative tradition of the transmission of his charisma. The history of Don Bosco and the Congregation is for us the source of spiritual vitality; the Constitutions are nothing else than the description of the characteristic experiences of the following of the Lord as lived by Don Bosco, and by him passed on so that it would grow and develop homogeneously in the Church. Without the concrete element of a lived experience it would not be possible to grasp the true core and spirit of the text.

It is true that the historical sensitivity required of the confrere who reads and meditates on the Rule is not of a strictly scientific kind; the latter could indeed be reductive if it were limited to the analysis of specific documents. It is a question of a realistic and connatural knowledge, nourished by a genuine sense of belonging to a living Congregation with worldwide experience; it is founded on concrete facts of great importance and authority, such as the sources, Don Bosco's first great disciples, the General Chapters, the witness of our Saints, the constant directives of the Rector Major with his council, communication and the happy initiatives of the various provinces.

As a further help to the attitude of faith of the reader, an appropriate explanation, albeit concise, has been prepared of the biblical quotations placed as indications at the head of the individual chap-

ters; and each article has been followed by an invocation which expresses the content once more, but in the form of a prayer.

In reading the text one must be able to profit by the significance and spiritual inspiration which lies behind the writing of the pages.

For an objective foundation and documentation of the principal events, the "notes" will be particularly useful; even though they cannot be used very easily in a communal reading, they will prove helpful for personal reflection.

— Finally, *a third criterion* of particular importance concerns the ecclesial value of the Constitutions. The Commentary in fact is dealing with a Rule of life approved by the Apostolic See as an authentic description of one of the Church's charismata.

The reader must remember that the constitutional text has been formulated with the universal contributions of all the provinces; it represents the reflected communal awareness of a "gift" received and lived in an authentic tradition which goes back to the origins. The renewed text is not the work "of the Superiors", as some have said, nor is it due to some influential group of chapter members, but is the result of a prolonged communal task, the fruit of the labours of our last three General Chapters: "Through the general chapter", we read in the Constitutions, "the entire Society, opening itself to the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to discern God's will at a specific moment in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service".⁴

⁴ C 146

It has been a communal conversion to the charismatic authenticity of the origins, starting from the many problems of the present day and in the

light of the different cultural sensitivities. The long period of research and discussion (nearly twenty years) may have left in the minds of some, of a superficial mentality or concerned about other things, a false impression of relativism: this would cause a delay in the vital process of our renewal.

Despite the difficult work involved, the GC22 wanted the Commentary to be produced, not only to ensure for the Congregation a correct interpretation of the constitutional text, but also to invite all the members to a true conversion to the ecclesial identity of the genuine plan of salesian life.

No one should think that he does not need it; it is not a question of minutiae, but of the overall organic sense of the vocation of each one among the People of God. It is a precious service of enlightenment.

The collaborators who were asked to make their contributions were chosen from the leaders of the various capitular commissions who had been more closely involved in the final elaboration of the contents of the articles in the various chapters, and the definitive structure of the whole.

The members of the General Council were able to revise and perfect the various contributions, with particular concern to see that the complete work should be a real homogeneous and authoritative aid, faithful to the approval given to the Constitutions by the Apostolic See. In this revision they had always in mind the principle stated in the text itself: "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'".⁵

⁵ C 192

More important aspects

I consider the publication of this Commentary an important event for the Congregation. It can provide the necessary light for the new and decisive stage of applying and putting into effect all the delicate and complex work that has followed Vatican II. For this reason I recommend it to the careful reading and meditation of every confrere. I would advise provincials and rectors to use it frequently in communal assemblies, especially during penitential seasons and times of retreat. It should become a family means of preparing for the coming centenary celebrations of Don Bosco.

It will certainly serve to recall and deepen some aspects which are particularly urgent at the present day. I will point out some of them; the knowledge that they should be given priority may enable us to make better use of the Commentary.

— *The growth of the interior man*⁷

The reader should concentrate on article 3 of the Constitutions, which deals with "our apostolic consecration". In this article are set out both the meaning and the value of our profession as Salesians of Don Bosco: specifically we have reference to the Father's love, to our discipleship of Christ for the building of his Kingdom among young people, and to the transforming gift of his Spirit. This is an accurate presentation of our Covenant relationship, of our own self-offering, of the grace of unity, of

⁶ cf. AGC 312, p. 44-45

⁷ C 3

the apostolic dynamism which is rooted in us, and of the determining nature for us of our mission to the young and the poor.

Understand this article well and you have in synthesis and in organic fashion an illustration of the entire contents of our Constitutions and of the full christian life they map out for us, revealing the interior wealth and evangelical depth of our profession. Straightaway we can see where to direct our attention and where we need to improve, if we want to overcome any residue of the spiritual superficiality which is so harmful for an apostolic Congregation committed to live and work in these new times.

In presenting the new Constitutions to you I spoke of the need for a revived understanding of the vital significance of religious profession at the embryonic stage of a new era.⁸ A proper understanding of our apostolic consecration is the beacon which lights up all the vast panorama of profession, or in other words the interior man who must grow in us.⁹ It is encouraging, I wrote at that time, "to consider our own life-plan as a gift (a charism!) which develops in us with the support and animation of the power of the Holy Spirit".

⁸ cf. AGC 312, p. 27-30

⁹ cf. AGC 312, p. 30-34; 22-23

¹⁰ C 21

— Don Bosco "*father and teacher*"¹⁰

The renewal of religious life brought about by Vatican II has restored a special importance to the figure of the Founder.¹¹ Article 21 of the Constitutions presents him as the model and historical source of our charism. Article 196 shows that our vocation is anchored in Christ, "whom we find present in Don Bosco who devoted his life to the young". And the Foreword gives us the Constitu-

¹¹ cf. AGC 312, p. 18-19

tions as his "living testament" which is for us a "precious treasure".

If we really love Don Bosco we shall be able to detect in the Constitutions his friendly smile and his presence as "father and teacher".

With his project he began a school of apostolic sanctity, which shows to the world an original aspect of the many forms of the Church's life and holiness. Our way of being christians is precisely that of reactivating in time and space his experience of evangelical life¹³ as though he were repeating to us each day: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ".¹⁴

¹² cf. AGC 319

¹³ cf. C 97

¹⁴ cf. 1 Cor 11,1

It will be fitting, therefore, if we can direct our reading of the Commentary to those aspects which take us back more vitally to the Founder, with particular attention to chapter II on the "salesian spirit". Chapter VII too on "dialogue with the Lord" introduces us to the great secret of the apostolic holiness of Don Bosco, nourished by an interior attitude of continual union with God.

These are two chapters which provide heartfelt justification for the title of "father and teacher" that we give to the Founder.

— *Formation*¹⁵

¹⁵ C 100

Another important aspect which should claim our attention in our reading is that of formation.

The Commentary can be of great help in leading us to think in practical terms about the statement in art. 100 of the Constitutions: "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 an aspect which cannot be let go: the

unique vocation of the Salesians of Don Bosco is that described authentically in the Constitutions. It is true that many different cultures exist, but Don Bosco's evangelical project is one and only, and salesians of every culture must be able to reproduce its genuine features. This is why the true reference centre for all, in every part of the world, is found in the Constitutions as rewritten by the General Chapters and approved by the Apostolic See. The Commentary is a help to the understanding of the objective sense of the one salesian vocation.

It may be that the style and mentality with which the articles of the Constitutions have been written reflects the influence of one culture more than another, notwithstanding the fact that confre-res with different backgrounds and from every continent collaborated in drafting them. The description of gospel values and of charismata, which are gifts from on high and therefore transcendent in their essential content, cannot be given concrete expression except through some particular cultural mediation. Faith or charisms have never existed without being inserted into a particular culture. Hence the necessity to be able to use such mediation to attain what is objective in the values described, and so be able to embody them without misinterpretation into one's own life situation.

The Commentary, even though itself being part of a particular culture, is a help, by means of its ample historical and doctrinal explanations, to the more easy attainment of the specific content of salesian fundamentals. And so both those in formation and their guides can embody quite authentically, though in different ways in different places, the vitality of Don Bosco's genuine charism in the following of Christ. In fact: "Formation is one in its

essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions; it accepts and develops whatever is true, noble and just in the various cultures".¹⁶

¹⁶ *ibid.*

The reading of the Commentary should lead everyone everywhere to assimilate, in the clarity of worldwide communion, the essential features of the salesian identity.

—*The present challenge of inculturation*¹⁷

¹⁷ C 7

The process of inculturation is one of today's delicate problems. It is a process substantially inherent in christianity itself, and for that reason is absolutely indispensable, even though it be complex in nature and enduring. It never comes to an end because cultural evolution is always taking place, and in recent times has greatly increased its pace.

The charism of Don Bosco is a small aspect of the Mystery of the Church as it unfolds in time; its inculturation cannot take place in separation from the overall task of implanting the Gospel itself. In whatever cultural situation he may be placed, the salesian must undertake this process in parallel and in agreement with his local Church. "Inculturation", declared the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, "is not merely external adaptation, since it implies both the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration in christianity and the impregnation by christianity of the various human cultures".¹⁸ "A facile accommodation which would lead to the secularization of the Church is to be avoided, as is also a retreat by the community of believers into an impenetrable ghetto. A missionary openness bent on saving the world both spiritually and materially is what is to be commended. Such a stance leads not merely to acceptance, but to the staunch defence of truly hu-

¹⁸ Final Report II, D,
4

man values. Such integral salvation is achieved only when such human values are purified and further elevated by grace to intimacy with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit".¹⁹

¹⁹ *ibid.* D, 3

And so what I want to emphasize here is the service the Commentary can offer for the implementation of so delicate and necessary a duty in respect also of our own charism within the Church.

Evidently this is not an aid which can tackle all the problems of the different cultures but, as we have just seen, its whole purpose is to ensure a correct understanding of the essential content of Don Bosco's charism. It serves to indicate what the salesian identity is that has to be embodied in local cultures, avoiding any misinterpretations or breaking of communion. In fact, the process of the inculturation of our charism, though obliging us to its gradual but real local incarnation and not just its simple adaptation, is not meant to damage the vital unity of the Congregation by leading to ambiguous and destructive nationalistic or provincial attitudes. Our world communion is not cultural uniformity but a living convergence of many cultures within the one vocational identity described in the constitutional text. Cultural differences must never change the content of the Constitutions; a particular culture does not take precedence over the charisma: it invented neither the Gospel nor Don Bosco's apostolic plan, even though it furnishes them with a land for their growth and a history into which they can enter as leaven.

Article 7 of the Constitutions says explicitly that "our vocation calls us to be deeply united with the world and its history. Open to the cultural values of the lands in which we work, we try to understand them and make them our own, so as to

incarnate in them the message of the Gospel".²⁰ Without any doubt this is a challenge of a particularly delicate nature, and hence it is well to remember that the inculturation of the Gospel (and therefore also of our charism) is ultimately the work of God and not simply the result of human adaptation. This is well illustrated by the Apostles: they grew up in a Jewish culture and were sent by the Lord to evangelize peoples everywhere, and hence to evangelize a multiplicity of cultures too. What was primarily asked of them was absolute fidelity to the testimony of Christ, together with the adaptability to assume new values and the ability to prescind from particular elements of Judaism that had already been overcome by the Gospel (we may recall the cataclysmic mission of Paul among the pagans).

²⁰ C 7; cf. 30, 57, 101

Neither one's own culture nor that of the others can ever be the unconditional criterion for the process of incarnation of the Gospel or of a charism. Culture is not something absolute; it cannot be conceived as something finished and closed. It is a creation of man, enriched by the positive contributions of his growing experience, but also partly flawed by his ignorance and mistakes. Cultures have always been like this, with some negative aspects; in this sense they have always exercised a kind of unconscious control on man's mentality and conscience, thus impairing his true human dignity; these belittling factors can in fact be detected in every culture and need to be offset by a truer and more mature human evolution enlivened by the signs of the times and especially by the revelation of Christ.

And so the inculturation of the Gospel (and with it that of the Church's various charismata) is

not like the entrance of a guest into a house where nothing can be touched and where he will not move a muscle, but rather like the happy arrival of a fellow-worker, a bearer of freedom and freshness, an apostle of renewal who intervenes in the evolution of the existing culture to transform it into something better and give it growth through new cultural expressions.

True enough, this can happen only as the result of a combined effort on the part of all sectors of the local Church, and may take many generations for its realization.

What we are concerned about at present is to point out the salvific superiority and the dynamic beneficial effects of the Gospel (and of our own particular charism) in comparison with existing cultures, and to indicate the importance for the process of inculturation of the salesian vocation (a process truly indispensable at the present day) of a clear understanding of the content of our own identity, and of committing ourselves, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to its authentic realization according to the needs of time and place. "The salesian community", say the Constitutions, "works in communion with the particular Church. It is open to the world's values and attentive to the cultural milieu in which it carries out its apostolic work".²¹

The GC22 wanted the Commentary to be produced, precisely to help us not to betray the gift we have inherited from Don Bosco, and to incarnate it in peoples everywhere as a living reality.

— *Pastoral creativity*²²

Another aspect, strictly linked with the incarnation of the salesian identity, is that of pluralism in pastoral work.

²¹ C 57

²² C 40

The Constitutions tell us that our specific and characteristic mission of being “in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor”²³ is carried out in practice through a whole variety of pastoral commitments. This plurality arises from the different youth conditions with which we come in contact, and also from the spirit of initiative and hence the creativity and apostolic inventiveness typical of fully committed confreres. 23 C 2

To guide the necessary passage from the unity of the mission common to all salesians throughout the world, to the pastoral variety dictated by the different local situations, the Constitutions provide common and enduring criteria which need to be properly applied: the first of these is the experience of Don Bosco in the Oratory of Valdocco, which was destined to be for us “the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works”.²⁴

24 C 40

A very important purpose of the Commentary is precisely that of guiding us in the correct interpretation and application of the pastoral criteria contained in the Constitutions.

If it is true that “our mission sets the tenor of our whole life; it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families”,²⁵ it means that all the articles of the Constitutions which indicate and specify our pastoral commitments have a particularly incisive character as regards our salesian vocation. It is therefore providential that we now have available a handbook which gives a detailed explanation of their content and makes their meaning clear. 25 C 3

At a time of great social and cultural transformations, one of the most delicate problems for the

whole Church is that of concreteness of method for an efficacious apostolate. And the same is evidently true for the Congregation.

The changed condition of youth require a pastoral approach which is both creative and courageous; there are no ready-made formulas to apply; the problems are so diverse that no single solution can meet all of them. Every province and every community needs to observe and take note, to discern, and then adopt a suitable course of action. Hence the need for knowing and giving importance to those common criteria which form part of Don Bosco's precious charismatic tradition.

The Commentary provides an ample and authoritative explanation of them, and so helps to provide a set of common basic criteria for the whole Congregation.

Clarification of our "Rule of life"

The general Introduction to the Commentary offers us a synthesis of the different meanings of the term "Constitutions" with a brief indication of the evolution of its use in religious life, and with an explanation of its nature as the "basic charter" of our "Rule of life".

To be Salesians means to return to the experience lived by Don Bosco, who attached particular importance to practical and methodological aspects in both apostolic activity and personal behaviour, as well as community life. The following of Christ implies a certain way of living; being a disciple implies too a certain methodology of activity and asceticism. The living tradition of the Founder's charism requires specific details and indications which are

not found in the Constitutions, even though they must always be in harmony with them. Article 191 asserts this explicitly when it lists the various components of what is called "the particular law of the Society".

The Commentary makes this aspect clear in explaining the different articles and especially in the explanatory synthesis it provides of the significance and value of the "General Regulations",²⁶ which flank the Constitutions with the indispensable norms for their practical application. The content of several constitutional articles is in fact developed and completed as regards their application by the corresponding Regulations.

As an example we could quote our responsibility in the Salesian Family,²⁷ which obliges us to provide certain services, the latter being specified in the Regulations.²⁸

Another example is our mission, substantially described in chap. IV of the Constitutions, but which requires further practical details; the latter are found in the Regulations, starting with the drawing up of the educative and pastoral plan.²⁹

So too in the case of formation:³⁰ the concrete applications are indicated not only in the Regulations,³¹ but also by the "Principles and Norms" of the "Ratio".

Finally we may recall the constitutional articles relating to the General Chapter³² and the Provincial Chapter:³³ more detailed norms are needed in both cases, and these are found in the Regulations.³⁴

A careful reading of the Commentary therefore will help us to understand and appreciate the extension, depth, usefulness, value, evangelical inspiration and concrete nature of the whole of our "Rule of life".

²⁶ cf. Commentary, Ital. edtn. p. 955

²⁷ C 5

²⁸ cf. R 36-41

²⁹ cf. R 4-35

³⁰ cf. C, ch. VIII and IX

³¹ cf. R, ch. VIII and IX

³² cf. C 146-153

³³ cf. C 170-174

³⁴ cf. R. 111-134; R 161-169

Invitation to interior assimilation

The GC22 wanted the Commentary above all as a help to assimilation, i.e. to the transferring of the vital content of the Constitutions to the area of personal awareness and spiritual conviction.

The general Introduction recalls the four aspects of this process: knowledge, harmony, devotion and living practice.³⁵ The Constitutions are a "book of life": it is not their purpose to lead us into a convent, there to live as observant religious (we read in the Commentary); they call upon us to stand at Don Bosco's side as "missionaries of the young". This is the fundamental commitment of our salesian profession, lived and further developed all through our life. To achieve this objective we must make of the Commentary a book of study and of prayerful reflection. These are two complementary conditions for its profitable use: study leads to a deep understanding in the realm of conscience of the content to be lived, and prayerful reflection fosters their internal assimilation as convictions and spiritual choices.

Both study and prayerful reflection of this kind is necessary both personally by the individual confrere, and as a communal practice by means of a suitable programme.

Every confrere should consider the Commentary as a valuable gift which the Congregation makes to him personally. It will serve him for a better understanding of his salesian profession, and for growth in it:

- study, following various basic themes (obtainable if necessary from the analytical index to the Constitutions), will increase in him the

³⁵ cf. Commentary, Ital. edtn. p. 28-29

awareness and enthusiasm for his plan of baptismal life;

- and prayerful reflection will lead him to discover better the sense in which the Constitutions are the “living testimony” of Don Bosco, and why they are for him, the Salesian, the “way that leads to Love”.

Every community too is invited to profit by the riches contained in this volume, especially at times of retreat or in penitential seasons:

- study, carried out in common with the help of a competent leader, will deepen in the confreres the gospel significance of their lives as missionaries of the young, and intensify their awareness of an important and very much up-to-date ecclesial charism;
- and prayerful reflection, accompanied perhaps by appropriate celebrations of the Word, will lead all the members to feel the depth and validity of the penetrating declaration of Don Rua (who was called the “living Rule”): “the Constitutions, emanating from the fatherly heart of Don Bosco and approved by the Church, will be your guide, your defence in every danger, in every doubt and difficulty. They are for us the book of life, the hope of salvation, the core of the Gospel, the way of perfection, the key of paradise, the pact of our covenant with God”.³⁶

A valid “aid” for fostering hope

After the providential turning point of Vatican II, the Rector Major with his council were given the task of preparing for the Congregation some aids which would be particularly useful in this pe-

³⁶ Letter to Provincials and Rectors on “The observance of the Constitutions and Regulations”, 1 Dec. 1909; in “Letters of Don Rua”, Turin 1965, p. 498-499

riod of profound transformation: the "Ratio", the "Criteria and norms for salesian vocation discernment", the Commentary or "Guide to the Constitutions", the Book of Government made up of the manual "The Salesian Rector" (of which the revised edition is at the press), the manual "The Salesian Provincial" and that for the "The Provincial Secretary" (soon to be published), the "Proprium" for the liturgical celebration of salesian feasts and commemorations with also the rite of our religious profession (in an advanced stage of preparation); the manual containing the "common nucleus" for our communal life of prayer following the indication of art. 77 of the Regulations (also close to publication), and various other guidelines offered at the right moment by our various Departments.

All these form a collection of valid aids, prepared with competence and sacrifice; their purpose is to help in the process of applying the conciliar renewal in our own Congregation. It is not easy to find other religious institutes which have available at the present time such a wealth of valuable accessories which are both practical and methodically based on spiritual acumen.

Quite a number of others are envious of them and ask for copies. It would indeed be strange if we ourselves did not value and exploit them. The coming celebrations of 1988, now getting closer, should prompt us to make constant and intelligent use of them. In this way we shall be able to give back to our communities that charismatic freshness that belongs to Don Bosco's evangelical plan, which is an essential characteristic of our identity, and which the local Churches expect with such great hope from the presence of salesians for the benefit of the young and the working classes.

Among these aids the Commentary has a special place, because it introduces us to the "basic charter" of our vocation. If it is used well it will greatly increase our hope, because it will lead us to understand the significance, breadth and depth of the fundamental option we made at our salesian profession, and will help us to apply it daily in our lives, revitalizing the mystical impulse of "*da mihi animas*" and its ascetical counterpart of "work and temperance". It will enlighten and accompany us in that "fidelity to the commitment made at our religious profession" which "is a response which we continually renew to the special Covenant that the Lord has made with us".³⁷

³⁷ C 195

The beginning of an improved ecclesial and Marian outlook

We have sometimes been accused of being too closed in our own works, with a kind of inward-looking mentality that puts the emphasis on an *esprit de corps* which smacks of a private chapel rather than the universal Church. We take note of the fact without arguing about it; it was to some extent a mentality common to religious institutes in general, and also in a different sense to the diocesan clergy.

The renewal provoked by Vatican II asks us to take a more authentic view of our identity. The Commentary, as we suggested earlier when speaking of the ecclesial criterion, explains repeatedly how "the salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission"; by our witness and our activities "we contribute to the building up of the Church as the

Body of Christ, so that also through us she may appear to the world as the 'universal sacrament of salvation'".³⁸

³⁸ C 6

It is very important that we reactivate and bring up to date the charismatic dimension of our vocation, so that all may see that we are in truth a gift "for the whole People of God"³⁹ and that we are really and constantly renewing "the desire to work with the Church".³⁹

³⁹ C 192

⁴⁰ C 7; cf. 35, 42, 47, 48, 57

In this sense what is said in art. 1 of the Constitutions about the charismatic origin of the work of our Founder must sound a deep chord in us; in fact, "from this active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength for our fidelity and support for our hope".⁴¹

⁴¹ C 1

And then the ecclesial perspective of our charisma is personalized and rendered more specifically discernible by the direct intervention of Mary, which was felt permanently by Don Bosco and which, as a grateful son, he recognized and proclaimed: «The Blessed Virgin is our foundress. She will also be our support».⁴²

⁴² BM VII, 197; cf. C 1, 8, 20, 34, 92

The Council has taught us to link Mary more and more with the Church, and the Church with Mary. The awareness too of her diligent and constant presence as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians prompts us to count with ever greater trust on the "grace of consecration",⁴³ which ensures for us both the power of the Holy Spirit and simultaneously the motherly care of Mary, so that we may faithfully fulfil with their help all that by their gift we have joyfully promised.⁴⁴

⁴³ C 195

⁴⁴ cf. prayer, C p. 7

The Commentary offers abundant elements for reflection on the ecclesial and Marian perspective of our Constitutions.

Dear confreres, we have available a very valid collection of aids for realizing in the Holy Spirit and in fidelity to Don Bosco the great metamorphosis of Vatican II, so as to enter actively as Salesians into the third millennium of christianity. In particular the Commentary on the Constitutions is offered to us as light and stimulus for growth in our vocational identity. Let us treasure it so as to make really effective at the present day our salesian profession which is "for the poor and the little ones a pledge of hope"⁴⁵ and "the most precious gift we can offer to the young".⁴⁶

⁴⁵ C 196⁴⁶ C 25

May Mary Help of Christians assist us and intercede on our behalf so that, remaining always with Don Bosco, we may follow to the end our "way that leads to Love".

I wish all of you a new year of growth in salesian witness and in apostolic fruitfulness in preparation for the centenary celebrations of 1988.

Let us together ask daily for the light, courage and apostolic creativity which the Holy Spirit gives uninterruptedly to the Church, and in her to those who bear his charismata.

Affectionately in Don Bosco,

Don F. Viganò