

acts

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of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

THE PRIEST OF THE YEAR 2000 A THEME WE HAVE VERY MUCH AT HEART

- Introduction. - 150th anniversary of the priestly ordination of Don Bosco. - The Synod of 1990, on priestly formation at the present day. - The "courageous clarity" of the synodal fathers. - The absolute originality of the "priesthood" of the New Covenant. - Baptismal consecration and the ordained ministry. - The delicate theme of the priest who is also a religious. - Don Bosco: Priest and Founder for the young. - Urgent need for better salesian formation. - The GC23 and our pastoral growth. - Gratitude to the Priest and his entrustment to Mary.

Rome, Solemnity of the
Immaculate Conception BVM,
8 December 1990

My dear confreres,

May the new year be for all of us a time when we intensify the spirit of Don Bosco in our hearts. In this way we shall be able, day by day, to gradually bring to reality the pedagogical and pastoral perspectives of the GC23.

Importance should be given to the "community day".¹ It will be well to recite in the course of the community meeting, which is a vital setting for ongoing formation, the "prayer" expressed in n. 95 of the Chapter document: "We believe that God loves the young... We believe that Jesus wants to share his life with young people... We believe that the Spirit is present in them... We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of

¹ GC23 222

meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them...". As we recite together the whole of this text, we shall grow in the characteristic experience which makes us see the field of education as the special place where we meet Christ.

I would like to exhort Provincials and Rectors to insist on *ongoing formation* so that "da mihi animas" may be not only the motto that characterizes us but also, and above all, the climate ensuring good health in our houses or, as Don Rinaldi used to say, the lungs through which we "sigh for souls".²

² Cf. AGC 332, pp. 41-45

To foster an atmosphere of this kind I think it will be useful to invite you to reflect on the recent ecclesial event of the Bishops' Synod, centred on priestly formation: every truly ecclesial event is also of its very nature a family event. This is a theme which for various reasons is of interest to us as a Congregation.

The 150th anniversary of the priestly ordination of Don Bosco.

In the first place a significant commemoration is coming which prompts us to think over again the historical origins of our charisma: on 5 June of this year there occurs the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's priestly ordination: it was a date of decisive importance in the life of our Founder and one which he had long desired and prepared for. It helps us to a better understanding of his pastoral heart. It is through the particular features of the priest, as manifested in Don Bosco, that we must deepen our understanding of our mission to the young and the poor.

If we count up the young confreres who aspire to be priests and are preparing for the priestly ministry in the Congregation, we find that between post-novices, those in practical training, and students of theology we arrive at the considerable number of more than 3,000; and if we add also about 450 novices who aspire to the priesthood, we reach a total of 3,500. These are numbers that remind us forcibly of the great responsibility we bear before the Church, and make us think too of the very many expectations of friendship with Christ that crowd the hearts of the young, sometimes unconsciously. These figures also give rise in us to a deep sense of gratitude and humble joy when we see them as an unfailing sign of the kindness and will of God for the continuity and growth of the Founder's charism: "every call", the Constitutions tell us, "is an indication that the Lord loves the Congregation, wants to see it vibrant for the good of the Church and never ceases to enrich it with new apostolic energy".³

³ C 22

We owe our existence to the burning zeal in the heart of Don Bosco, the priest; we share with him a pastoral mission which takes upon itself the life of faith of the young and the poorer classes; we live and work together,⁴ animated sustained and guided at world, provincial and local level, by a confrere who draws constant inspiration for his priestly zeal "through the grace of his priestly ministry and pastoral experience".⁵

⁴ C 49

⁵ C 121

Our Congregation has original features in which the priesthood (lived in complementary brotherhood between lay and priest confreres) is a constitutive element in its identity. We are a community "of clerics and laymen who complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation".⁶ And

⁶ C 4

so the theme considered by the Synod is one that touches us closely.

But also, and above all, it plunges us, together with all believers, into the ineffable mystery of Christ, putting us more intensely at the centre of his love and mission. It takes us back to the events of his death and resurrection, and to the mediation in heaven of the Risen Christ who never ceases to intercede with us before the Father. The Church's liturgical activity is rooted in him, and each day, through the Eucharist, incorporates our enterprise and our life in his sublime act of sacrifice which continues definitively as the summit of human love in history.

This is a powerful incitement to us to see the Synod as a providential event which helps to improve the spiritual quality of the life of the conferees and communities. We want to debunk that cutting statement that we have "many priests but little priesthood": this is evidently absurd, but even the suspicion that it might contain a grain of truth is depressing and prompts us to take a serious look at the matter.

The recent Synod, even though here we can take only a preliminary look at it, points to a clear method by which we can rise to higher levels.

The Synod of 1990, on the formation of the Priest at the present day.

We have followed this eighth ordinary Bishops' Synod through the newspapers, and that is not enough. We want to come closer to it to look at it from within. Let us begin with some facts that will give us a better observation point.

The 1990-Synod, which was preceded by a lengthy preparation with the contributions of episcopal conferences, took place at the Vatican from 30 September to 28 October. Taking part in it were 238 synodal fathers, 17 experts and 43 observers of various nationalities. They included four salesian prelates: Cardinal Rosalio Castillo, and Bishops Oscar Rodriguez, Basilio Mvé and Juan Abelardo Mata.

For the first time there was a complete participation by the bishops of Eastern Europe, with the result that to the usual language groups there was added another – the Slav group (made up of those from the Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, one each from Latvia and Byelorussia, and representatives from Yugoslavia and Poland). The reports given by some of these bishops on what had occurred in their local Churches was deeply moving and gave rise to prolonged applause. So, for example, Mgr Alexandru Todea, Metropolitan of Fagaras and Alba Julia in Rumania, described with penetrating realism the sufferings caused by persecution: a total of a thousand years of prison suffered by bishops, priests and faithful; the death in prison of seven bishops; and an atheistic organization of society under a dictatorial and oppressive regime.

The theme studied in the Synod was: “*the formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day*”. During the four intense weeks of work, 41 “Propositions” were formulated to be given to the Pope, with other contributions, for the drafting of the Apostolic Exhortation that would follow the Synod.

These were not just summarized proposals but well defined themes with indications for their further development. They provide a brief presentation of the cultural contexts in which believers

live at the present time, and a panorama of the thoughts of the Pastors on the evolution of society; they deal too with vocations and their discernment, the common priesthood of the People of God and the identity and mission of service proper to the priest, the means and content of their initial formation, the importance of ongoing formation, and various problems inherent in the lives of priests.

Worthy of particular note was the report of the Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Mgr Pio Laghi, on the present situation in vocations: a slow and laborious upswing in Europe and North America, with a constant increase in Africa, Latin America and Asian areas, varying in extent from one place to another.

Clearly at the centre of everything – and this is the aspect of greatest interest to us – was the consideration of the priesthood of the New Covenant under its two aspects of baptismal consecration (i.e. the priesthood common to all the faithful) and of ordained ministry (i.e. that belonging specifically to priests and bishops).

Unfortunately the media in general failed to present the values and rich renewal elements of the Synod; it was something not easy to do for widely varying reasons. More than a few newspapers and reviews of a more or less lay leaning, seizing on their favourite points of interest, gave superficial and badly informed evaluations and judgements on the negative side.

Our direct contacts with the synodal fathers, on the other hand, provide a quite different evaluation: an unusual convergence of views among the participants and an untroubled future outlook. The secretary, Mgr John Schotte, in the final press conference, spoke of a “strong convergence”, in “effec-

tive and affective brotherly collegiality". And Cardinal Goffredo Daneels, Archbishop of Brussels and a veteran of several previous Synods, said he thought this had been the best of those in which he had taken part.

Two characteristic aspects of the synodal atmosphere can be emphasized. The first is the fact that almost two-thirds of the bishops were at their first Synod, and the majority (all except about twenty) had not taken part in Vatican II, so that Mgr Schotte was able to describe this one as the first "post-conciliar" Synod; and yet in it the strong fidelity to the content of Vatican II was quite striking.

The second aspect is the air of hope, based on confidence in the intervention of the Holy Spirit for vocations and the holiness of the clergy. The synodal fathers rose above the malevolent use of current statistics as propaganda suggesting a social weakening or backwardness, or even going as far as raising the spectre of old age. This was a Synod reflecting the youthfulness of the Church and in no way lacking faith in its progress towards the third millennium.

The Pope deliberately gave explicit emphasis to the spiritual fruits of the vocation to the ministerial priesthood by the beatification of two worthy priests, Giuseppe Allamano (a past-pupil of Valdocco) and Annibale Maria Di Francia.

It was a Synod, therefore, rich in hope, which based its trust on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit who renews priesthood in the Church.

The “courageous clarity” of the synodal fathers.

The secretary Mgr Schotte, expressing an overall evaluation of the Synod, spoke amongst other things of its “courageous clarity” in giving an appropriate response to the various theories and doubts that had arisen about the very nature of priestly ministry, and consequently on the formation of the priest himself. For years past, in fact, interpretations had been circulating that conceived renewal of “ministry” as starting from sociological principles to arrive at the conclusion that such renewal must be considered as a community “function” rather than a sacramental “consecration”. A similar functional interpretation would seek to render insignificant the traditional doctrine on the ministerial priesthood; it would see such ministry as a function stemming from the local community. And so the priesthood would not be linked with an indelible character or the law of celibacy; it would be open to all and would have a great variety of forms according to the cultural requirements of time and place. It should therefore be no longer a “sacred mediation” (as they say) overladen with a crust of “power and dignity” accumulated in the course of centuries, but a simple service which should be an up-to-date response to the present needs of human social life; this would include participation by the rank and file and would mean, in fact, a democratic sharing of responsibility by all the People of God.

The nature of ministry, therefore, would have to be sought more in the laws of human society than in sacramental reference to Christ; this would call into question the apostolic succession itself in

view of a Church structure that would be no longer hierarchic.

It is not surprising that theories of this kind, together with the great social and ecclesial changes that have taken place, should have led to a crisis of priestly identity, with the result that among the “present-day circumstances” to be considered a place has to be found also and especially for a redefining of priestly identity.

As well as the confusion generated by theories of this type, there have also been the adopting of positions concerning the method of formation; even though with a right intention, some of these would favour the practice of placing candidates in the front line among those to whom the mission is addressed, paying little attention to the need for a gradual approach, the spiritual requirements for ministerial incorporation into the priesthood of Christ and specific qualification for the pastoral mission.

This is why the synodal fathers had to consider among the “present-day circumstances” referred to in their theme also (and primarily) these fundamental difficulties.

From this point of view the Synod can be considered a timely prophetic statement in favour of the Priest of the Year 2000, a statement for which there was a crying need!

The theme was of its very nature a wide one, and limits were found necessary as regards what could be dealt with in the space of four weeks. And so discussion was confined almost entirely to the “diocesan” priest; and not very much was said about the challenges presented by today’s pastoral situations. But we have to admit that there is so

great a variety of priestly charismata and of social and cultural contexts that it would be quite impossible to address all of them in so short a space of time.

It will be to our purpose however to recall here the contribution of Cardinal Jean Jerome Hamer, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life. He stated: "In Clerical Religious Institutes the priesthood belongs to the very nature of these Institutes. For these religious priests the exercise of Sacred Orders is, therefore, not an external element added as an extra to an already complete religious life. This fact is of notable importance in different fields, but especially in that of formation. Every major superior has the responsibility to maintain perfect unity in the formation for priesthood and for religious life, according to the proper identity (charism) of the Institute".⁷

⁷ Oss. Rom. 12. 10. 90

These considerations can serve as a background against which we can develop some reflections concerning in particular the originality of our own Congregation. It is a good thing for us to look squarely at the characteristic aspects of our own charisma.

Among the Propositions of the Synod there is, in any case, one that deals with the relationship between secular and religious priests, insisting on the importance of the document "Mutuae Relationes"⁸ and other Propositions concerning pastoral involvement, which derive in practice from the locality (particular Churches and Bishops' Conferences), and which carry directives binding also on religious; there are also references to the ecclesial significance of the "presbyterium" for all priests.

⁸ Rome, 14. 5. 78

We hope that the Pope's Apostolic Exhortation will offer us some further guidelines in due course.

On the other hand, the question of "present-day circumstances" will also be considered, even though from a wider standpoint, in coming meetings of bishops: the special European Synod in 1991, the IVth Assembly of the Latin-American Bishops in 1992, and the special African Synod in 1993.

The Holy Father himself recognized the need to continue in this sense the reflections begun in this Synod. In his closing address of 27 October at the end of the final general assembly the Pope, after speaking of the "very great importance" of priestly formation, added: "The problems just mentioned involve the universal Church. Consideration must be continued and followed up, according to the guidelines set down by the Synodal Assembly, in view of their application to the various situations of the local Churches. This continuation of the work is part and parcel of the normal flow of Synodal activity. The Synod will yield all its results only through further work, inspired and guided by the Synod itself".⁹

⁹ Oss. Rom. 28. 10. 90

The absolute originality of the priesthood of the New Covenant.

There is no doubt that the emergence of the signs of the times, the new relationship between the Church and the world and the demands of the renewal of the ordained ministry flowing from the obligations of the new evangelization, imply a deep and attentive reconsideration of the nature and practice of the christian priesthood, which the Council of Trent had not set out in all its details be-

cause of the prevailing circumstances. Clarity and certainty about one of the most vital and constitutive aspects of the Church is of surpassing interest to all the People of God. To have a faith vision of priestly identity means perceiving more deeply, as far as is possible, the mystery of Christ. On the basis of a clear identity it will be easier to be open to the search for new ways of exercising the ministry without running grave risks of deviation.

The point of reference to which the synodal fathers returned as a starting point for their considerations was the doctrine contained in the great documents of Vatican II. It will be useful to recall their main themes, which should be the daily nourishment of the contemplation of our faith.

The notion of christian priesthood in the New Covenant does not belong to the specific concept of religions; the latter confine the priesthood to the environment of rites and what is sacred. But in the New Covenant, on the other hand, it is a historical fact that stems directly from the man Jesus Christ and the saving events of his Passover. It is not therefore a religious expression of the sacred, but is based on an event of time and place which touches the whole of human reality, with a practical influence on the overall meaning of his existence and of his vocation as an individual in creation. Christianity lives more by *faith* than by *religion*; in it there is only one true "Priest", with a single efficacious "Sacrifice": i.e. Christ with his death and resurrection!

"He has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life".¹⁰ From the religious point of view of the Jewish tradition, Jesus

¹⁰ Heb 7. 16

Christ would be, in our present-day terminology, a "layman": "For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests".¹¹ His *sacrifice* too is unique and is realized in the historical events of his passion, death and resurrection: "Christ was offered once for all",¹² and not in a temple or a sacred place but on the hill of Calvary and in a social context of condemnation through the scaffold of the cross: from there he passed once and for all time into the true sanctuary, where he is seated at the right hand of God to be our decisive mediator; "he makes use of a greater, a more complete tabernacle, which human hands never fashioned; it does not belong to this order of creation at all".¹³ Christ's passion and death are an expression of the highest love a human being can ever display, and the resurrection bears this supreme sacrifice to the Father in a perennial and continuously active form.

There was never before, nor can there ever be in the future, a priesthood more original than this one. It touches, as we said, the very reality of man from within his nature and his destination in history. Christ is a priest because he is a man; and as the paschal man he is the "second Adam", i.e. the founder of the true "new man", whose mystery he reveals and whom he renews in line with the fullness of his capabilities as king of all creation; he restores to him, in fact, the dignity of the worshipper for the whole of creation which he had lost through the sin of the first Adam. Man indeed was called from the first moment of creation to be the interpreter of the world before God; the true liturgy was meant to be the "living man" with his knowledge, gratitude, fellowship and his entire history.

¹¹ Heb 7,14¹² Heb 9,28¹³ Heb 9,11

What a disaster sin brought with it! Only Christ, with his unique and indefectible priesthood, was able to rehabilitate man in wondrous fashion ("mirabilis"!), and reestablish him in his dignity and vocation. And so his priesthood enters into the very framework of an objective and integral anthropology which should be of interest to every human being and to all cultures.

This priesthood of Christ, although unique, is not an isolated reality as though he were an isolated hero; on the contrary it is an expression of the deepest and universal solidarity, that of the first-born of many brethren, of the "head" of the body of all humanity: in him and through him exists the priesthood and sacrifice of man, of the whole human race.

Baptismal consecration and the ordained ministry.

To attain this objective of the involvement of all, Christ instituted, as a visible means for those who believe in him, the sacramental nature of the New Covenant, i.e. the mediation of signs (persons and things) indicative of his Passover. Then he sent the Holy Spirit to incorporate, one by one, in the People of God by his gentle power all humanity, and bring them to act in history as personal signs of the "New Man".

It was the Lord's will that everyone should be endowed with a "common priesthood" to transform the personal life of each one into an acceptable sacrifice, and the whole of history into a liturgy of the living man. "The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priest-

hood, that through all the works of christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy, and pleasing to God. They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs".¹⁴

A wonderful goal indeed!

To render this common priesthood visible and effective, the Lord made present his unique paschal sacrifice through the sacramental nature of the eucharistic celebration. The common priesthood brings every generation, with its own works of love, into the supreme act of the liturgy of the Cross.

Rightly did the Council proclaim that the liturgy (and more precisely the Eucharist) is "the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed, and is also the fount from which all her power flows".¹⁵ The tasks of evangelization and apostolic labours are essentially ordered to this: sharing in the priesthood of Christ, fighting at his side for the defeat of evil, to love like him and to express in daily living what is experienced sacramentally through faith.

And so the common priesthood, which we must all live as disciples of the Lord and living members of his Body, is the highest expression of human dignity, the reintegration of his human mission in the world, the historical way which makes it possible to feel involved in redemption and salvation.

To bring about this universal participation in Christ's priesthood, he himself instituted the ordained ministry. This he did by choosing and con-

¹⁴ LG 10

¹⁵ SC 10

secrating the Twelve, who continue through the centuries by means of the apostolic succession. The sacrament of Order consecrates their successors (the bishops) and provides them with a special power of service which makes possible the exercise of the priesthood of the community: he himself calls them and qualifies them by the "anointing" of the Holy Spirit.

Priests, in turn, are ordained as collaborators of the Bishops, and receive in their consecration a sharing in the sacramental power of Order which qualifies them to serve the community through two complementary activities: that of acting "in the person of Christ the head" through the ministry of the word, through the sacramental reactualization of the one paschal sacrifice of the Eucharist, and through the administration of the sacraments of salvation; and in addition that of acting "in the person of the Church", representing her before God and dedicating themselves to her children with the love and solicitude of a faithful and resourceful spouse.

Power of this kind, which the priest derives from the sacrament of Order, is not of the sociological kind imposed on the faithful through superior dignity, but is an indispensable service, instituted by Christ, for the functioning of the common priesthood.

Rightly therefore was it said synthetically during the Synod that the ministerial priesthood belongs to the constitutive elements of the Church: it relates simultaneously to Christ and to the Church or, in other words, to Christ as the Chief Shepherd and Spouse of the Church. Ministry therefore is not only the fulfilment of an organic function in the Church, but is also a self-donation to the baptized

in view of their life and activity of faith in history.

All this makes us think, not only that the ministerial priesthood is constitutively ordered to the common priesthood,¹⁶ but that in the priest's heart the spiritual characteristic of his specific ministry is that of having an awareness and internal feeling which bind him inseparably with all that portion of the People of God to whom he has been sent. If in fact there be a real harmful crust to be removed in an ordained ministry, it is that of a "clericalist" mode of action (of which examples are not lacking in history) which make the priest act like a boss among the People of God; such an attitude has nothing in common with Christ the Good Shepherd, who is the "Servant of Yahweh". A priest behaving in this way would show very clearly that he had not understood the priesthood of the New Covenant.

The one who makes possible the constitutive and spiritual authenticity of the priest or bishop as "minister of the community"¹⁷ is the Holy Spirit, who makes efficacious the consecration of Order and infuses into his heart a particular pastoral charity accompanied by different charismata according to the needs of the People of God. This aspect of diversification in pastoral charity is very important with respect to the multiple needs of the people.

There is therefore in priests a common basic identity, differentiated however by pastoral gifts which imply a pluriformity of ways of pastoral service. If then to these charismatic differences be added the particular needs of those to whom specific groups of priests are sent, it will become immediately clear that their ministerial identity cannot be described in a univocal way, but must take into ac-

¹⁶ LG 10

¹⁷ LG 20

count the requirements stemming from the Spirit and also from the times and needs of those for whom they work.

Rightly then does the theme of the Synod refer to "present-day circumstances" which will always need to be studied; the kind of formation to be fostered, in fact, must be related also to the concrete type of ministry the priest will have to carry out in response to human needs.

After summarizing the priest's identity, the synodal fathers insist on the particular interior dispositions which must permeate his ministerial identity. It is true that between *ministry* and *person* there is a clear distinction, but nevertheless since the priestly ministry is not simply an intermittent *function* but implies a special *consecration* of the person through the permanent character of Order, there arises in the priest a strong connection between ministry and person, enlivened by pastoral charity which binds the person to the ministry in the depths of his heart, prompting in him the feelings of the Good Shepherd. The priest is not a functionary with fixed hours of work, but a full-time consecrated individual throughout all his existence: look at the Apostles if you want examples!

Insistence on this specific interior attitude is of exceptional importance, because it links the soul of the priest to the Father who is rich in mercy, to Christ the Eternal Priest, to the Holy Spirit fount of pastoral charity, to the ecclesial community whose servant he becomes, to the Pope and the Bishop whose collaborator he is, and to the other priests of the particular Church in which he works and with whom he forms a fraternal presbyterium.

But since his ministerial priesthood is at the ser-

vice of the People of God, his interior preparation necessarily includes formation to kindness, to pardon and service, to the discernment of hearts, to sensitivity as regards the needs of others, to missionary zeal, to responsibility for the building of the community, to the spirit of initiative, to courage and sacrifice, to the understanding and communication of the word of God, to discernment of the signs of the times, to the witness of the beatitudes, to the demands of solidarity and justice; in a nutshell, to the personal living out of a faith which tirelessly supports the faith of others – all these things constitute without any doubt the level that the evangelical life style of priests should reach.

This spiritual formation takes for granted a practical human and christian maturity, and adequate intellectual preparation and, above all, a conscious and increasing pastoral determination with regard to the prevailing situation.

The delicate theme of the priest who is also a religious

The Synod concentrated its attention, as we said earlier, on the diocesan priest, but it is clear that it is on the foundation of an interior pastoral disposition common to all priests that can be based the possibility of further spiritual and pastoral traits that differ from one another, in line with the plurality of charisms with which the Holy Spirit enriches the exercise of the ministry. In this way there has arisen during the centuries a variegated and complementary convergence of different forms which render the practice of the ministry more attractive, more flexible, and more relevant; this in-

deed is characteristic of a Church that is not only "well prepared for the building up of the Body of Christ", but is also "adorned with manifold gifts" so as "to manifest in herself the multiform wisdom of God".¹⁸ Here we may think of the priestly physiognomy proper to the members of those Institutes of consecrated life which are defined canonically by the technical term 'clerical'; in them, as Card. Hamer declared in the assembly, the exercise of the ministry belongs, in a manner proper to each one, to the very nature of their charisma. This is a fact of considerable importance both for the Church and above all for the life of the Institutes themselves.

¹⁸ Cf. PC 1

This is a delicate matter which has not yet been given sufficient direct attention. The Synod has left it open, but has nevertheless recognized its importance and relevance in speaking of the mutual relations to be deepened between religious and secular priests; it can be said too that some of the initiatives for renewal in view of a better formation of the diocesan clergy draw their inspiration from some aspects of the practical formation already taking place in religious Institutes.

We in the Congregation have already made certain reflections on the topic of the priest-confrere, especially when we went more deeply into the pastoral quality of the salesian mission.

We know that the consecration proper to our religious profession is rooted in our baptismal dignity; it makes us grow in faith as disciples of Christ with a particular "salesian spirit" so as to be signs and bearers of God's love for the young.¹⁹ Rightly we expressed this spiritual characterization by using the term "salesian" fundamentally as a noun; and so every confreres is either a "priest-salesian"

¹⁹ Cf. C 2

or a "lay-salesian". We emphasized the impact of the mission to the young and the poor on the whole of our identity; it characterizes our religious life not only as an "apostolic consecration",²⁰ but also as determining the subject of the mission, which is the community rather than an individual,²¹ and a community moreover which reflects the indispensable complementary relationship between priests and brothers, and is animated, served and guided by a confrere who is enriched by the gifts of Order.²²

For the priest-salesian this means on the one hand that in him his priestly consecration is qualified and enlivened by the spirit and mission that is his by his salesian profession, and on the other it ensures, enriches and renders fruitful the pastoral identity of his own vocation and that of the whole community.

But this is not all. If we consider from a historical standpoint how our salesian charism was born and has developed, we see that it came into being through the work of the Holy Spirit and through the motherly intervention of Mary,²³ from the apostolic heart of a diocesan priest, Don Bosco, who in turn drew his inspiration from the zeal and pastoral kindness of a residential front-line bishop, St Francis de Sales. It is a charism therefore whose historical roots are actively based in the priestly zeal of the ordained ministry, intimately and explicitly linked with the exercise of the common priesthood of a large number of collaborators.

Every member of the Congregation is first and foremost a member of a salesian community which has the original feature of being made up of ecclesiastics and laymen, equal in dignity and complementing each other in their pedagogical and pastoral commitment.²⁴

²⁰ Cf. C 3

²¹ Cf. C 44

²² Cf. C 121

²³ Cf. C 1

²⁴ Cf. ACS 298

From the awareness that every confrere must have that he is an active and responsible member of a community with this particular charismatic feature, there arises a conscious knowledge and mentality of this complementary dimension, through which every member realizes how indispensable is the mutual enriching support provided by the priestly and lay elements. Hence, as I wrote in the circular already referred to, "the Salesian who is a priest should feel a spontaneous bond of communion with the Brother in virtue of their common salesian vocation, and the lay Salesian should feel the same towards his priest-confrere. Our vocation is essentially a community vocation; hence there must be an effective communion that goes deeper than mere friendship between persons. More profoundly significant is the mutual relationship of the two basic elements, priestly and lay".²⁵ In the heart of every member, from the very fact that he is a Salesian, there is a vocational relationship with the other kind of confrere who makes up the community.

²⁵ *ibid.* pp. 5-6

It is not a case of the priestly dimension being exclusive to the priest-confreres and the lay dimension exclusive to the Brothers; the salesian community is not a more or less artificial aggregation of two kinds of members who make the effort to live together. What we must insist on is that in the heart of every confrere are found both dimensions, emphasized in different ways by the two types of salesian vocation, but intimately connected with each other by their particular charismatic nature: as a good Salesian the priest cultivates also the lay dimension of the common mission and the Brother too, as a good Salesian, cultivates on his side the priestly dimension of the same common mission.

And so it can be seen why both dimensions are equally and simultaneously important for the drawing up and realization of the educative and pastoral plan. Without the lay dimension we should lose the positive aspect of a healthy secularity characteristic of our choice of educational methods, and without the priestly dimension we should run the risk of losing the pastoral quality of the whole plan. By upsetting the complementary balance we could fall on the one hand into a kind of pragmatic social activism, and on the other into a too generic kind of pastoral commitment that would no longer be the genuine mission of Don Bosco.

The Synod invites us to a clear rethinking of the overall significance of our mission, and to be clear about where lies the vital synthesis that ensures the identity of our apostolic consecration.

This is why the Synod's theme is of such concern to us. We too in the Congregation, in harmony with the bishops, want to get a clear mental picture of the Priest of the Year 2000. We want to collaborate, as genuine Salesians, in the growth of faith in the new historical era that is beginning. And looking forward with us in hope are all the members of the Salesian Family, and especially an increasing number of young people who feel attracted by the friendly heart of Don Bosco the priest.

And so without further delay we intend to draw light and indications from the Apostolic Exhortation the Pope is now preparing, so as to commit ourselves ever more seriously to promoting the growth of the common priesthood in the Congregation, and in particular to the formation of the priest-salesian, keeping clearly in mind the original nature and demands of our charisma. It is the Church herself that wants us to be genuinely faithful to our proper cha-

racteristics.²⁶

²⁶ Cf. MR 11

I would like to conclude this important point by recalling that the intensity of pastoral charity, and hence the degree of holiness, do not of themselves depend either on the ordained ministry or on the various services provided in shared apostolic responsibility, but only on the interior vitality of the common priesthood that unites us to Christ (or in other words on the life of faith, hope and charity), with which every ministry and service is carried out.

The life of grace (i.e. of pastoral charity), says St Thomas Aquinas, has a value which is of itself greater than all created things. We shall be judged on the basis of love: in the heavenly Jerusalem there will be no further need for the Bible, for bishops and priests, for the magisterium, for the sacraments, for coordination, or for the great many mutual services which are indispensable in our history. And so already, in the ecclesial community, the order of institutional, hierarchical and operational realities take second place (if we may put it that way; remember where the chapter on the People of God is placed in "Lumen Gentium"!) to the Mystery they serve and reveal to those who live the faith. Holiness is rooted in the degree of perception and communion with the life of the Trinity. We see the intensity of holiness reflected in Mary, and ministerial authenticity in Peter. Both were very holy people: but they show us very clearly that the degree of holiness is not to be identified with hierarchical and ministerial degree.

Don Bosco: Priest and Founder for the young.

This year, as I said earlier, we commemorate the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's priestly ordination. The consecration of Order was an event of grace not only for his personal life but also for his whole Salesian Family. The Holy Spirit sent him forth as a priest, under the spiritual guidance of St Joseph Cafasso, to interpret and carry out his ministry in harmony with the circumstances of the period then in evolution and the urgent social and cultural problems of the city of Turin. This he did with boldness and originality through a preferential option for the young, and especially those most in need.

While the Synod was in progress I thought several times of two judgements that had been made on Don Bosco's kind of priestly life, made by two writers not accustomed to the sort of reflection we are wont to make in our houses.

One we know already is the answer given by the famous Dominican scholar P.M.D.Chenu to a journalist, who had asked him who he thought would be the new saints for the period after the Council: "First of all", he said, "I would like to remind you of one who preceded the Council by a century: Don Bosco. He is already a new and prophetic model of sanctity through his work which marks a break with the way of thinking and believing of his contemporaries".²⁷

The other I came across recently in a recent newspaper article on the Synod's work; it gave a judgement that was substantially negative: the Synod, under the influence of the Curia had defended the figure of the traditional priest of the Council of Trent, instead of presenting one in line with

²⁷ *Avvenire*, 22. 2. 84

the new social demands of the present day. But although the author showed no great sympathy for Don Bosco, he said of him that "he had already presented in Piedmont halfway through the nineteenth century a very different figure of a priest... The priests of his oratory lived in the midst of boys destined for the lowliest trades; he used to hitch up his cassock to play with them. And Don Bosco prepared his young aspirants to the priesthood to be men of the same kind as himself; because of this his bishop would not ordain them. It was in fact an unheard of innovation".²⁸ The writer stated this fact as a preliminary to going off on his own line of thought.

²⁸ SERGIO QUINZIO,
L'Espresso, 21. 10. 90

It is to our purpose though to take up this idea of a peculiar concrete feature impressed by Don Bosco on the salesian priest; and we do it having in mind the pluriformity recognized by Vatican II as regards the manner of exercising the priestly ministry; the common ministerial task, in fact, of building up the Body of Christ calls for many kinds of duties and fresh adaptations, especially in our own times.²⁹

²⁹ Cf. PO 8

Today we have our sights on the horizon of the third millennium; deep and rapid changes are taking place around us; we note the irrelevance of the faith in the emerging culture, and how harmful this is for youth and the poorer classes; we are concerned about the vast and complex field of education, because we see it being bombarded by a stream of innovations which give it dynamism but without the light of evangelization, and consequently upend it. A careful consideration of Don Bosco's pastoral style should guide us as we look for criteria with which to confront these challenges of our day.

In the first place the salesian priest (in union

with the lay salesian) is sent to fulfil a mission in the midst of the world of the young and the poor; this requires him to undertake certain tasks, in the areas of education and the culture of the world of work, aimed at people who may be far from the Church or belonging to other religions. He must also be convinced that in the community he is a collaborator with the lay salesian in communion of vocation, and one with him in drawing up and carrying out a single common plan. It is also up to him to take an active part in the animation of the various Groups of the Salesian Family, both consecrated and lay.

All this calls for adequate preparation, solicitous care and a particular manner of ministerial practice. And so it will be well for the priest to refer back continually to Don Bosco as his model;³⁰ as he looks at him he will have to rethink the great possibilities of pastoral charity as an inexhaustible source of apostolic creativity.

It was pastoral charity that led Don Bosco, through the special intervention of the Holy Spirit, to be a Founder, i.e. to pass on to many others, as a legacy to be developed, his specific mission to the young and the poor. Because of the particular charisma that was linked to his priestly zeal, he gave rise to a growing apostolic family embracing men and women, lay people and religious; and in this way he showed that this kind of pastoral charity could be the centre and synthesis of a salesian spirit shared by a vast movement for doing good.³¹

The consecrated life of religious Institutes founded by Don Bosco is not copied from the model of hermits in the desert or contemplatives in monasteries (who are customarily presented as the historical forerunners of religious life); rather does it

³⁰ Cf. C 21

³¹ Cf. C 10

draw its inspiration from the apostolic life of the Twelve and the pastoral preoccupations of bishops (St Francis de Sales) and priests with the care of souls (Don Bosco); hence we have a type of religious consecration of a unique kind, closely linked with the pastoral charity of the ordained ministry.³²

The true identity of the salesian priest is of great interest, not only to the other confreres in the Congregation but also to all members of the great Salesian Family; his ministerial zeal and the depth of his pastoral convictions ensure and nourish the spirituality of all of them. But the converse is also true: if he should be spiritually superficial and only weakly united with God; if his ministerial activity should be languid and without teeth, unfortunately but inevitably the very sources of Don Bosco's charisma would be damaged.

On this account we have been concerned in the Congregation for years about a better formation for our priests.

Urgent need for better salesian formation.

A notable part of the Synod's work was dedicated to the problems of priestly formation. After probing the settings from which vocations are born, insistence was laid on the need for a preliminary year of preparation (a kind of novitiate), on formation communities or seminaries (and Major Seminaries in particular), on the decisive importance of studies arranged in the light of new progress in science and technology and modern pastoral needs, on the competence and ecclesial sense of the teachers, on the human, christian and spiritual atmosphere in the formation communities, and on

³² Cf. EGIDIO VIGANÒ
*Per una teologia della
vita consecrata*, LDC
1986, pp. 10-11, 33-34.

the indispensability of ongoing formation in harmony with the process of inculturation. The question was also discussed of seminarians coming from the various Movements, who had been formed with their own spiritual characteristics but must then enter into a sincere relationship with their own bishop and presbyterium, in fullness of communion and dedication.

For us the criteria for the formation of the salesian priest, with his particular vocational characteristics, are to be found in the "*Ratio*", promulgated on 8 December 1985;³³ the Synod prompts us to emphasize its relevance and importance. We can rejoice in the fact of its complete conformity in what refers to the foundations of the identity of the ordained ministry, and its clear perception of what is characteristic of our own charisma. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who collaborated in drawing it up, revising it and bringing it to perfection. In the Congregation we have a secure guideline to follow: let us set about deepening our knowledge of it and putting it into practice! Only if it is fully implemented can we home in on the indispensable key points of our spirit.

But if we look at the concrete state of affairs, we have to confess unfortunately that during these years of renewal we have noted with concern that here and there in some Provinces there have been some shortcomings: in the immediate formation for the priesthood, in the follow-up of young priests in the first five years after ordination, and in the intensity and adequacy of ongoing formation.

The reminder about *ongoing formation* figured largely in the concerns of the synodal fathers. It had been already referred to in various documents of the Magisterium, as well as in our own General

Chapters (especially the GC23), our Constitutions, the Ratio and Provincial Directories, but not everyone seems to have understood its true nature and purpose. In the profane sector it is considered quite simply as the principle or viewpoint which regulates the entire process of cultural formation seen in its overall and interdisciplinary dimension, no longer tied in with a particular segment of the person or attached to a particular period of his existence. It is a process that embraces every expression and educational process from the cradle to the grave. It covers the whole existence of every person, youngster or adult, with all the problems involved, according to specific methods and the new ways of educational transmission with its various implications, and others as well.

In the setting of our salesian life the concept of ongoing formation pervades the whole of the Ratio. Before continual updating in the various sectors of salesian activity and mission, which are indispensable, the Ratio sees in the Constitutions³³ our life as a "path to holiness" to be followed in "daily efforts to grow in the perfect love of God and men"; it sees it as "a response that we continually renew to the special covenant the Lord has made with us"; a life of docility to the Holy Spirit "in a constant effort of conversion and renewal".³⁵

The consequence emerging from these brief quotations is this: the period of initial formation is characterized by specific growth processes, rich in relevant content, but also by the assimilation of criteria and methods which must form a dynamic accompaniment in appropriate ways to every phase of life, with priority given to the spiritual dimension, which is the first and last motive for everything. The logic of baptism and religious profes-

³³ FSDB, 2nd edtn, Rome 1985.

³⁴ C 118, 119, 96, 98, 25

³⁵ FSDB 488 ff.

sion, as incorporation into the divine life through the following of Christ, tends of its nature to growth and in fact demands it, as is frequently stated in the Letters of the Apostle Paul.

And here let me add that if it is true that through the studies in the phases of initial formation the aim is to develop a proper critical faculty and an indispensable pedagogical and pastoral competence (not always alert unfortunately with regard to theories put forward by certain researchers), there remains in some cases the danger of not giving sufficient care to competence and ministerial fervour in what regards the salesian spirit. The priest must be the man of Jesus Christ and of the Church, sent into the world to communicate the news of salvation, truth in its integrity, the mercy of the Father, the redemption of the Son, the interior power of the Spirit; for this he must be enthusiastic and tireless in bringing hope: a man who is a sacrament, a person who is also a sign.

The synodal Fathers were concerned to present priestly identity in its most genuine form, precisely so as to insist on the indispensability of an adequate spirituality, stemming from pastoral charity, which leads to an ardent constancy. Religious Institutes must add to this pastoral aspect, for their own priests, the particular characteristics of the spirit of their own charisma. This was emphasized by Card. Hamer in his intervention: "Whenever future priests receive all their institutional formation within the institute to which they belong, the task of superiors is relatively easy. But it is no longer the same when the superiors send their religious to centres of ecclesiastical studies outside their own institute. In this case the responsibility of superiors, far from diminishing, increases notably. Indeed,

participating in such a centre of studies postulates that the young people live in a religious house of their institute, in the heart of an educative and lively community, with the permanent presence of qualified educators, capable of assisting young men in integrating in their religious life the philosophical and theological teachings that they receive in the study centres. This implies great sacrifices for the institutes. But this is the high price that is paid to ensure the unity of the priesthood and religious life, and this unity is a great benefit for the Mystical Body".³⁶

³⁶ OSS. Rom. 12. 10 90

Our reflection on the event of the Synod should indeed be an invitation and stimulus to think over carefully once again the content and important guidelines of our Ratio, and especially to revise in the Provincial Councils, "Curatoria" and individual formation communities, the practice being followed, so as to correct any defects in its application and boost its quality.

The Ratio forms part of the "particular law" of the Congregation and is, in consequence, a vital element in our Rule of life;³⁷ it was drawn up with the contributions of the whole Congregation in complete agreement with the renewed text of the Constitutions and the new Code of Canon Law. It is founded on the salesian vocational identity and presents a strongly unified plan of formation.³⁸ By putting into practice the principles and norms, I wrote in presenting the book, we shall be led to a clearer sense of vocation, a gift which is contemporary, original and fertile; the possibility of unifying one's existence through the integral development of the various aspects of formation (human maturation, intellectual and professional preparation, religious and apostolic life); the feeling of being socially use-

³⁷ Cf. C 191

³⁸ FSDB 25-27

ful and apostolically significant and fruitful; the development of a characteristic spirituality, the sense of belonging to the Congregation and that of ecclesial communion, a singular kind of service to the young and their condition".³⁹

³⁹ *ibid.* p. 19

Provincials, Rectors and formation personnel should consider as a priority their obligation to frequently reconsider the norms and principles of this important document and fulfil with solicitous diligence the tasks it indicates. Constant attention of this kind will result in "much good for the Provinces, for the Congregation and for their future. It will mean sowing with toil, but with the certainty of reaping the harvest with joy. These significant options, made and realized in the Congregation by all of us, are like so many elements of its renewal, of that "fair copy" of which Don Bosco used to speak when he left its preparation as a legacy to our responsibility as his disciples and continuers".⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 20

The GC23 and our pastoral growth.

We recently celebrated the 23rd General Chapter; even though it did not deal explicitly with the specific vocation of the salesian priest, it described the horizons of the salesian mission in the circumstances of the present day: its particular and original nature, the pastoral reading of contemporary situations and events, and the educational methods for evangelization. All this touches closely the "Salesian" as such, whether he be priest or brother; and it implies a special relationship with the common priestly dimension.

In the light of the Synod therefore we can speak of the particular "priestly" quality – a wider term

than the canonical “clerical” – which we must enhance in the Congregation. I will point out three aspects that I believe to be fundamental and to involve all of us; they are: *pastoral quality*, *salesian spirituality*, and *shared responsibility by the community* as the subject of the mission. The consideration of these aspects from the standpoint of the priesthood (whether baptismal or ministerial) highlights some novel aspects of no little importance that will help us to get a clearer understanding of their values.

— The *pastoral quality* is a fundamental note that permeates the whole of the Chapter document. The proposals for the study of the reality of situations, analysis of contexts and making plans for carrying out the work that lies ahead, are all presented as “a *pastoral study*”.⁴¹

⁴¹ GC23 16

This quality derives from the strength of the “*da mihi animas*” (the inspiration of St Francis de Sales and of Don Bosco – both of them “pastors”!), it is concerned with education to the faith, it takes pains to analyze the reality of contexts, it makes use of the best human means available to know and discern them, and puts us on guard lest we become obsessed with other interests that are not genuinely ecclesial. We could call this a typically “priestly” attitude in the full sense of the term, to the extent that it involves us all in commitment to educational and pastoral services for the purpose of rendering our charges capable of celebrating their liturgy of life by incorporating it into Christ’s Eucharist. It is precisely for this reason that our pastoral solicitude does not stop at a knowledge and deeper analysis of the great doctrinal principles and of the Gospel itself (which it obviously appreciates, esteems and

studies at depth), but also dedicates itself with attention and constant flexibility to the perception of concrete circumstances, looking into their content and motivations, analyzing the questions they pose, and identifying the sort of challenges they present for evangelization.

In connection with the formation of the salesian priest, the pastoral aspect is without any doubt the element that constitutes and gives direction to all his apostolic activity.

— The second aspect to be considered is that of *salesian spirituality* as an interior force proceeding from pastoral charity.⁴²

⁴² Cf. C 10

We have already seen that our charisma comes forth from the heart of Don Bosco the priest. His is a spirituality that is radically priestly, taking its inspiration from Peter, Paul, the canonized bishops and their collaborators. It is a spirituality that calls to mind what St Augustine says in commenting on the passage in St John's Gospel⁴³ where the pastoral mandate is given to Peter; he feels himself challenged by "the words Christ repeated so insistently: 'Do you love me? Feed my sheep!', as though to say: if you love me, never mind taking care of yourself, but look after my sheep. And take care of them as mine, not as your own; seek my glory in them, not yours, my dominion not yours, my profit and reward not yours, if you do not want to be among those who belong to 'evil times', i.e. those who love themselves with all that derives from self-love, the source of every evil".⁴⁴

⁴³ Jn 21,17

⁴⁴ *Treatise on St John* 123,
5

As you can see, that is the salesian spirituality of "da mihi animas".

It bears within itself a double and simultaneous vital inclination: that of a continual growth in the

love that flows from the heart of Christ the Saviour, sharing and leading others to share in the priesthood of the New Covenant, whatever their state of life may be; and that of feeling oneself to be sent to feed the poor and lowly through generous self-donation. It is a spirituality nourished by pastoral charity in a specific way which cultivates the attitude "of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving".⁴⁵

⁴⁵ C 11

The expressions "union with God", "thirst for souls", "work and temperance", "make yourself loved", "serve the Lord in holy joy", "no exertion is heavy when it is a question of something for the Church or the Pope", "that you are young is enough to make me love you very much", "family atmosphere", "spirit of initiative", "preventive system" etc., take every Salesian (and hence also confreres who are priests) back to the model of the priestly heart of Don Bosco, "deeply human, open to the realities of this earth, and filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit" to such an extent that he lived in the midst of daily reality as though "seeing him who is invisible".⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Cf. C 21

— Finally the theme of *shared responsibility in the community* as the subject of the mission, while bringing to mind the mutual relationship between priestly and lay dimensions, prompts all the confreres, under the guidance of the one who takes Don Bosco's place (a priest-confrere), to work towards a living synthesis that can constantly exploit the energy from two poles that are linked together: human advancement and growth in faith. This "grace of unity" is specific to the salesian vocation, which moves every confrere to have, like Don Bosco, *always and everywhere a priestly attitude*: the pasto-

ral zeal of the educator. Every Salesian in fact, whether he be priest or layman, models himself on Christ the Good Shepherd, of whom he is a personal sign of service to the young.

The GC23 insists on ongoing formation so that every community may be a "sign and school of faith". It is characteristic of the priesthood of the New Covenant to take on responsibility for the faith of others. The salesian community does this while immersed in the world of youth, which it finds a suitable place for carrying out its own ongoing formation: "Living in the midst of the young and in constant contact with working-class surroundings, the Salesian tries to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of each day, and so acquires the *ability to learn* from life's experiences".⁴⁷ The salesian community regards life as its great textbook and as the true altar of sacrifice.

- From these reflections on the GC23, brief though they are, can be seen at once the exceptional importance that attaches in the Congregation to the initial and ongoing formation of the salesian priest for the physiognomy of our communities and for its many kinds of service both to the young and to the various branches of the Salesian Family. His growth in interior priestly qualities is of concern to all, e.g. special competence in contemplating and proclaiming the Word of God, in the vital and pedagogical exploitation of the liturgy, in the direction of souls through the sacrament of Reconciliation, in the ability to catechize and evangelize, and in general in the knack of incorporating the initiatives of human development into an organic synthesis of the christian faith.

The indications for the process of formation and the methods to be followed, which are authori-

⁴⁷ C 119

tatively set out in the "Ratio", are particularly relevant and valid at the present day in the light of the GC23.

Gratitude to the Priest and his entrustment to Mary.

In conclusion, dear confreres, there are some stimulating thoughts in the last two Propositions drawn up by the synodal fathers.

In the first place there is a public proclamation of gratitude to the Priest: his ministry is necessary for the good of the Church; his virtue has the happy result of causing growth in spirituality in others; through his service, and especially through the administration of the sacraments,⁴⁸ he gives vitality and drive to the baptismal consecration that produces a priestly people for the liturgy of life.

⁴⁸ Cf. LG 11

The priest is a full-time servant of our christian dignity as true children of God. Hence there arises spontaneously from the heart a strong feeling of gratitude towards those who have followed the call of the Lord and given themselves generously to the work of the ministry. Believers have the priest very much at heart; he is a gift of God to be esteemed and loved, a person to be considered as a living part of their own existence.

During the beatification of the two priests, Giuseppe Allamano and Annibale Maria Di Francia, the Pope rightly said: "The greatest chastisement the Almighty inflicts on his people is to deprive them of his ministers, or rather of ministers after his own heart". Let us feel prompted to intensify our prayers for priestly vocations, for their best possible formation in the prevailing circumstances, and for

the perseverance and holiness of all priests. And let us try to increase in those people who have forgotten it an understanding of the need for the priest in society. In this way we shall show that we have really at heart the Priest of the Year 2000!

The other thought is contained in the final Proposition and refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary, "Mother of Christ and Mother of priests". In her womb Christ was consecrated priest of the New Covenant. Mary accompanied him to the foot of the Cross in the supreme act of the new and unique sacrifice. She waited with the Apostles in the cenacle in expectation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the beginning of the ministry. Assumed into heaven, she accompanies Christ the Eternal Priest in his permanent mediation. As Mother and Image of the Church, she showers her solicitous care on the friends of her Son who, through the ordained ministry, share in a special manner in his priesthood for the benefit of others.

The formation of the priest refers back to her, both as the human being who best and most fully responded to God's call, and as the disciple who accepted in herself the Word of the Father and gave birth to him for all others. Mary, the Queen of the Apostles, appears as the shining incentive and help in ecclesial communion and gives constant light to the mission through her virginal motherhood.

We place our hope in her zealous intercession and entrust to her attentive care the pastoral work for vocations, their formation in the circumstances of the present day, the interior growth of priests of all the particular Churches, and especially of our Salesian Congregation, that their apostolic spirit and ministerial competence may increase accord-

ing to the wonderful example of the two ardent priestly hearts of St John Bosco and St Francis de Sales.

In this way all the Congregation, the entire Salesian Family, and ever more numerous ranks of youngsters and people in general, will understand and celebrate each day the baptismal priesthood which incorporates the acts of love of each one into Christ's own supreme act of love, than which nothing can be greater.

The priesthood of the New Covenant in very truth leads human history to become concentrated on the summit of love, gradually building through the centuries the Kingdom of God in which Love will be all in all.

May the 150th anniversary of the ordination of Don Bosco reawaken in the Congregation a deep esteem and living sense of the common priesthood, through a greater authenticity of the ministerial counterpart!

Cordial greetings in the Lord.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Don F. Viganò". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial 'D' and 'V'.