

# acts

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

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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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## **SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

- Introduction - Neither the latest fashion nor a continual harping on the same point, but a genuinely new requirement. - An indispensable source of energy for the journey of faith. - A daunting reality. - We are anchored in the might of the Holy Spirit. - In the great channel of "salesian" spirituality. - Following Don Bosco. - We form evangelizing communities. - Under the guidance of the Help of Christians, Lodestar of the new evangelization. - A positive omen.

Rome, 15 August 1990  
Solemnity of the Assumption

My dear confreres,

Greetings from myself and the members of the new General Council. Very soon we shall be meeting together to make a deeper study of the guidelines of the GC23 and to draft a programme of animation and government for the purpose of rendering incisive and efficacious our service to the Provinces in the coming six years. You already have to hand the Chapter Documents and are studying their contents.

I would like to help you in this vital task by some reflections which I think are important.

There are two basic facts underlying the overall significance of our GC23: first it aims at setting us firmly within the ecclesial movement of the "New Evangelization"; and then there is the recognition

and conviction that our journey in faith is simply impossible without the energizing force of "Spirituality."

I have already spoken to you about the new evangelization:<sup>1</sup> I am now inviting you to reflect on our "Spirituality", which is presented in the Chapter documents as the secret of success in the education of the young to the faith.

<sup>1</sup> AGC 331, 1989

The new evangelization calls for many qualities and abilities. But while spirituality can make up to some extent for the lack of other qualities, no other capacity or aptitude can make up for a lack of spirituality.

It will be useful therefore to seek out together some of the reasons why we are asked to give such importance to this argument and to assign it a real priority in the formation programme.

Meanwhile I ask you to pray with particular intensity for the success of the 19th General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The theme of their work is: "Educating girls and young women: the contribution of the FMA to a new evangelization in different social and cultural contexts". Such a theme, as was pointed out by the Mother General in her letter convoking the Chapter, homes in on the aspect that defines their mission: "to be in the Church and society at the service of the education of girls and young women according to the Preventive System of Don Bosco". Like ourselves, they have an urgent need for their communities to face up with hearts aflame to the more pressing educational requirements of the present day, after being renewed by an authentic salesian spirituality.



**Neither the latest fashion nor a continual harping on the same point, but a genuinely new requirement.**

It may be asked why the GC23 put spirituality at the centre of its concerns. Is this not in fact a harking back to a theme that is easy to talk about but largely irrelevant to the present day, thus providing an easy way of dodging difficulties? Or is it not an invitation to imitate some of these fashionable modern groups who have a tendency to shy away from the challenges of the new cultures? Or in other words, is it not a theme of little practical importance?

The chapter document quite definitely reflects another perspective. The spirituality it refers to is neither a passing fad nor the hackneyed replaying of an old record; for us it implies nothing less than genuine fidelity to the preventive system, as a practical *sine qua non* for the new evangelization and a requirement of modern times.

Don Bosco never liked evading reality, and he gives us this same message through his person and his pedagogical method.<sup>2</sup>

By the term "spirituality" the GC23 intended an experience of God, implying the practice of the theological life of "faith, hope and charity" which is the fruit of the indwelling in us of the Holy Spirit. When the text speaks of "faith" the intention is to bring about a vital union of the three theological virtues in a single practical style of convinced and dynamic christian life.

St Catherine of Siena used to say that when the practice of the theological virtues is only half-hearted, the Church's countenance becomes pale. Without a living and vibrant faith no education to faith is possible!

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Don Bosco's interior life*, Strenna 1981, commentary of RM

The soul of the chapter document is an experience of life and activity anchored in God, a driving force without which we are compelled to wonder whether we are still capable of continuing the journey till we reach the goal.

This is the starting point for spirituality: the road to be followed is a new one; only recently has the path been marked out, in fact it is still in process of construction without as yet an asphalted surface and subject to previously unknown perspectives which will call for a rethinking of the christian identity and the way of living it. The cultural context of the faith has changed, and there is an urgent need to be able to manifest in ourselves and in young people the new countenance of the believer, with modern motivation and practical applications in life-style. This is where the breath of the Spirit is blowing, bringing out the present-day guise of the faith!

On the other hand the GC23 has brought home to us the fact that a growing demand for spirituality is becoming evident specifically in youth groups.

We are aware that Vatican II has been considered a real discovery of the Holy Spirit as the leading teacher of the faith in this last part of the second millennium. The Council documents show a clear perspective of the Holy Spirit in considering the Church and her mission; specifically the decree "Perfectae caritatis" reminds members of Institutes of consecrated life that "before all else, religious life is ordered to the following of Christ by its members...; hence even the best-contrived adaptations to the needs of our time will be of no avail unless they are animated by a *spiritual renewal*, which must always be assigned primary importance even in the active ministry".<sup>3</sup>

Paul VI noted with wonder and hope that "we

<sup>3</sup> PC 2c

are living in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit... People are gathering about him; they want to let themselves be led by him... *It is in the Church's evangelical mission that he is most active*: it is not by chance that the great inauguration of evangelization took place on the morning of Pentecost, under the inspiration of the Spirit".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> EN 75

The ecclesial movements that have sprouted in recent decades have been comprehensively considered officially as the expression of a new period of spirituality, the fruit of the "richness and versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> CL 29

All our own renewal too, under the guidance of the valuable work of the General Chapters that have followed Vatican II, is considered in the chapter document as an involvement of us Salesians in the present ecclesial commitment to the new evangelization. Read carefully the "Introduction" to the document: it draws its inspiration from God's pedagogical activity in history and looks at our recent General Chapters from a theological point of view. You will see how the Congregation is situated at the heart of the Church, precisely at the service of the new evangelization. Its progress towards this end is marked by various stages of research and analysis: it started from the "mission" (SGC 20); this was found to be a task taken up by the "community through a specific plan (GC21), through the strengthening of our "apostolic consecration" (GC22), so as to respond to the many and pressing challenges of today's youth (GC23).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> cf. *Educating young people to the faith: Capital Documents*, Ed. SDB, Rome 1990 (hereafter GC23), 1-14

The word "spirituality" embodies a vital synthesis of the demands of our renewal at this time, and their acceptance by both individuals and communities.

— *The Holy Father* has repeatedly reminded us of this: first, in his letter for the 1988 Centenary: “The originality and boldness of the plan for a ‘youthful holiness’ is intrinsic to the educational art of this great Saint, who can be rightly called the ‘master of youth spirituality’.”<sup>7</sup> Then in his message to the GC23: “an aspect that calls for your careful study is ‘youth spirituality’... it is not sufficient to rely on the simple rationality of a human ethic... We must stir up deep personal convictions which will lead to a life commitment inspired by the perennial values of the Gospel”.<sup>8</sup> And again during his visit to the Chapter: “What a great need there is in the Church at the present day for young people to be educated ... to a practical ‘spirituality’”.<sup>9</sup>

7 IP 16

8 GC23, 313

9 GC23, 334

— *The Rector Major*, for his part, had already insisted (in connection with the GC23) on this point with confreres and communities with a view to producing a real spirituality among young people. Commenting on the Strenna for 1990, he emphasizes the importance of the community’s witness: “The preventive system requires spirituality; the journey ‘from faith to faith’ needs educators who are full of spirituality. It is not a source of energy limited to chosen souls”.<sup>10</sup> In his address at the opening of the Chapter he presented the preventive system as the fruit and source of salesian spirituality: “The great challenge put to us by the Chapter’s theme is that of the ‘evangelizing and missionary spirituality’ in our communities. We are educators because we are shepherds in Christ’s Church. Its pastoral quality is the soul of our pedagogical competence, just as ‘da mihi animas’ is the secret that enlivens our spirit from within”.<sup>11</sup> Concluding his Report on the State of the Congregation (1984-1990) he points to spirituality as the great secret for

10 Strenna 1990, commentary of RM

11 GC23, 326

the success of our apostolic renewal: "the basic factor most urgently needed in our salesian activity can be expressed in a word which implies for us a special plea: 'spirituality'!".<sup>12</sup> And in his closing address to the Chapter he gave some examples of tensions in our life,<sup>13</sup> before going on to insist that the necessary unifying force stems unfailingly from an intense spirituality: "A living synthesis of the two poles in each case is made possible by a force from on high... which binds inseparably together union with God and staying with the young... The inherent strength of our salesian spirituality (is) a dynamic daily expression of the grace of unity".<sup>14</sup>

- Finally, the *'Radiograph' of the Provincial Chapters* and the subsequent *Precapitular working document* dwell on the positive aspects of the lived experience in several provinces, suggesting plans for the deeper study and specific development of a practical youth spirituality. In this sense they list many positive facts, constituent elements, ways and means of growth, critical aspects and difficulties, connections with the promoting of vocations, and they also suggest fundamental nuclei for a salesian youth spirituality. "The proposal to do further research in SYS", one reads, "is intended to meet a felt need: we want to go more deeply in the circumstances of the present day, into those principles of christian life that Don Bosco strove to instil into his boys. It is not a question of a historical study but of gleaning the legacy of Don Bosco's spirit, of going back once again to his typical spiritual and educational experiences, of rediscovering the educative force of the ideal of holiness to which he urged his youngsters".<sup>15</sup>

Rightly therefore does the entire chapter document concentrate its guidelines and proposals on a

<sup>12</sup> Report of RM to GC23, p. 272

<sup>13</sup> cf. GC23, 348

<sup>14</sup> GC23, 349

<sup>15</sup> *Schemi precapitolari* 536; radiography of prov. chaps. 213-244

*journey of faith which has spirituality as its driving force*, and this at two levels: that of the spirituality of the confreres and that of the spirituality of the young, in distinct and separate ways that are none the less complementary and organically united.

Let us not forget that it is the Holy Spirit alone, as Paul VI said, "who stirs up the new creation, the new humanity of which evangelization is to be the result, with that unity in variety which evangelization wishes to achieve within the christian community. Through the Holy Spirit the Gospel penetrates to the heart of the world, for it is he who causes people to discern the signs of the times, signs willed by God, which evangelization reveals and puts to use within history".<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> EN 75

### **An indispensable source of energy for the journey of faith.**

The spirituality spoken of in the chapter document is tied in with the concept of "journey" or "itinerary". A journey, in the Bible, generally begins from a crisis situation and moves towards its objective through a particular force which acts as a spur; think, for instance, of Abraham and Moses.

For us, in the journey indicated by the GC23, the particular driving force is precisely spirituality. This is not something that offers ready-made solutions to the many challenges we face; it is not a kit of formulas. The present crisis, in fact, calls on us for a response not only to classical difficulties and happenings: the challenges to which it gives rise appear rather as "indications of a 'change of epoch' that we must learn to assess in the light of faith".<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> GC23, 91

Spirituality helps in the discernment and tackling of problems and provokes a desire to reach the goal: it is a source of enthusiasm. It consists in a typical way of living the Gospel "on the spot"; it is therefore essentially creative, always in dialogue with practical life, and also courageous and enterprising.

Any spirituality, and especially 'salesian' spirituality because of its linkage with reality, must not only be constantly proposed over and over again, but must also be continually made incarnate and revitalized if it is to grow and act always in harmony with the prevailing situation. It will certainly remain faithful to the vital values of its origins and of living tradition, but of its nature it is also called upon to be fertile and get down to brass tacks if it is to become a gift of life, an appropriate response and also a gospel challenge.

It embodies an intrinsic transforming force because it is the expression of a faith conceived as a motive force in history. A faith (which includes also hope and charity) not simply linked with a doctrine which enlightens the intelligence, but a personal attitude as a progressive experience of God which becomes in each individual a vital force of synthesis in his freedom and convictions, and hence in his behaviour. Nowadays such an attitude is characterized by a strong social dimension, as the Holy Father has repeatedly reminded us and as is stated explicitly in the Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici": young people "ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society".<sup>18</sup>

In commenting on the Strenna for 1990 I told you that faith does not exist on its own; it is the believing individual who exists and acts: spirituality however is the attitude proper to committed be-

<sup>18</sup> CL 46

lievers! To be able to cultivate in communities a real spiritual innovation and bring about gradually in our works a youth spirituality means giving new life to the faith so as to shoot it like an arrow into families, local areas, society, and shape their futures so that they will be more in line with the Creator's plan.

At the present day we are observing a decline in various ideologies; this is a striking fact that makes us think. Some of these ideologies claimed to take the place and role of faith among young people. And unfortunately it seemed that formation to the faith was often unable to produce believers capable of evangelizing the signs of the times: Vatican II admitted as much.<sup>19</sup> That is the point. Yesterday's rise and progress of the ideologies lead one to think that there was a period of weakness in formation to the faith, the lack of an adequate pastoral and pedagogical presentation of the Lord's Passover as the central point of history.

<sup>19</sup> cf. GS 19

The faith we commit ourselves to developing in the young, says the chapter document, "is not something disjoined from or merely closely associated with what is human, historical, temporal or secular, but is rather a generating force within all these; it gives them enlightenment and new meaning and also transcends them, broadening our horizons beyond the confines of history".<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> GC23, 117

Not a spiritualism of flight therefore, but a front-line spirituality, one of research, of initiative and of courage; in a word a spirituality of realism. This does not diminish the problems; but instead of dodging them, it acknowledges their existence, analyzes them and tackles them.

You need only think of the importance given by the chapter document to the first element in the



journey (“towards human maturity”), considered not as a separate sector but as a dimension of every stage of the journey, totally concerned (together with the contributions of the educational sciences) with the search for meaning, with the perception of life as a gift and task to be carried out, to a diagnosis of the emptiness of the impending idols. The spirituality of educators proclaims in fact “faith calls life to mind, and that when life is seen in its true light it feels in a certain sense the need of faith. Because of grace there is no break between creation and redemption but continuity”.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> GC23, 120

### **A daunting reality.**

The historical era in which we are living is a complex one, and is dense with future prospects for both good and evil. The secularization process is accompanied by both positive and negative values. Unfortunately the development of society tends often to what is negative. The most dangerous of the threatened losses is that of giving no consideration at all to the faith.

This became evident in practical terms during the preparation of the GC23 and in the Chapter itself. One need only recall the work done in the provinces and in the chapter assembly to identify the difficulties we are meeting at the present day in our educational commitment. The Bible shows us that the awareness of being in a crisis situation is the starting condition for equipping the base camp for the journey to overcome it; recall the Exodus and the parable of the Prodigal Son.

For this reason the Chapter tried in the first place to look at the various contexts from a pastoral standpoint: from consumerism to the different

kinds of poverty, from decolonized peoples to the exodus from totalitarian regimes now going on, from big States to ethnic minorities, from the Catholic outlook to the very many other christian denominations, from atheism to the great religions. In these contexts educational institutions (family, school, group activity, social communication, entry into the world of work) are in the delicate situation of seeking their proper role. Young people appear dissatisfied, looking for values and asking for new relationships. If you observe their attitude to the faith, you find many of them at a distance or even totally estranged from it, quite a number are indifferent, and others open to religious discussion, but with widely differing approaches; fortunately there are also some young practising christians, but sometimes without any higher ideals; and finally there are those committed ones who find in the faith a practical guide for life and who become a leaven among others ("Young people for the young"!).

From this overall view and from the lively discussions that took place in the assembly it was possible to identify some of the more urgent challenges of a universal nature. "They are matters which on the one hand seem to be provocations to our mission of educators to the faith; and on the other appear as real opportunities rich in possibilities. They are new occasions that call for creativity and courage".<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> GC23, 75

Five of them are indicated:

- The challenge of those "far away or outside" the world of faith.
- The challenge of "poverty" which debilitates and depresses the environment and destroys its human dignity.

- The challenge of the “irrelevance of the faith in life and culture”: underlying this is a subtly harmful mentality which needs a deep reassignment of values and an adequate cultural level in presenting the events of salvation.
- The challenge of “other religions”; this is met with very commonly in Asia and Africa, but is found to some extent everywhere with the inter-continental movement of peoples. Every single one of these religions, despite the positive values they have, present special difficulties for evangelization because of the strong place they have in local culture.
- Finally, the challenge of “life” itself: this is “a synthesis of all the others and permeates them all”.<sup>23</sup> The intensity and vibrations of anxieties, desires, quests, sensitivities, ideals, disappointments, bitter experiences, involve in one way or another the whole of human existence, and easily breed in young people insecurity, relativism, inconstancy and unprofitable doubts.

<sup>23</sup> GC23, 87

All these challenges and so many other problems besides can inculcate a sense of paralysis which makes us wonder whether the goal can be reached at all.

And to the above we have also to add the internal difficulties we find in making an objective evaluation of the forces we have in the Congregation at the present time (as more than one member of the Chapter pointed out): and this may lead to temptations to consternation and dismay. When you hear talk about the ageing process in various provinces, of the falling-off of vocations, of the slow pace of renewal, poor pastoral quality, lack of understanding in discerning the signs of the times, spiritual superficiality or genericism, etc., a terrible doubt

arises: do not all these challenges and problems add up to a dead weight so heavy that the process can never get off the ground at all?

And if we go on to think about the world-wide challenge that is shaking up the whole Church because of the seriously equivocal ideas inherent in the emerging cultures: science and faith, nature and grace, culture and the Gospel, technical developments and ethics, theology and the teaching role, etc., we can see the clouds looming ever larger along the route.

And yet the Lord is calling us and sending us for the new evangelization. And we journey on, with the humility to recognize that our task is not unlimited, and that today more than in the past it must rely more on the quality of individuals and communities than on their number.

We must be able to look at the challenges, problems and difficulties, not to lose heart but to make an objective assessment of where to make a courageous commitment.

Meanwhile we shall try not to overlook the results we have already achieved; we recall Project Africa, the General Chapters of renewal, the educative and pastoral plans, the efforts at ongoing formation, the flourishing of initiatives of an oratory kind, the volunteer movement, groups of animators, the revival of the Cooperators and Past-Pupils, collaboration in the Salesian Family, etc.; we think back to the waves of grace that accompanied the Centenary of 1988, we look at Don Bosco and our origins, we think of the young people who have reached holiness in our company, and those involved in groups which already constitute a youth spirituality movement.

History teaches us that there is no implanting of

the Gospel without problems and difficulties. The Apostles set about evangelizing the world in conditions much more unfavourable than ours; the Saints, the Founders, Don Bosco, the great missionaries did not turn back in the face of difficulties; on the contrary they faced up to the needs, convinced about the indispensability of the mystery of Christ, and sure of the intervention of the power of his Spirit.

The new evangelization involves us in a time which is witnessing the full development of the changing of an era which is on a par with anything in human history; we are called to be able to live in this dense hour of hope. It would be ingenuous to take refuge in nostalgia for situations to which return is impossible. The Lord has consecrated us for the future of the young; he has sent us to carry out a fascinating task, and he himself is constantly at our side in its development; he wants us to be leaders in a renewed period of christian faith which must be the historical leaven for the beginning of the third millennium.

And so no faltering, but trust and confidence!

### **We are anchored in the might of the Holy Spirit.**

Without courageous interior convictions we shall never set out on the journey at all; and on the other hand we shall be successful in our complex enterprise if we have "spirituality".

Our analysis of the challenges has brought home to us the fact that there is an urgent need to communicate to every young person an updated and original plan of christian life according to which he "learns a new way of being a believer in

the world, and arranges his life around certain perceptions of faith, choices of values and gospel attitudes: he lives a spirituality".<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> GC23, 158

In the first two parts of the chapter document the accent is directly on the spirituality which must be developed in the young; but the whole process is animated by the educative spirituality of the confreres. Then in the third part, the indispensability of such spirituality in the salesian community is specifically emphasized.

In fact in the process of evangelization the salesian community feels itself once again called by God; it rethinks the mission it has received; it is convinced that God works in history, it knows that Don Bosco's experience was prophetic and valid always,<sup>25</sup> and it rediscovers that our tradition has always seen the preventive system as a spirituality project.<sup>26</sup> It feels that it must proceed "from faith to faith", from its own communal spirituality to that of the young.

<sup>25</sup> GC23, 89-93

<sup>26</sup> GC23, 158

The response to the challenges begins in confreres deeply animated by an apostolic mystique, aimed at the gradual inculcation of a youth spirituality. In the light of the serious nature of the challenges we must willingly accept the urgent need to be "spiritual men" in the sense proclaimed by the Apostle Paul. No faltering, we said, but trust and confidence.

At first sight it would seem impossible for us to attain the goal, but in reality we can do so because, as St Paul says,<sup>27</sup> we no longer live in our own weakness but are strengthened by the Spirit. Those who allow themselves to be guided by the Spirit are concerned about the things of the Spirit, while those who let themselves be guided by their own weakness seek to satisfy their own selfish desires. It

<sup>27</sup> cf. Rom 8, 4-5

would be a good thing if every confrere read over again the whole of chap.8 of St Paul's epistle to the Romans.

The spirituality spoken of by the GC23 is a living experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit, which became more intense after the Pentecostal experience of Vatican II. It is a matter of the individual and communal discovery of a God inserted in History and in one's own life. Rightly has a famous convert and author entitled one of his books: "God exists, I have met him".<sup>28</sup> Each one of us should be able to say the same thing. In a secularized environment in which God would seem to be permanently eclipsed, there is emerging the awareness of the need to experience his presence and to proclaim it in our daily living. One of the great theologians of our century, Karl Rahner, thinks that the "pious" person of tomorrow will either be a "spiritual man", i.e. one who has had personal experience of God, or he will simply cease to be "pious".

Today the People of God has a greater need than ever before of those elements of spirituality which – as has been stated by one scholar – take account of human responsibility, which give value to daily existence, to the social dimension, to problems of work, to the world of technology, and to history in general.

We are convinced that our own spirituality must be seen in this perspective; indeed we consider such a perspective as one of the great characteristics which denote its originality and its present-day relevance.

The foundation of all true spirituality for the future is first of all the rediscovery of the Holy Spirit and the rooting of one's own life in the strength of his unifying love. The Pope himself, in his address

<sup>28</sup> ANDRE FROSSARD, *Dieu existe, je L'ai rencontré* - Fayard, Paris 1969

to the Chapter members, said as much: "Spirituality means a living participation in the power of the Holy Spirit... From it proceeds the strength of personal synthesis between faith and life".<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> GC23, 334

Revelation offers us a dynamic concept of the Holy Spirit who bursts personally into history and acts constantly throughout the Church's life. To understand his mission and efficacy, says St Gregory Nazianzen, we must be able to think in the manner of the fishermen (the Apostles), and not like Aristotle" (This without prejudice to the great values of science). One student of christianity rightly observed: "When we speak of 'spirit', when we say that God is 'spirit', what do we mean? Do we have the Greek or Hebrew tongue in mind? If Greek, then we are saying he is immaterial, but if Hebrew then we are saying God is a hurricane, a violent storm, an irresistible power. Here lies the source of so much ambiguity when we speak of spirituality. Does spirituality mean becoming immaterial or in being animated by the Holy Spirit?"<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> J. DANIELOU, quoted in CONGAR, *Credo nello Spirito Santo*, I, p. 18, Queriniana 1981

True spirituality is always accompanied by courage and enthusiasm because it is conscious of this constant animation of the Spirit.

We know that he is accustomed to manifest his power not in a "strong wind", nor in an "earthquake", nor in "fire", but paradoxically in a "still small voice", as the prophet Elijah discovered;<sup>31</sup> but his power remains always irresistible. The Holy Spirit presents himself not so much as "absolute power" but rather as "infinite Love"; he touches the heart in an efficacious manner, he strengthens the "interior man"; he is present in an almost hidden way. The "spiritual man" is his masterpiece, the fruit of the energy of his gift of charity.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Kings 19, 11-14

This gentle presence is therefore efficacious



through the power of Love. And the power of love is the strength of unity: a unity which does not suppress distinction but which excludes separation; it is like a reflection of the mystery of God. The unity found in the Trinity is not something previous to the Persons, but depends on their distinction: it proceeds from the supreme ecstasy of love of the mutual and total donation of the individual Persons; it is a dynamic unity, the fruit of the reciprocal self-donation of the Three; in the Holy Spirit it has the unifying explosion of the whole strength of divine love. Certainly, the Trinity is a "mystery", but if God were not three he would not be "Love; and we would know nothing of his Spirit and we would never understand the "grace of unity" which he pours into our heart with pastoral charity!

"In fact the Holy Spirit is God's extreme manifestation of himself outside the Trinity, in human history: through the "mystery of union in Christ", through the "strength of communion" in the Church, through the "grace of unity" in the person, through the "power that draws all things together" in the unfolding history of humanity and in the whole of creation; all this in so far as it is the power of love that carries the universe along in view of the recapitulation of all things in Christ."

The launching pad of spirituality is to be found in our putting ourselves in harmony with the Spirit so as to be guided by his strength. With him is rendered possible a real synthesis between faith and life: unity in distinction and distinction in unity, or in other words a living bond, coordination, completion and sublimation. It ensures that the christian identity is an expression of a unified personality, endowed with social and apostolic creativity for its task in the world.

There is much more to be said about spirituality, but the first step requiring attention is precisely this being rooted in the Spirit. This is something outside all fashions and utopias. "Both the narrowly conservative and the wildly progressive are usually unable to discern the authentic presence of the Holy Spirit: the former because he often expresses himself outside the ways so dear to them, and the latter because they lose their bearings when events do not turn out according to their expectations.

Fortunately this spiritual rooting process has long been the object of our concern in the Congregation. The whole process of our post-conciliar renewal has been directed in this sense; one need only refer back to the reflections we have frequently made on our "interior apostolic convictions" (in commenting on art. 3 of the Constitutions).

What appears urgent however is the task of intensifying the spiritual atmosphere in every community and in every confrere: to bear witness together to the presence of the Holy Spirit through a pastoral charity which enables us to live each day the "da mihi animas" which enables us to repeat with the Psalmist: "With God we shall do bravely and he will trample down our foes"<sup>32</sup>, and so drive away all discouragement or attitude of resignation.

<sup>32</sup> Ps 107,14

### **In the great channel of "salesian" spirituality.**

To our kind of spirituality we give the name "salesian".

The term refers back to St Francis de Sales, one of the greatest figures in christian spirituality. The first one to use this word was Don Bosco himself.

When he persuaded his first group of boys to stay with him to practise the pastoral charity characteristic of his mission of education, the name he gave them was "Salesians".<sup>33</sup> It was also his wish that the religious institute he founded be known officially as the "Society of St Francis de Sales". He wanted his followers to look to St Francis de Sales as a "zealous pastor and doctor of charity", the phrase used in the Constitutions,<sup>34</sup> which specify also that in this way he intended to draw his inspiration from the Saint's "goodness and zeal",<sup>35</sup> giving priority to attitudes of loving kindness, joy, dialogue, community life, friendship and constant patience, following the rich "humanism"<sup>36</sup> that characterized the life and activity of the tireless Bishop of Geneva.

It may be of interest to recognize that Don Bosco's attraction to St Francis de Sales goes back to the years of his formation and further pastoral training: "the charity and kindness of St Francis de Sales", he wrote in the fourth of the resolutions made at his first Mass, "will be my guide in everything".<sup>37</sup> This attraction never weakened in his later life, as is clear from what he did and caused to be done in honour of his Patron.<sup>38</sup>

In adopting and applying the term "salesian" also to the spirituality of youth, the capitular document does not intend to put it forward as "the distinctive mark of a certain group; it indicates, rather the charismatic source"<sup>39</sup> which, through Don Bosco, is linked with the broad spiritual current of St Francis de Sales, totally dedicated to the following of Christ drawn by the loving kindness of the heart of the Saviour.

This name was not chosen therefore for competitive reasons, savouring of self-love, as if it were

<sup>33</sup> cf. BM 5, 8

<sup>34</sup> C 9

<sup>35</sup> C 4

<sup>36</sup> C 17

<sup>37</sup> *Spiritual writings of St John Bosco*

<sup>38</sup> GC23, cf. BM Analytical Index

<sup>39</sup> GC23, 158

a question of naming a sporting team to compete with others: no, here it is case of evangelical identification within a wide context of spiritual choice that is highly praised by the Church and particularly relevant because of its harmony with conciliar directives: one need only recall that the recent Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici" concludes its 4th chapter, dealing with the variety of workers in the Lord's vineyard, by quoting from a page of a particularly significant work on spirituality by St Francis de Sales.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> cf. CL 56

For us too I think it important to emphasize this broad and ecclesial aspect of the adjective "salesian", so as to restore St Francis de Sales to a more fitting and influential place in our spirituality; he is, in fact, the doctor of that kind of pastoral charity which is the summation and centre of our apostolic spirit.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> cf. C 10

In a circular of 1921 Fr Paul Albera, Don Bosco's second successor, exhorted the confreres to celebrate worthily the third centenary of the death of St Francis de Sales (28 December of the following year 1922): "We, who must take from him not only his name but also his spirit," he wrote, "have a duty to surpass all others in celebrating the event worthily". He said that the decision to choose "Salesians" as our name had been providential ("wisely and splendidly in line with God's designs"); and he added: "It makes Don Bosco's mission at the present day seem like a reflection, or better a continuation, of that initiative of Francis himself three hundred years ago. For this reason... the third centenary of the death of our Patron should prompt us primarily to a deeper and more intimate study of his life and writings in relation to our own work, known already by association of name as "salesian

work", and for that very reason destined to spread and popularize by every means his spirit and teaching, already perfectly assimilated by Don Bosco and genially inserted into his system of education".<sup>42</sup>

St Francis de Sales, together with other great people like St Teresa, St John of the Cross, St Ignatius of Loyola, etc., is one of those who started up a spiritual movement of strong renewal.

He made attractive the living of the Gospel in the world for people of every condition and state of life; he brought interior piety into harmony with external activity; he gave importance to life's daily occupations; he struggled against the rigorism which was to characterize Jansenism; he insisted on the need of a practical spirituality for all. He called this spiritual renewal "devotion", a name that many do not like at the present day because it smacks of a simple adherence to religious practices without any underlying depth of life; but for him it meant the new spirituality, i.e. a level of charity "which makes us work diligently, frequently and readily"; "it is a kind of nimble spiritual agility": "to be 'devout'," he wrote, "in addition to charity you need a lively willingness in all you do"; this makes charity ready, active and diligent".<sup>43</sup> And he further declares that "the 'devout life' is agreeable, easy and congenial", "it is the perfection of charity".<sup>44</sup> "Devotion" can be adapted to every vocation and profession, it does no harm to anything, in fact it makes everything better"; "to try to eliminate the 'devout life' from the soldier's barracks, from the workshop of the tradesman, from the court of royalty, from the bridal chamber, is a mistake – even more than that, it is a heresy".<sup>45</sup>

His "Introduction to the Devout Life" ("Philothea") launched a true message of spirituality for

<sup>42</sup> *Lettere Circolari* - Don Albera pp. 552-553

<sup>43</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Francois de Sales. Edition complete*, Vol III (1893), *Introduction a la Vie Devote*, Part I, Chap I, p. 13-16 passim

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* Chap II, p. 16-19 passim

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* Chap III, p. 19-20

everyone, reestablishing the importance of the laity and of human work. It achieved the success it deserved: more than 1,300 editions! a treasure which not even the mentality of today has discarded. "If there exists in the world", wrote a recent biographer of the Saint, "a revolutionary book, this is it: the inclusion of all human existence in 'devotion', the inserting in God of all we desire, everything we think and do and love, all we hope for and all we achieve".<sup>46</sup>

Don Bosco, after choosing St Francis de Sales as his Patron, and his motto 'da mihi animas' as a synthesis of his own spirituality, showed (as I have just pointed out) a deep affinity for this vision and found it so congenial as to apply it in creative fashion to youthful perspectives in his preventive system, and in the involvement of so many forces in what we now know as the "Salesian" Family.<sup>47</sup>

But the missionary heart of St Francis de Sales, as well as feeling the pressing need to launch a spiritual renewal for everyone, realized that this would require doctrinal enlightenment concerning the love of charity, at least for those more committed. For this reason he drew up his "Treatise on the love of God", thought out and written in the midst of his many pastoral activities; it was a book born of reflection on his apostolic experience and aimed at the fomenting of evangelizing activity. A book of life, almost an autobiography: the effort to make constant progress in spiritual growth, not along monastic lines but in an apostolic life plan. Today we would describe it as the work of a committed author, a "vade mecum" for the disciple who wants to live in the world as a believer. Spirituality should permeate life itself, all the unforeseen vicissitudes of daily life, with its joys and sufferings,

<sup>46</sup> GIORGIO PAPASOGLI, *Come piace a Dio*, Città Nuova Ed. 1981, p. 366

<sup>47</sup> cf. J. PICCA and J. STRUS, *San Francesco di Sales e i Salesiani di Don Bosco* - LAS Rome 1986

friendships and separations, difficulties and consolations. From this point of view it goes more deeply, in particular, to the spiritual value of the "ecstasy of action", involving every christian in being a true disciple of Christ in the midst of the responsibilities and concerns associated with his existence: a living between faith and practice.

One of his succinct intuitions is well known: "man is the perfection of the universe; the spirit is the perfection of man; love is the perfection of the spirit, and charity is the perfection of love".<sup>48</sup>

It is an apostolic spirituality to which Don Bosco felt an attraction. It is not therefore without significance that our Founder, in his last days, entrusted Fr Giulio Barberis, who was novice-master, with the task of making St Francis de Sales better known by writing a life of him "suited to the young and embodying the christian life".<sup>49</sup>

In his turn Fr Philip Rinaldi, as Rector Major, asked Fr Eugene Ceria to make a deeper study of the works of St Francis and his doctrine, and make them better known in the Congregation.

John Paul II has said of Don Bosco that he was a "genius of the heart"; in St Francis de Sales the heart found not only one of the most genial interpreters of its human riches made perfect by charity, but also a keen and contemplative thinker able to discern its beating even to the highest level of the gift of itself in apostolic activity.

Many in the Church find themselves attracted by the Bishop of Geneva's brand of spirituality. Pope John XXIII, for instance, called him "my Francis de Sales"; and as long ago as 29 January 1903 wrote of him in his "Journal of a Soul": "What a fine figure of a man, of a priest, of a bishop! If I could be like him nothing would upset me,

<sup>48</sup> *Oeuvres... o.c.* Vol V (1894), *Traite de l'Amour de Dieu*, Vol II, Book X, chap. I, p. 165

<sup>49</sup> G. BARBERIS, *Vita di S. Francesco di Sales; libri quattro proposti alla gioventu*, I, 5 - Turin, Libreria Salesiana, 1902

not even if they made me Pope".<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> JOHN XXIII, *Journal of a Soul*

And so when we speak of "salesian" spirituality we feel ourselves to be going ahead with Don Bosco in a broad spiritual current, on which St Francis de Sales has impressed in a dynamic and incarnate form the supreme seal of the particular love of apostolic charity.

This is an appellation therefore for relaunching among youth a taste for God, the festivity that is life, commitment for history, responsibility for all created things and a willing and generous sharing in ecclesial responsibility.

### Following Don Bosco.

We are called "Salesians of Don Bosco.

Our "salesian" spirituality has been left to us by the Founder as a legacy; it refers, says the chapter document, to "our spiritual experience as Don Bosco's followers";<sup>51</sup> it is linked with the devout humanism of St Francis de Sales "*reinterpreted*" by Don Bosco in the experience of the Oratory".<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> GC23, 92

<sup>52</sup> GC23, 158

We have to ask ourselves in what this "reinterpretation" consists. The response would take us far afield, but the main line to follow is, I think, happily found in something Fr Philip Rinaldi said, and which can be found quoted in a Salesian Bulletin: "St Francis de Sales is the Master of a spiritual doctrine which emerges in a living form from his immortal writings; Don Bosco, on the other hand, has expressed his spirituality not on paper but by impressing it on the Society he created... The doctrine was there already; God called Don Bosco to make it effective by bringing it to life in the Family he had founded for the salvation of the young".<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *Bollettino Salesiano*, "Don Bosco alla scuola di S. Francesco di Sales", August 1967, 1-4



Our salesian spirituality therefore is shaped and deeply enriched by the doctrine of St Francis de Sales, but it has its own characteristics with a strong pedagogical dimension, for the young and the poor, impressed on it by Don Bosco; in an original way they indicate Don Bosco's features.

The legacy of a Founder is not something static, but "is transmitted to his followers to be lived by them, to be preserved, deepened and constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in a process of growth".<sup>54</sup>

The Pope specifically reminded us of this, speaking of the educational practice of our Father: "His educational message needs to be studied at still greater depth, to be adapted and renewed with intelligence and courage, precisely because of changed social, cultural, ecclesial and pastoral contexts".<sup>55</sup>

Our spirituality and that of the young are in a certain sense distinct, but they are strictly and mutually connected in such a way that they can never be separated. We recall, for example, how the confreres used to pray with their pupils, and that the "Companion of Youth" was in practice a common book of prayer for all.<sup>56</sup> Justly has it been said that Don Caviglia's commentary on the "Life of Dominic Savio" (written by Don Bosco), while going deeply into the subject of youth spirituality, is also a valid study of the spirituality of the holy educator himself.

The Constitutions, on the other hand, assure us that the spirituality we live and to which we bear witness through our plan of salesian life "is the most precious gift we can offer to the young".<sup>57</sup>

What then is the kind of spirituality that defines us?

<sup>54</sup> MR 11

<sup>55</sup> IP 13

<sup>56</sup> The "Companion of Youth" was published by Don Albera only in 1916.

<sup>57</sup> C 25

It is well known that being rooted in the Holy Spirit is one and only, but it can take many forms. He gives rise to a marvellous multiplicity of spiritual attitudes, with an inexhaustible fertility and continuous creativity.

Without going into all the delicate and complex problems, what we want to do here is gather together some of the characteristic traits of the specific spirituality of Don Bosco, so as to have a snapshot of our spiritual physiognomy, because it is on that that we must concentrate our efforts of renewal. The Holy Spirit himself has helped us to take this snapshot in the General Chapters of the post-Vatican II period, and in this way we have been able to present to the Church our "identity card" through the renewed text of the Constitutions.

The document of the GC23 provides us with an opportunity of emphasizing in this research an interesting new approach: that of rethinking the elements that specify our spirituality<sup>58</sup> starting from the standpoint of the youth spirituality we have experienced in recent years.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Cf. C 1-3, 10-21

<sup>59</sup> GC23, 158-180

The spirituality of the young is of a "starting" kind; it conforms to the law of gradualism and is subject to development with time and the high and low points associated with youth instability. It must be adaptable to circumstances and help the young on the basis of their actual state and situation at the moment.

From the earliest years of his priesthood, Don Bosco perceived intuitively the possibility of accompanying the young to the fullness of christian life, in proportion to their age, with a kind of youth spirituality organized around some key-ideas open to the faith, due in some measure to the usage of his time but prophetic none the less, and promoted

with enthusiasm and a genial educational thrust. The GC23 has taken a new look at these key-ideas and invites them to organize the life of young people around them, and emphasize them through choice of values and gospel attitudes.<sup>60</sup>

The text of the document refers to them as “fundamental nuclei”, and without pretending to be exclusive suggests the following:

- *a basis of practical realism centered on “daily life”;*

(Don Bosco used to speak of a “religious sense of duty” at the different moments of the day;

- *an attitude of hope permeated by “joy”, linked with the values associated with youthful growth;*  
(Don Bosco had already written in the “Companion of Youth”: “I want to teach you a christian method that will make you happy and content even now: let us serve the Lord in holy joy”);
- *a strong and personal friendship with “Christ”, known and frequented in prayer, the Eucharist and the Gospel;*

(Don Bosco considered eucharistic pedagogy as the culminating point of his educational practice);

- *an ever more responsible and courageous sense of membership of the “Church”, both particular and universal;*<sup>61</sup>

(Don Bosco inculcated in the young a great love for the Church, the Pope and the Bishops);

- *a practical and industrious “commitment” of service, according to one’s own social responsibilities and the material and spiritual needs of others;*<sup>62</sup>

(Don Bosco took care to involve the best of his youngsters in practical apostolic activity);

- and, as a family atmosphere for growth, a

<sup>60</sup> GC23, 158

<sup>61</sup> GC23, 171-172

<sup>62</sup> cf. GC23, 161

*Marian dimension* which implied entrustment with simplicity and confidence to the Motherly help of our Blessed Lady;<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> GC23, 157, 177

(Don Bosco saw devotion to Mary as the support for growth in faith in the young).

These key-points or fundamental nuclei, combined with the consideration of the *four dimensions of the journey of faith* (the human person, Christ, Church, Kingdom),<sup>64</sup> prompt us to rethink the preventive system as the living expression and pedagogical practice of our specific spirituality, or in other words "as a way of living and of handing on the gospel message".<sup>65</sup> From this angle of the journey of faith of the young we can look again at the principal elements that characterize our spiritual countenance as Salesians of Don Bosco.

<sup>64</sup> cf. GC23, 120-156

<sup>65</sup> C 20; cf. GC23, 326, 350

Here it is only a matter of pointing them out, because each of them has already been considered and developed in these years following the Council, even though one may hope to see eventually a deeper and more organic overall study of them.

To recall them, starting from the standpoint of the education of youth to the faith, will be able to contribute to the programming of ongoing formation, so much recommended by the Chapter, and make it more practical. Here are the main ones:

— *In the first place internal apostolic conviction*:<sup>66</sup> this is our basic spiritual driving force; together with the grace of unity that comes from pastoral charity, it places us on the road to the spirituality of the active life, combining "consecration" and "mission" internally in a synthesis of life that is radiantly apostolic: "a spontaneous expression of love", say the Constitutions, "inspired by the love of a God who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives

<sup>66</sup> GC23, 221

<sup>67</sup> C 20

his life to save them".<sup>67</sup> This particular and fundamental "internal apostolic conviction" implies for us that "spiritual and pastoral renewal are two aspects which are mutually compenetrated and inter-dependent".<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> GC23, 217

Between these two aspects there is, for us, a mutual immanence and true reciprocity; but they have their causal source in the personal life of union with God.

<sup>69</sup> GC23, 103, 112, 113, 118, 130, 131, 132, and *passim*

— *Then, the testimony provided by the central position of Christ, the Good Shepherd:*<sup>69</sup> he is the living and existential centre of our consecrated life (practice of the evangelical counsels). All consecrated persons are centred on Christ, but our specific witness is characterized by the pedagogical and pastoral standpoint from which we see Christ as the "Good Shepherd", who created man and loves his attributes, who redeemed him and pardons his sins, and who makes him a new creature through his Spirit. This central position of Christ, the Good Shepherd, must shine like the sun in our environments through a new eucharistic enthusiasm and a host of initiatives expressing a daily manner of living and educating which "permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved".<sup>70</sup> The emphasis on Christ as the Good Shepherd certainly implies dedication to the young even to the cross, but also points to the attitude that conquers "by gentleness and self-giving",<sup>71</sup> by gentleness, loving kindness and friendship, developing the whole spiritual ascesis of "make yourself loved" which is characteristic of the oratorian heart.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> C 20<sup>71</sup> C 11<sup>72</sup> cf. AGC 326

The chapter document insists on the elimination of distance between us and the young people: "the

first thing we have to do is to remove this gap between us, approach them and get close to them”,<sup>73</sup> be able to give “due value to the patrimony every youngster has in himself”,<sup>74</sup> and offer him a setting that is full of life and presents so many opportunities”.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> GC23, 97

<sup>74</sup> GC23, 99

<sup>75</sup> GC23, 100

This first step for beginning the journey together is called “presence”, and is a value we need to salvage! Not just any kind of presence but a pastoral presence or, if you wish, a ministerial or even sacramental presence, because it must be one that brings Christ with it; attentive, by all means, to the feelings and aspirations of the young, but bearing in itself clear evangelical messages and a clearly evident love of charity.

— And then, *educational commitment as our “mission”*:<sup>76</sup> our way of following Christ is marked “by a special gift of God: predilection for the young... For their welfare we give generously of our time, talents and health”.<sup>77</sup> Our mission in the Church is specifically characterized by the practice of education: “Don Bosco has taught us to recognize God’s operative presence in our work of education, and to experience it as life and love”.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> GC23, 94, 95, 102, 104, 106, 108 etc.

<sup>77</sup> C 14

<sup>78</sup> GC23, 94

We know 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”.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> C 3

In this way, for our spirituality our work of education becomes the preeminent context in which we meet God”.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> GC23, 95

Because it is “educational”, this spirituality will always be attentive to the world context and to the challenges of youth: it will call for flexibility, creativity and balance,<sup>81</sup> and will seek seriously the appropriate pedagogical qualifications. The same sa-

<sup>81</sup> Cf. C 19

lesian consecration which inwardly “thirsts for souls” assumes the pedagogical values and lives them as a concrete expression of spirituality.

In the context of the mission, I think it will be helpful to emphasize also the influence exercised on our spirituality in concrete ways by the presence of the young and the poor among those Don Bosco left us as the priority group among our beneficiaries! The original ascesis of “make yourself loved” is an evangelical response to so many things these youngsters lack; it reminds us too that contact with poor youth did not arouse in Don Bosco even a shadow of ideological reaction, but rather a pedagogical intensification of pastoral charity to reawaken in him and in his followers the fatherly and motherly love of the mission of education.

— *the need to be practical in ecclesial matters*:<sup>82</sup> an authentic sense of Church should be present both in the life of the community and in educational and pastoral activities. Salesian life and work is a concrete experience of Church: we consider ourselves situated “at the heart of the Church”,<sup>83</sup> “we feel ourselves a living part of her, and we cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness. This we express in an attitude of filial loyalty to Peter’s successor and to his teaching, and in our efforts to live in communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity”.<sup>84</sup>

The third “dimension of the journey of faith” proposed in the chapter document deals precisely with the steps to be taken and the attitudes to be cultivated for “an intense ecclesial membership”; and the fourth of the fundamental nuclei of youth spirituality insists in turn on the formation of ecclesial communion, in its concrete expressions of local

<sup>82</sup> GC23, 140 ff, 169 ff, 222, 226

<sup>83</sup> C 6

<sup>84</sup> C 13

structures and universal institution with an “explicit love of the Pope and a convinced adherence to his teaching”.<sup>85</sup> This kind of attention to ecclesial communion enlivens also the whole field of vocational activity.

<sup>85</sup> GC23, 172

This is a spirituality, therefore, which makes us feel it and see it objectively as a real “gift” of the Spirit to the Church to intensify communion in it and collaborate in its mission: The needs of the young and of working-class areas, the desire to work with the Church and in her name, inspire and shape our concrete pastoral activity so as to bring about a more just world and one of greater brotherhood in Christ”.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>86</sup> C 7

— Another characteristic element is *joy in hard work*.<sup>87</sup> this is an aspect inherent in the whole of the oratory style and in a psychology that looks to the future of the adolescent heart. We were born on the “Hill of the Youth Beatitudes”, and we spread its evangelical riches throughout the world. We live a spirituality of family joy, shared in an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness,<sup>88</sup> completely permeated by a hope that “radiates joy and is able to educate to a christian and festive way of life”,<sup>89</sup> because we practise a pedagogy that “believes in man’s natural and supernatural resources, without losing sight of his weakness”.<sup>90</sup> This atmosphere of joy and optimism is neither ingenuity nor superficiality, but the fruit of true theological hope and well thought out pedagogical harmony with so many positive values placed by the Creator in the heart of the young.

<sup>87</sup> GC23, 152, 165, 166

<sup>88</sup> C 16

<sup>89</sup> C 17

<sup>90</sup> C 17

Precisely because it is the fruit of hope, it is a joy lived in an intense activity – made up of “work and temperance”, or in other words in an ascetic



commitment constantly present in the realization of the mission.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>91</sup> cf. C 18

— And finally, *the Marian dimension*:<sup>92</sup> our educational mission is a participation in Mary's ecclesial motherhood. This is a dimension that merits a special comment, and we shall give it later on.

<sup>92</sup> GC23, 157, 177

Here we merely add that Don Bosco's salesian spirituality, reconsidered from the standpoint of the journey of faith of today's youth, becomes for us the soul of the new evangelization, "new", as the Pope said, "in its enthusiasm, in its method, in its expressions", or in other words animated by enthusiasm and adapted to the times which implies a vast and delicate change of mentality.<sup>93</sup> The GC23 was clearly aware of this; it declared in fact that "its context is new, as also are the general objectives towards which it tends: it is a matter of renewing the human texture of society, by accepting as the primary task the renewal of evangelical spirit in ecclesial communities".<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> cf. AGC 331

<sup>94</sup> GC23, 4

We have therefore a quite specific salesian spirituality with concrete aspects on which we must concentrate the programming of ongoing formation in the provinces and houses, as we seek also to study more deeply the heart of Don Bosco.

### **We form evangelizing communities.**

I said to you in the Presentation of the Acts of the GC23 that the first subject to whom the chapter document is addressed, the guiding principle that binds together the various parts of the text, is our community of consecrated persons: this is the principle recipient of the document; to this belongs the

responsibility and commitment of realizing the journey of faith for the young. Every community therefore will have to concern itself with salesian spirituality at two levels: that of bringing about its gradual growth in their young people, and that of bearing witness to it in their own daily life.

There are three complementary aspects proposed to our care and attention: the community as a "*sign of faith*",<sup>95</sup> as a "*school of faith*",<sup>96</sup> and as a "*centre of communion and participation*".<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> GC23, 216

<sup>96</sup> GC23, 217

<sup>97</sup> GC23, 218

The community's primary animators, the Provincial and the Rector, must be able to apply the post-chapter programme to this objective: "Ongoing formation therefore, which qualifies the Salesian for his mission as educator and pastor, must become an unalterable constant in his life".<sup>98</sup> We must become aware of the urgent need to give rise in the environment to a salesian youth spirituality, and consequently to put the community in a state of spiritual fertility, leading it (as the text says) "to rethink and renew itself in the light of the Gospel and of our Rule of life:<sup>99</sup> or in other words to go ahead seriously with the process of renewal that has been already indicated for years past. The provincial and local communities therefore will have to take their task seriously, drawing up programmes, making assessments, and constantly reviewing what has been laid down in this connection in the deliberations of the Chapter.

<sup>98</sup> GC23, 220

<sup>99</sup> GC23, 215

Let us look at the three aspects indicated in the text:

— *The community as a "sign of faith"* calls for a serious rethinking of the authenticity of its own evangelical witness. The fundamental condition consists in this: to live and work together as a group of believers in the salesian manner, pro-

claiming existentially the mystery of Christ the Good Shepherd by living Don Bosco's Rule. The community itself becomes the "faith-sign" in so far as its members express in their daily life with joy and constancy the values of salesian spirituality totally directed to the young.

The text insists particularly on attention to the "internal apostolic conviction".<sup>100</sup> On more than one occasion we have devoted space to the consideration of vital elements that constitute the same. Very recently we noted that Don Rinaldi seemed the "authoritative interpreter of our apostolic interiority".<sup>101</sup> It would be a good thing to read that message again. There we shall find that salesian spirituality has as its source and supreme value union with God; "creative and dynamic apostolic commitment springs constantly from the ardour of the love of God: thence proceeds the famous "grace of unity" of our pastoral charity!

Let us recall the three elements indicated there: "thirst for souls (the fine commentary on *da mihi animas*), tireless apostolic work, and fidelity to daily prayer".<sup>102</sup> These are elements that must find a place in the content of programmes of ongoing formation in response to the challenges, if we want to become "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor".<sup>103</sup> In this way we shall become "spiritual men" and communities, able to raise up and animate a practical salesian youth spirituality in the circumstances of the present day.

— *The community as a "school of faith"* is what "makes the mission the reason for its existence and work".<sup>104</sup> Here comes into play the pedagogical dimension of community activity. If we are to be valid educators, our internal apostolic convic-

<sup>100</sup> GC23, 221

<sup>101</sup> AGC 332, p. 38 ff.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* p. 39 ff.

<sup>103</sup> C 2

<sup>104</sup> GC23, 217

tion must include a greater knowledge of the world of the young and our presence in it; this is a characteristic aspect of all our activity, which must be simultaneously spiritual, pastoral and educational.

"A truly qualitative leap is needed, a return among youth with renewed pastoral sensitivity and a more marked educational ability".<sup>105</sup> To define and give efficacious guidance to its effort in this sense, the community must draw up, apply, revise and carefully update its "educational and pastoral plan", keeping in mind the journey of faith proposed by the GC23, and translating it into concrete processes suited to the kind of young people and the context of the work.

<sup>105</sup> GC23, 225

To be a "school of faith" today it is indispensable to combine "being signs" with "being friends", to have fire in the heart and sacrifice in self-giving, to practise at one and the same time union with God and the cultivation of direct experience of the youth world, by "listening to their questions and aspirations, acquiring their culture and their language, and willingness to share experiences and projects worked out not only for them, but also and more especially with them".<sup>106</sup> It is not a matter of weakening the "sign", but of making it educationally meaningful. If our presence has no pastoral and educational significance in the locality and in the Church, it cannot be considered a "school of faith".

<sup>106</sup> GC23, 225

But it is also indispensable for this purpose that the community become a living experience of Church, and concretely of the local Church (parish, diocese, episcopal conference); and so "it must be clearly inserted in the plans and projects of the local Church for pastoral work in the youth sector. It must learn to receive incentives from it, but also to

<sup>107</sup> GC23, 226

communicate experiences".<sup>107</sup>

For this reason the chapter deliberations remind both provincial and local communities of various responsibilities they have. Only in a community that is a "school of faith" can flourish an education that will be a "pedagogy of holiness".

— *The community as a "centre of communion and participation"* refers equally to the wider educative community and to the various Groups of the Salesian Family.

<sup>108</sup> GC23, 218

"The community", says the text, "by virtue of its consecrated life, becomes a centre of communion and participation, capable of gathering together and stimulating those whom the Spirit calls to work with youth".<sup>108</sup>

This is a perspective that was launched by earlier General Chapters, but it has urgent need of realization with greater common purpose and greater efficacy and dedication. The present chapter deliberations are clear and compelling. Failure to put them into effect would be a sign of inability, or of lack of attention, or of convenience; in other words it reduces to a lack of salesian spirituality. It would be a sad thing if we had to watch the decline of some of our works because of the lack of enthusiasm in the hearts of the confreres. The "spiritual men" can be found in all ages and conditions of life; the "oratorian heart" is a salesian sine qua non from first profession to the last breath.

According to the chapter document, the central point of this third community commitment is the *involvement of the laity*. The term 'laity' is a broad one and is not applied in the same way to all. In our experience we distinguish different groups: that of the "Cooperators" (for living the christian vocation to the full), that of the "Past-pupils" (linked

more with the cultural and educational aspect), that of the "Collaborators" (which also includes people from the previous two groups, but can be much wider), and that of "Members of the educative community" (including especially the parents of the young people for whom we work, as well as all those who work with us for youth).

The involvement and utilization of the laity demands in the confreres the ability to establish with them relationships of mature sharing of responsibility, according to the nature of the group. This is not an easy thing to do; it involves a deep change of mentality and adequate treatment and relationships. But above all it calls for the ability to undertake with them "a process of formation. Experiences realized so far guarantee satisfactory results, even though with some difficulties".<sup>109</sup>

<sup>109</sup> GC23, 233

There, then, you have a very practical field for new kinds of commitment to salesian spirituality, and one that is open and in harmony with all lay conditions. And so among the priorities in our programming there will be the formation of lay people!

Further on, the Chapter recalls the importance of organization in our work, the urgency of vocational commitment, the claims of social communication, and goes on to provide some practical guidelines for particular situations. They are all very practical indications so that the community may become a leading factor in the new evangelization among youth. The great secret for getting everything going is always salesian spirituality, witnessed to by the community as a "sign of faith", as a "school of faith" and as a "centre of communion and participation".

Dear Provincials, dear Rectors, and dear Con-

freres all, let us get down with great good will to do something more, and at once.

**Under the guidance of the Help of Christians, Lodestar of the new evangelization.**

Before concluding I think it would be very useful, and for us particularly gratifying, to add one further reflection: concerning the Marian dimension of our spirituality. This, as I said earlier, is referred to in various parts of the chapter document.

Salesian spirituality is strongly Marian, as for that matter is every spirituality.

The Pope expressed the hope that Mary Help of Christians would be for our Family "the Star of the new evangelization".<sup>110</sup> Let us look therefore at this Star, and let us allow ourselves to be led by her as our "Teacher and Guide".

We have seen that the fundamental and enlivening element in any spirituality is that it is rooted in the Holy Spirit.

Now, after Christ Mary is the most lofty expression of the work of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation: she is the Spirit's masterpiece. The more you look at Mary the more you can understand and participate very much better in the enlivening presence of the Holy Spirit.

From Vatican II onwards efforts have been made to delve more deeply into the relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit. Pope Paul VI in "Marialis cultus" emphasized the fruitfulness of so doing: "Such a study", he said, "will bring out in particular the hidden relationship between the Spirit of God and the Virgin of Nazareth, and show the influence they exert on the Church".<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> GC23, 335

<sup>111</sup> MC 27

It is not difficult to observe that Mary's entire existence is marked by the Holy Spirit to such an extent that she may be considered his "Icon" or, as "Lumen gentium" puts it, the "temple" (Latin: "sacrarium") of the Holy Spirit,<sup>112</sup> i.e. the central part, secret and reserved, of the temple; from there she is the bearer of the Holy Spirit for all. This is indicated also by the titles the Council used in her regard: "Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediator"<sup>113</sup>, all of which proclaim in her a special and significant harmony with the vitalizing work of the "other Paraclete". Mary is the masterpiece, the image and bearer of the Holy Spirit because by him she was "fashioned and formed as a new creature":<sup>114</sup>

112 LG 53

113 LG 62

114 LG 56

- in her Conception she is "Immaculate": the beginning of the new creation, full of grace;
- in the Annunciation she is the "Virgin Mother": the living Ark of the new Covenant;
- at Christmas she is the "Fulfilment of the Promise": the Mother of Christ the Messiah;
- at the Visitation she is "Prophetic wisdom": the Believer who reads the book of history;
- on Calvary she is the "Mother of all men": the new Eve of redeemed humanity;
- at Pentecost she is the "Queen of Apostles": the great Intercessor on behalf of the Church;
- in her Assumption she is the "Helper of all": who pleads for our final salvation.

Such greatness and excellence in her is the work of the Holy Spirit; she is situated at the meeting-point of the Old and New Testaments; she is the "Daughter of Sion". the "Icon of the Mystery" and the Model of the Church, linked to the Holy Spirit to such an extent that she is inseparably linked with his plan of salvation, imploring his presence for all,



and accompanying his gifts in motherly fashion (think, for instance, of the history of our own charisma); for this reason she shines brightly through the centuries as the Star of evangelization.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>115</sup> cf. EN 82

In her we find the prototype of all spirituality; in fact, said the Council, Mary, “committing herself wholeheartedly to God’s saving will and impeded by no sin, devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under and with him serving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of Almighty God”.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>116</sup> LG 56

We can gather something of this unique spirituality of hers from the prophetic canticle of the “Magnificat”.<sup>117</sup> in which Mary proclaims that she is full of joy, above every weakness, convinced of God’s merciful strength, that he loves us and looks to us for great things, thus giving continual proof of his power, overcoming difficulties and providing a response to challenges; he is always faithful with his People and carries them, as he promised, to final victory.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Lk 1, 46-55

The Magnificat is indeed the hymn of christian spirituality for every new evangelization; it is an expression of enthusiasm, because it embodies a keen glance of faith, a sure plan of hope, and the immortal hymn of saving love.

### **Finally, a positive omen.**

Allow me, dear confreres, to repeat here in conclusion what I suggested to the members at the end of the GC23: “Our Congregation was solemnly entrusted to Mary on 14 January 1984, at the beginning of the GC22. The Constitutions say that this entrustment helps us to ‘become witnesses to the

young of her Son's boundless love'.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>118</sup> C 8

To her we entrust our intention to proceed on the journey of faith, intensifying our attention to the salesian spirituality of Don Bosco and our deeper understanding of it. We ask her to help us to share with the young that magnificent "spiritual patrimony" proper to the christian humanism of St Francis de Sales and used successfully and in masterly fashion by our Father for the benefit of youngsters of the poorer classes. Mary herself guided our Founder in this educative experience and taught him how to lead young people to holiness. As a motherly response to our entrustment to her we await, through Mary's intercession, the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which will ensure for us truly oratorian hearts so as to be in the world valid educators of youth to the faith.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>119</sup> GC23, 357

Rooted in the power of the Spirit, and overcoming every mistrust that might arise from difficult circumstances or from our own limitations, let us live with joy the salesian spirituality for the new evangelization, and proclaim to the world by our deeds the reasons for our hope and trust.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>120</sup> cf. 1 Pet 3, 15

My best wishes to all of you, individuals and communities, for a successful application of the GC23; it will be our best way of preparing for the coming third millennium.

Affectionately in Don Bosco,

*Don F. Viganò*