

acts

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

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

YEAR LXXXI **N. 370**
january-march 2000

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Editrice S.D.B.
Edizione extra commerciale
Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco
Via della Pisana, 1111
Casella Postale 18333
00163 Roma

COMMUNICATION IN THE SALESIAN MISSION

“They were astonished beyond measure!

‘He has done all things well;

he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak’.”¹

1. **Let us get on the air** – ...with the Church – ...and with the Charism – Interpersonal communication. – Social communication.

2. **“He makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak”** – Change of mentality. – Conditions for communication. – The need of the moment: becoming qualified. – A communal competence.

3. **Practical guidelines.** – Community commitments. – Provincial commitments. – Conclusion.

Rome, 8 December 1999

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

My dear Confreres,

The year 2000 is at the door. I hope it may prove a happy one for you in the spirit of the extraordinary Jubilee which marks the watershed between the centuries and the millennia. Accompanying you in it you will have the reflection on Repentance already published,² the Strenna on Reconciliation and Peace, the Letter on the Eucharist which will reach you for the month of May, and the aid prepared for our community celebrations.³

In this letter on the other hand I want to develop quietly a point from our six-year program.⁴

When we try to imagine what our life and that of young people will be like in the coming century, we think spontaneously of the development likely to take place in social communication. The mass media already form an indispensable

¹ Mk 7,37

² cf. AGC 369, Oct.-Dec. 1999

³ cf. AGC 369, p.48

⁴ cf. AGC 358, supplement.

part of our personal equipment, almost incorporated in our way of life: newspapers, radio, TV, portable telephones, computers, internet, congresses and meetings, shows and spectacles, cultural and publishing events – these are things that mark our daily life.

Social communication fills the whole world and determines the form of human coexistence. It is of close interest therefore to the vocation of the Salesian as a disciple of Christ and, in a still more pressing manner, as one who works with the mentality of an educator in the field of advancement and evangelization.

With conviction and mental satisfaction we call ourselves sons of a Saint who was able to listen to the many voices coming from the young people and culture of his time; and he succeeded in communicating by body language, by word, and by the very structure he had created. The latter, in fact, became a specific “message” because it expressed very clearly the purpose and spirit of his mission.

In this he referred back to the spirituality of St Francis de Sales, who is now the Patron of Catholic journalists because of his ability at speaking and writing on the Christian life in a manner that could be understood by small and great, the educated and the simple, church people and those far from any kind of religion.

If we now pass on from these very brief but necessary considerations to examine the life of young people of our time, we find two feelings rising in us: we discover that their terminology, picked up from the media, risks becoming completely unintelligible to us; and we feel the urgent need to make up lost ground in the use of communication, as a response to our vocation as Salesians.

It is a matter of first attaining and then holding the fort in a reality which is in constant evolution and which in turn becomes the driving force behind an equally uninterrupted global change.

1. Let us get on the air

... with the Church

A great deal has been said on this matter in recent official documents of the Church and in comments for the annual day of social communication.

The material is abundant and touches on the various aspects of communication: from theology⁵ to the social and cultural dimension; from the formation of priests⁶ to the instruction of the faithful; from the preparation of programs to the pastoral organization of dioceses for an organic intervention in this field.⁷

I am not going to summarize the doctrine. I shall just take one or two points for consideration of an item in the theme which seems of most importance for us, from both a theoretical and practical point of view.

Paul VI had seen intuitively the epoch-making change that the evangelization of the world was undergoing and, in consequence, the new forms which the proclamation of the Gospel required.

“Our century”, declares Evangelii Nuntiandi, “is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means.

When they are put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people.

The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not

⁵ cf. *Communio et Progressio*, pastoral instruction on the means of social communication, of 1971.

⁶ cf. Guidelines for the formation of future priests re the means of social communication, of 1986.

⁷ cf. *Aetatis novae*, pastoral instruction on social communication on the XX anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*, of 1992.

utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims 'from the housetops'⁸ the message of which she is the depositary. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes".⁹

The indication comes from the mandate given by Jesus to the Church to take the Gospel to the whole world: it is a question of speaking to multitudes, of extending almost infinitely the field where the word is heard, of taking the Good News to millions of people: and also of helping entire peoples to live lucidly the faith received in a new culture. This is a first element of which we must be clearly aware: pulpits, platforms, sites and channels of proclamation have been changed with common advantage to all.

From the abundant magisterium of John Paul II, rightly considered a great communicator, we take a second point which goes beyond the extensive capacity of the MSC and leads us to a more substantial view: social communication as culture.

"This is a complex issue, since the 'new culture' originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.

My predecessor Pope Paul VI said that 'the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time', and the field of communications fully confirms this judgement".¹⁰

The conclusion is peremptory. The simple utilization of the instruments and techniques of social communication is not sufficient to achieve integration between the evangelical message and modern culture. Concepts of life and values must be discovered which are not merely widespread, but even internal to the new methods of communication. *"It is not enough, there-*

⁸ cf. Mt 10,27; Lk 12,3.

⁹ Paul VI, EN 45 (8 Dec. 1975)

¹⁰ *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 Dec. 1990, n.37

fore”, they are the words of the Pope, “to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the ‘new culture’ created by modern communications”.¹¹

A greater effort is needed but it is indispensable, and from many points of view it is attractive because of the novelty of the panorama it offers.

I conclude this rapid review by quoting a text from the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, which concerns us closely, and to which the Union of Superiors General dedicated their 50th meeting.¹² In the Exhortation, in fact, social communication is placed among the modern areopagi which present the greatest challenge to the Christian mentality and hence have more need of boldness, creativity, competence and ability for new collaboration on the part of charismatic persons.

“Consecrated persons, especially those who have the institutional charism of working in this field, have a duty to learn the language of the media, in order to speak effectively of Christ to our contemporaries, interpreting their ‘joys and hopes, their griefs and anxieties’,¹³ and thus contributing to the building up of a society in which all people sense that they are brothers and sisters making their way to God”.¹⁴

...and with the Charism

I have briefly recalled Don Bosco’s experience. We could recount his story as a communicator, identify the parameters of his communication, or comment on his projects. The present-day translation of his thought we find in the Constitutions which, by reference back to him, place communication in the

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² USG, *The challenge of communication*. Means of social communication and evangelization, Rome 1999.

¹³ GS 1

¹⁴ VC 99

perspective we spoke of earlier: as a great possibility for education and evangelization and as a central point for culture.

The relevant article of the Constitutions reads literally: *“We work in the social communication sector. This is a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission.*

Our Founder had an instinctive grasp of the value of this means of mass education, which creates culture and puts before the public models of Christian living; he showed great originality in the apostolic undertakings which he initiated to defend and sustain the faith of the people.

*Following his example we utilize as God’s gift the great possibilities which social communication offers us for education and evangelization”.*¹⁵

The indication was present in the first draft of the Constitutions prepared by Don Bosco for presentation to the Holy See.¹⁶ Even at that time the obligation of being involved in social communication was recognized as an important part of our apostolate.

The typical areas of the mission entrusted to the Salesians, education, evangelization and social communication, are to be mutually linked together, and to reach practical decisions in harmony with the charism they must also refer to those to whom our mission is primarily addressed and to the services we want to offer them.¹⁷

From one point of view these clarifications help in considering social communication not simply as a collection of instruments or material means to be adopted or as an autonomous activity, albeit within the charism. Rather do they invest the entire salesian presence, committed to education and evangelization both through specific works and equally through other

¹⁵ C 43

¹⁶ cf. *Constituzioni* 1858, I, 5 (cf. critical text edited by F.Motto, ISS-LAS 1982, p.78)

¹⁷ cf. C 31

forms of activity which influence popular culture and through the promotion of adequate social forms.¹⁸

On the other hand, the same constitutional indications circumscribe, guide and finalize the many possibilities, modes and fields of social communication to the objectives of our mission, freeing it from the risk of getting lost among other messages and initiatives.

In this way communication becomes understood as the “main highway” for the realization of the different areas of the mission, and consequently as a necessary qualification forming part of the identity of the salesian educator, pastor, evangelizer and vocations promoter.¹⁹ He realizes this aspect of his mission “particularly by means of social communication”, says art.6 of the Constitutions in line with Don Bosco’s circular letter of 19 March 1885: “*I beg and beseech you therefore not to neglect this most important part of our mission. Begin it not only among the youngsters entrusted by Providence to your care, but make yourselves its apostles by word and example and through the spreading of good books*”.²⁰

Don Bosco would be even more insistent today. He would be again in the vanguard of progress, bringing influence to bear on the criteria underlying the use of the new technical instruments and drawing on them for the spreading of his own educative and cultural projects.

This is what I had in mind when at the end of the GC24 I put forward social communication as one of the main points for attention in the next six years²¹, and when with the General Council we included in the general programming some indica-

¹⁸ cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹ cf. *Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*. Guide to the Constitutions, Rome 1986, p. 400

²⁰ E. CERIA, *Don Bosco's Collected Letters*, vol. 4, p. 318ff, letter 2539. Circular 19 March 18

²¹ cf. GC24, 249-251

tions about communication, which we considered of primary importance, as well as a suitably detailed program entrusted to the Department concerned.²² Among the strategies to be adopted to make the salesian presence more effective we included: "By enabling the SDB and EPC communities to communicate with the local context by providing significant messages (kind of work, witness, interventions, statements) for human advancement and evangelization".²³

Interpersonal communication

As educators we are concerned in the first place with *interpersonal communication* between adult and young person, between laity and religious, between those rich in experience and those taking their first steps in life, between all those who have gifts to share.

In this connection I have already had the possibility of sharing some ideas with you on the concept of the community as "animating nucleus".²⁴ I take up the matter again briefly because it belongs to the completeness of the theme with which we are dealing and in its context reveals new dimensions.

The preventive system, it has been said, depends for its educative efficacy mainly on the direct face-to-face meeting. It is a meeting of trust, of friendship. If the youngster is to give his confidence, the educator too must give spontaneously what he himself is living. The family spirit fosters encounters for mutual growth: all the way from the playground to times set aside for dialogue. There are all sorts of aspects to interpersonal communication.

The same kind of thing must be extended analogously to workers, collaborators and those who share our responsibility.

²² AGC 358, suppl. cf. 2, 21 p. 15 and part II – Social communication, pp. 29-32

²³ AGC 358, suppl. cf. 2, 21 p. 15

²⁴ cf. AGC 363, "*Experts, witnesses and craftsmen of communion*"

Every educative community and every project calls for a sincere assessment of the circumstances in which the work is taking place, a verification of the plan proposed and realized, and attention to what is emerging in the hearts of the persons involved as they try to fulfil the common mission.

For the religious community, the different forms of involvement of the confreres and community justify the importance given by the Constitutions to communal meetings: council meetings, community assemblies, moments of shared prayer and the like.

Reducing the possibility of dialogue and inter-exchange in the religious community, as in the educative community, would lead to failure in developing and accompanying the process of growth of the youngsters and the others with whom we are working.

I add two observations. The new tone and new situation of fraternal life encourage us to create in our communities space and opportunity for conversation. It often happens that haste and the many things we have in hand leave insufficient space for restful and unstructured conversation, in which we can exchange personal ideas and try out our ability for sharing. When it does not become merely banal or reduced to grumbling, complaint or mere gossip, conversation offers a new way of being together, of behaving, of listening and responding, of knowing and being known; in short, of living.

The second observation is to emphasize the importance of careful and interested listening in interpersonal communication. Let others speak! Communication is disturbed not only by those who withdraw into silence, but also by those who do not help others by giving them the possibility to express their opinion. "Every Superior (...) should let others speak freely, but should say little himself"²⁵, recommended Don Bosco to the

²⁵ BRAIDO P. editor. *Don Bosco educatore*, Writings and testimonies, Rome, LAS 1987, p. 282

educator. The tendency today, picked up from TV and spectacular presentations, leads in the opposite direction.

The commitment required for educative competence in the matter of communication is therefore indeed a broad one. It includes a reform of our attitudes and habits as well as of relationships and forms of collaboration.

Social communication

Social communication goes beyond the interpersonal kind. It projects us into the world of technology which allow us to reach simultaneously with the same message a large number of people and to establish contacts and linkages without boundaries. In this sense it is a 'new' phenomenon and in its own setting continues to come up with innovations which present us with challenges.

You often hear it said that we live in a global village, in an 'electronic' country. Such expressions can be criticized, but at least they convey an idea very well: communication envelops everyone; it reaches the ends of the world, gets close to peoples and individuals: the universe in which we are living becomes wired up to an ever greater extent. On the meridians of longitude and parallels of latitude are superimposed lines of communication and electronic waves which propagate impulses, images and voices.

And the coming years promise further revolutions. What has already been achieved in the field of social communication will see in future a quantitative and qualitative development which is at present only fictitious. To this conclusion we are led by research, the market and publicity: no sooner have we acquired a portable telephone, a television receiver or a computer than we hear talk of the next model with new possibilities.

We are still in the early stages. The next novelties will not be the last ones. Indeed they could provoke a further acceleration in change. All this represents an opportunity and condi-

tioning, the importance of which we must not run the risk of undervaluing.

Three aspects need to be seriously examined by our educative and religious communities.

The first is the *new relationship between the means and the message*. Maybe this has not yet been grasped and accepted by our mentality, accustomed as we are to distinguish matter from form and content from style.

A news item, an event, a message take on different characteristics according to the instrument by which they are received. The effect when conveyed face to face by word of mouth is one thing. The value, content and reaction of the hearers are different if the same news reaches them through one or more newspapers. It changes still further if it comes by way of an announcement on the radio, and if received by television the results are different again.

The wider the range of intervention, the more attractive the manner of presentation, the more distant the interlocutor, the more "incontrovertible" the communication becomes.

There is a second aspect which concerns us very closely. Our communities, the works and activities to which we give rise like every institution become part of a *much wider system of communication*, within which they are compared and interact. They seem silent physical realities; but in fact they are sending out messages even before we have put pen to paper or taken a microphone to say who we are or talk about ourselves.

It is indispensable, therefore, to attend not only to what is realized within the work. We must keep in mind the image it creates, the reflection our action produces outside the work. A material building speaks through its sober appearance and good taste; the kind of youngster prevailing in a work is already saying something; so is the program and educational style; the environment, experienced directly or known by other

means, is already speaking. And as a result of our communication, in and with the context, what we are doing can be expanded or negatively conditioned.

Finally we must cultivate and exploit the *service to communion*.

The urgent need to enter the communication society more energetically arises from the fact that information and communication, while occupying an ever more pervasive place in human life, seem to be giving rise to a Babel, where people of the same race and tongue cannot understand each other, rather than a Jerusalem Square where the Spirit inspires a message understood in the same manner by different peoples of different tongues. Much is said indeed and many are reached through social communication, but the interpretations given of important facts and aspects of life are often distracting and contradictory. Hence the need of directing towards unity whatever good is to be found in it.

How can we be educators and evangelizers in a global village of these dimensions? How can we become efficacious when many teachers combine in the formation of the same youngsters, but with different aims one from another?

The problem consists not simply in the use of instruments, but in the ability to express ourselves adequately through them. Immersed in a universal network, we are called upon to create, exchange, and accumulate knowledge and cultural values which become common.

A person and a people are such because they are able to produce what is necessary to know and be known; because they are able to learn from others what serves for their own life and can offer to others what serves for an improvement of their own; because they are able to accumulate information, news, facts and experiences which build each one's personal history and serve for going ahead into the future.

There is a patrimony of information, of knowledge and of

useful images which is passed on. But present-day communication can lead, unless the rules are known, either to neglecting what is important, or forgetting what has been achieved with much toil.

2. "He makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak".

Jesus is the Word, and since He lives in ineffable communication with the Father and the Spirit, He communicates God to man and makes him perceive in the light of God, in their right sense and dimension, persons, events and things. And this Word penetrates into the universe and is diffused through history.

Man has to learn to dispose himself to accept it and then communicate it.

There are pages of the Gospel which well express the educative task we have in the area of communication. They are those in which is recounted how Jesus frees the capacity of the senses: eyes, hearing, tongue and the ability to perceive the world, others and the person himself.

They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak'".²⁶

²⁶ Mk 7, 32-37

Miracles are a manifestation of Jesus and highlight aspects of his power to save man. The loosening of organs and the recovery of the senses allow him to communicate with the full reality from which he had been cut off: the physical reality of the world, that of individuals, interior, transcendent. First they make us attentive observers and hearers of such a reality, and then they enable us to interpret it and proclaim it. In this way the man born blind began by seeing men "as though they were trees", and ended by seeing Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.²⁷

We note that the miracle takes place without a word on the part of Jesus. He uses simple, concrete gestures which are immediately understandable and need no comment. The individual voice of the one who was cured is immediately amplified by the "information" of all the witnesses who begin to speak and recount what has happened.

We are called upon to spread the word, to open eyes, to provide information about the gift of God. How do we set about it? We shall have to be well aware ourselves of the important realities and good communicators of them, and not simply technicians using instruments.

Change of mentality

We said that social communication invests the whole of the salesian presence. Entering into it does not imply just the touching up of some elements of this presence, leaving the others as they were; it calls rather for a *cultural conversion* which becomes translated into a spiritual commitment and a new pastoral outlook.

Until the present day our primary concern was for the results we were able to achieve through our works.

In these we succeeded, through God's grace and the activity of our confreres and collaborators, in creating a satisfying and

²⁷ cf. Mk 8, 22-24; Jn 9, 35-38

serene environment and in communicating to young people convictions, attitudes and values.

Salesian communities, moreover, linked themselves with the social context in which they happened to be situated according to the ways present in the pre-information era: they offered moments of culture, participation in religious and social events, direct rapport with families, and contact with civil and ecclesiastical organisms and institutions.

It was a praxis well formulated and it held sway. But today, in the information era, new factors have come into play, and there must be growth in the awareness of and attention to the broader repercussions of our presence, and of our attitudes and interventions.

The *salesian community* is called upon to do its planning with an eye on its own work as seen also from outside. It is a kind of re-collocation, not so much geographically in the sense of migrating from one place to another, but rather mentally, i.e. being able to consider things from a point of view which gets beyond material space and immediate objectives.

This means passing from concerns based on internal considerations to giving attention to the sensitivities and expectations coming from the context; from doing a great deal of hard work within our own walls, to finding out what others think of us and how they perceive our activity and presence; from a simple and careful development of activities to the communicative and involving ability of the context to affect typical values of the salesian spirituality and mission.

There are some words of Don Bosco which can help us to understand the significance of all this, so that the salesian presence, in its effort to make itself visible or give an account of itself, may not be reduced to a simple veneer or be obsessed with self-presentation.

“Our times call for action. The world has become materialistic, and so we have to go out of our way to make known the good we are doing. Even if we were to work miracles by praying

*day and night in solitude, the world would neither notice it nor believe it. The world has to see for itself”.*²⁸

These are somewhat bold words, with a directness that rather takes us aback. They make us look in a different way at the very organization of community life and apostolic action. It is indispensable to think of our presence, the community and salesian work in “network” form, intercommunicating like a transmitter.

The GC24 has pointed to new openings in this same sense. The first concerns the *lay collaborators*. As has already been said several times, this is not only a question of having persons external to the community who come to work with us in the education and evangelization of the young. Their presence indicates acceptance on our part from other points of view: the typical lay perspectives.

It is not possible to speak of collaboration and of shared responsibility unless there is reciprocity and integration of views and experiences, and this leads necessarily to a different vision of salesian activity, and to new ways of intervention.

This change of mentality and of operational model has a name: the *educative community*. It is not something purely technical, a new structure; it is specifically a reality of internal and external communication. It is not reduced to expressing well-organized contents with verbal clarity and correct positioning in time. It is before all else a capacity of relationship, of real information which is pertinent and opportune, of vital sharing, of a common choice of educative and pastoral criteria.

The Salesian is present in the educative community with a specific responsibility and must learn the many paths and variations of dialogue with the laity and with the educative community as a whole.

A second setting in which a change of mentality is needed is the

²⁸ BM 13, 126

context in which we are called upon to work: the wider *territory* in which the salesian work is situated as a centre of aggregation.

The rediscovery of this function prompts us to broaden the dialogue to include educational, social and religious institutions working in the same area. Encounter with them is the acid test of what we are capable of communicating outside the religious community and our closest collaborators.

How much is perceived externally of the salesian educative project, of the personal and social values they choose for themselves and propose to the young?

How does salesian work become effective in the neighbourhood, in the sectors most congenial to the charism: by attention to the youth condition, by the follow-up of the development of the working class, by closeness to those who live their life feeling isolated and marginalized? The EPC becomes significant in the neighbourhood, and hence carries an intelligible message, when it is able to bring together all who are interested in educational and cultural initiatives and appears as a centre of radiation of sensitivity, plans and workers who are linked with it.

We can also refer to a third opening towards which the same GC24 propels us: it is the scope created by *modern technology*, which can build relationships, provide a self-image and begin an effective dialogue with interlocutors who are invisible but none the less real.

Here especially is there need for a change of mentality, both because we are not yet familiar with virtual space and because we have to learn new forms of communication and meeting. Examples are not lacking of realizations which, when possibility offers, are pursued by willing youngsters or professional collaborators. Web-sites are becoming ever more numerous and some of them are highly educational and reach a large number of persons, thus increasing the influence of the work.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are part of a great network which envelops us. We could remain outside it, or we

could become inserted in it by offering, in this field too, the gifts we have as educators and evangelizers.

It is a matter of no little importance that we can instantly diffuse information and communications to all parts of the world. Often we speak more of the risks of such a situation than of its advantages. But if we want the world of communications to be changed for the better by the leaven of the Gospel we must feel challenged to intervene and interact with those who descend into the streets and areopagi "to speak and debate".²⁹

Conditions for communication

When we look at things from only an immediate perspective, the principal conditions needed for social communication seem to be high in spectacular quality and the selling potential of the products.

We have only to look at what is offered by television, the most powerful of the mass media, to be convinced of this. Television tends, of its very nature, to turn every event into a spectacle. All programs are assembled with this requirement in view. The very information must be made into a manifestation.

For a TV program to be interesting it must be striking, raise emotions, and be made a powerful image by the skilful use of light and colour, originality, and rapid succession of frames and comments.

In this way too communication is today a great marketplace. We define our society as one of information and images. Information is the main *materia prima* of the economy: data is exchanged to a much greater extent than products. Programs compete for viewers by every possible means. The propaganda is concentrated more on the image than on what is offered by the product. Communication itself, in all its aspects is a matter of big business, played against a background of supply and demand, with competition in price and quality.

²⁹ cf. Acts 17,20

This is the situation in which the salesian community is placed and in which it has to act with an educative purpose. It too, in a certain sense has to impress people and have selling power. And so it tries to understand how communication functions, but it emphasizes the need that it be placed at the service of human growth and bring about communion among mankind.

For it to be positive and efficacious in this connection, the community has to pay heed to other conditions: from a personal standpoint, but still more from an institutional point of view it relies on *authenticity and transparency*.

These are the qualities demanded by those who consider us a point of reference for life and for Christian and human experience in a given area. But as well as this: for us, as disciples of Christ thy are also demands and ruling factors of communication.

I recognize that we are being asked to acquire certain personal and communal attitudes. We have lived out our options and projects, our realizations and cultural realizations, but almost in a reserved manner. Others had to discover for themselves the driving force behind our activities. We did not keep them hidden intentionally, but neither were we concerned about being 'transparent', about making ourselves known.

The matter is not only a moral one. It belongs to the universe of communication: to be present we must be perceptible; to be efficacious we must be authentic, i.e. communicate experiences and convictions which we feel and live at a deep level.

The instruments of communication, and particularly the most recent of them, represent a supermarket of ideas. The visions of life and the proposals they offer are many, easily accepted and just as easily abandoned.

The danger lies in losing the sense of difference between the necessary and the superfluous, between the important and the ephemeral. Since everything is subject to consumption, everything can become the object of exchange. And in this "everything" even authenticity and transparency can end up. "At-

tractive fiction” takes the place of truth and sincerity when it comes to selling something; obsessive audience seeking becomes the norm instead of attempts to generate convergence and a responsible reply.

But even though aware of these real risks and tendencies, we express a positive judgement on the overall world of communications, because “if properly used, they contribute greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of men’s minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the Kingdom of God”.³⁰

Jesus, the Apostle of the Father, came into the world to communicate God’s life, and gathered together in a new form the three elements of human expression: word, action and symbolic gestures. The word sustains the gesture so that the latter be not meaningless; the gesture complements the word so that the latter becomes visible and concrete (“the Word became flesh”³¹ was said of Jesus who came into the world); and action is the fulfilment of the history of the richness of the gesture and the significance of the word.

Authenticity and transparency are not therefore an unattainable utopia. They are criteria for the evaluation of what is offered for the building of communion and responsibility. In other words they are a measure of whether the will to communicate is true and whether the intentions behind it are in line with ethics and love. They therefore represent the commitment of the believer who wants to enter into rapport with others.

The need of the moment: becoming qualified

To respond to today’s challenges in the field of communications an adequate formation process is needed.

With the evolution of the media a conflict is arising between the internal possibilities of the technologies themselves and the

³⁰ cf. *Inter mirifica*, 2

³¹ Jn 1,14

human acceptability of what is subsequently offered. The relationship between technical progress and the human maturing process, between technological development and civil progress, is in fact far from automatic.

We may note that while technology is developing with extreme rapidity, the development of individual skill, of how to use the new techniques is rather slow and erratic.

A twofold velocity level has already been experienced in our own communities: some find adaptation difficult and banish the very thought of learning to use and evaluate anything concerning the instruments of information; others easily find themselves at home in the new languages and possibilities they offer, and are able to keep pace with their development with some ease. It is a reflection to some extent of what is happening on a much greater scale in the social reality.

What is to be done then? The only useful road ahead is through formation. The new literacy, i.e. the ability to read and write in the culture of the media, affects everyone, and in so far as concerns the faith it affects all believers. How much more then should it be of interest to educators and evangelizers!

For some years now the Church, through the competent departments of the Holy See, has been proposing a process which contemplates three different levels of formation: one a basic level, a second "pastoral" level, and a third level of specialist preparation.

The minimum required is the *basic level*. Each of us consumes information every day through a thousand and one different channels: from newspapers to books, from the radio to the video, from the cinema to the *Internet*.

Learning to read and evaluate is the first step. One cannot be exposed to the communicational bombardment without the necessary antibodies and the key to its interpretation, so as not to be ingenuously taken in; so as not to see only through the eyes of others and judge through their heads. One cannot remain

even a passive recipient at a time when interactivity has become generalized and every citizen has the right and possibility of expressing his opinion at once on whatever is offered him.

In the process of formation of communities, salesian religious communities equally with educative communities, the guidelines of the Church must be kept in mind,³² so as not to express only generic negative comments, but to help by being able to give motivated judgements on the products of communion. The effort must therefore be made to make oneself capable of an ordinary handling of the new means, techniques and languages: verbal, gestural, audiovisual, symbolic; in speech, radio and television.

There is ample space for formative proposals and also for regular and ordinary intervention initiatives, to meet the demands of the different places in which we work. I am thinking of the influence that could be exerted by educative communities in defending the rights of the weak and the values of local cultures, if they were able to insert themselves in communication circles with correct evaluations of events that take place, and with suitable proposals for objectives to be realized.

A permanent function of "communication" with the world outside, even at moderate expense, is in no way superfluous or marginal for an educative community.

The *second level* of formation involves those who have par-

³² But even as the Church takes a positive, sympathetic approach to media, seeking to enter into the culture created by modern communications in order to evangelize effectively, it is necessary at the very same time that the Church offer a critical evaluation of mass media and their impact upon culture. As we have said repeatedly, communications technology is a marvelous expression of human genius, and the media confer innumerable benefits upon society. But as we have also pointed out, the application of communications technology has been a mixed blessing, and its use for good purposes requires sound values and wise choices on the part of individuals, the private sector, governments and society as a whole. The Church does not presume to dictate these decisions and choices, but it does seek to be of help by indicating ethical and moral criteria which are relevant to the process-criteria which are to be found in both human and Christian values" (*Aetatis Novae*, 12).

ticular responsibilities in the animation of the social communication in the area.

This is not yet specialist level, but that of educative and pastoral workers who must enter the communication network with a professional approach and in line with their mission. It is of concern therefore to *provincial animators of social communication, religious and educative communities*.

It is a matter of knowing, in the first place, the real and effective influences which the new informational technologies and the media exert on the educative processes of individuals and groups.

From this arises a new demand in educative projects: the explicit integration of communication criteria in pastoral options. Yesterday it was sufficient that the content be well defined and pieced together. The instrument would have served solely to "pass" the message efficaciously to the greatest possible number of recipients.

The new model emphasizes that the media are not only "means"; they imply a culture, a philosophy of life, an ethic which re-reads and re-evaluates values, a spirituality which requires a synthesis of human and Christian life under new aspects. In the more specific order of the elaboration and presentation of messages, the use of the instruments and the form determine the characteristics and primary significance of the message itself.

This work of inculturation is indispensable today and shapes in a different manner the way in which the educator and pastor is made.

There are also other elements at this level of formation which we call to attention as being important and relevant.

The educative community must be ready to "minister both to the 'information-rich' and to the 'information-poor'. They need to know how to invite others into dialogue, avoiding a style of communicating which suggests domination, manipulation or personal gain".³³

³³ cf. *Aetatis Novae*, 18

Both the salesian community and the educative community must in particular be capable of accompanying those who are actively committed in work with the media. They must not be left on their own. Let them be encouraged and supported in their activities. They should be called together in certain circumstances for a frank dialogue and mutual help in the understanding and verification of their progress and proposals.³⁴ They, for their part, will try to listen to evaluations and opinions, to act in accordance with a communal project and to work as a team in a sharing and responsible manner.

The *third level* of formation is for *specialists in social communication*. It is of interest directly to *provincial communities* and by reflection to local communities as well.

In the plan for the qualification of a province called for by the Regulations³⁵ and emphasized in the letter *For you I study*,³⁶ particular importance attaches to the training of confreres for the field of social communication.

Once they are qualified, these confreres will place their skills at the service of the province, working in the context of a provincial plan and responding to the demands of the different dimensions: from youth pastoral work, which will give greater attention to the perspectives of communication, to the economy sector which will attend to the financial and entrepreneurial aspects of the communication structures present in many salesian institutions.

The effort made by the Congregation in establishing a University Faculty of social communication should be exploited to prepare confreres who will help the Congregation to rise to the level of the new requirements.

³⁴ Lay Catholic professionals and others working in either the Church apostolate of social communications or the secular media often look to the Church for spiritual guidance and pastoral care, [...] nourishing the communicators' faith, and keeping alive their sense of dedication in the difficult task of communicating Gospel values and authentic human values to the world.

³⁵ cf. R 100

³⁶ cf. AGC 361, Oct.-Dec. 1997

When I look back at our recent history, I have to acknowledge the great part the Salesians have played in the growth of ecclesial sensitivity in respect of pastoral work for the young.

Will it be possible to start up a similar process in regard to social communication? Is it not the case here too of needy youngsters who have to be followed up in their development, or of working-class people who need support in their efforts at advancement?

“Communication is the dimension of the spirit in which we raise ourselves above our biological constitution and our bondage to nature. It has therefore a fundamental function for the development of our understanding of ourselves and of the world”.³⁷

The consent we give to the communications we receive provides confirmation and scope for the maturing of our personal identity. The exchange involved develops our understanding of the value and significance of our own existence.

It is true that no one can delegate to others the task of interpreting life, but it is also true that no human being lives for himself alone; and above all, no one is capable of discovering for himself the keys for understanding life.

This is where the service rendered to man by specialists in communication comes in. The serious effort to make this service recognized as an ecclesial ministry can add dignity to the intervention of those involved in the work.

A communal competence

What we have been saying in the preceding pages are not things extraneous to daily life. Learning how to put together a message for it to be efficacious is part of the pastoral task. Otherwise the community risks just beating the air.

³⁷ German Episcopal Conference and Council of the German Evangelical Churches, *Media, prospettive e rischi*, part 3, 3.2

It is not enough to have treasures; we have to know how to use them. If they remained hidden and could not be passed on to others they would be like stagnant funds.

Often the objectives fixed for themselves by the religious and educative communities are not attained because the forms of communication have not homed in clearly on the nucleus of the message; they have not claimed the attention of those we are addressing, we have not got them involved; we have not talked at their level of experience.

It is true that not all of us are called to be specialists in social communication; but we are all obliged to be good communicators.

The two points do not necessarily go together. Between them is the same difference that exists between the theoretical knowledge of what is to be done and having the personal skill to do it. Every salesian educator and evangelizer needs practical competence in communication for all his interventions: when he meets a youngster or a confrere personally, when he is called upon to speak in public, when he proclaims the word of God to a group or to a vast audience, in a retreat or a discussion, when an opportunity offers for intervening in the mass media.

And it becomes more evident every day that it is part of normal life to be ready to intervene either occasionally or with a certain regularity through the press, radio and TV.

The GC23 had already pointed to these possible settings. "The Congregation", we read in the capitular document, "commits itself to an adequate use of social communication for transmitting the Christian message and educating youth to the faith. For this reason the local community will foster its own capacity for communication: by helping each Salesian to be a good communicator, able to use a kind of language adapted to the young and to people in general, especially in the liturgy and

catechesis; by exploiting all the means (relationships, aspects of the house, theatre, video, music, meeting rooms, etc.) through which messages can be given to predispose people to the faith and spread the message of salvation; and in particular by seeing that young people are educated to the different forms of communication, and a critical reading of the messages they convey".³⁸

If local communities, when reviewing their work, find that they have not yet given effect to these guidelines of the General Chapter, they should draw up a plan for their implementation.

3. Practical guidelines

I now offer you a series of practical guidelines. They are not meant to be taken as an indivisible block, as though every province and every community must realize all of them.

The Congregation is variegated as regards social communication. There are provinces with qualified personnel, structures which operate like business concerns in the manner we have described, training programs already in use, provincial organisms, multiple youth activities, and so on. Others, on the other hand, are working at much more modest levels.

It will be the task of provincial councils to adapt the plan of action to the demands of local circumstances and the real possibilities of the province. But this dimension cannot be ignored or left to the indefinite future. The fundamental option is clear, and so is the direction our efforts must take: the setting up of teams and centres working on the elaboration of messages rather than being concerned with the possession of instruments or the management of material structures. These soon become obsolete and frequently, once we have acquired

³⁸ GC23, 257-258

them, we find we have to use them in work which is not directly related to our mission. The services offered by such technical plants we can leave to third parties, at least in the regions normally foreseen, while we concentrate on the messages.

In no field of life are there any simple and immediately applicable rules of thumb, and still less so in a setting which is in continual expansion and where it is difficult to foresee future developments even in the short term. But it is of no little importance to be aware of the thousand and one possibilities opening up before our apostolic enterprise.

I gather them into two categories: the educative commitment of every salesian work, and the institutional responsibility of the provinces in face of the culture of communication.

The two aspects are mutually complementary: we have to work at once with what we have and to the extent that we may be able, but we must not disregard a wider concern for the youth situation and culture which call for long-term and more wide-ranging programs of action.

The latter may seem to be beyond our capabilities, and maybe they are. But if we do not begin, as citizens and Salesians, to assume greater responsibilities, despite the naturally associated difficulties and those which turn up willy-nilly, we shall never be able to exert any influence on events: i.e. on the criteria of users, the ethics of manufacturers, the mentality of educators, the sensitivity of pastors. And still less shall we be able to meet the challenges, previously unknown and unforeseeable, of the cultural complexity associated with communication.

The salesian charism, in virtue of its direct experience with the young and the ordinary people, can suggest plans for the positive orientation of mass communication and participate in their realization with competent educative and pastoral contributions.

Community commitments

Today social communication is the greatest fact in socialization and education. It is a school without limits of time and space where information can be found, together with modes of action, guidelines for thought and practical solutions of the problems presented by life. It must be considered therefore as a field of interventions for us Salesians, attentive as we always are to the educative dimension.

Here then are some possible commitments to be brought to the attention of the communities so that they may find a place in the educative project and be considered in the yearly programming.

Activate salesian communication

The Congregation and the Salesian Family are up to date as regards the means and manner of internal communication. This takes place at different levels (house, province, region, congregation) and carries abundant material, corresponding to the different needs and priorities.

There is the institutional communication which brings, with the authority given by the Constitutions and the wide experience of salesian life, charismatic guidelines in terms of motivations and practical indications: it includes the Letters of the Rector Major, the communications of the General Councillors for the animation of the sectors entrusted to them, and those which go from the provincial centres to local communities. These communications already carry many elements of spirituality.

Then there is the fraternal communication about the happenings of the Congregation which can be of greater interest because of their significance or their effect on public opinion. This is indicated in art.59 of the Constitutions as one of the main elements for the creation of unity and a sense of belonging. Here I see a difficulty which may be put forward: the accumulation of documents and communications, the lack of

time for communication, the varied interests of the confreres.

It has been found that it is possible to manage the complexity deriving from these three factors by greater attention on the part of the superior or animator to the use of opportunities for communication (good-nights, spiritual reading, community-days, meals, other meetings), by arranging that the organs of communication be placed in a dignified place for the information of the individual confreres (community-room, library), and by making an intelligent selection so as to present to the community the more important or interesting points in line with objective criteria of salesian life or of the community situation, with appropriate comment.

Education to the use of the media

The terminology used in different countries can vary, as also can technical levels and the availability of programs and instruments. What remains the same everywhere is the will for commitment: all who work in education and evangelization must feel themselves called to elaborate a pedagogy which leads to an understanding and use of the media.

It is not sufficient to equip the community, juvenile or adult, with instruments – even of a sophisticated kind – to bring about an increase in communion. It is not the simple connection with national or international networks that ensures an adequate diffusion of knowledge and increased rapport, but the measured and reasonable use of such possibilities. Educative guidance is no less desirable for adults too.

From this stems the need for educators to have the possibility of knowing in depth the problems to which contact with the new technologies can give rise. We must make the effort to apply to the world of the media the principles and criteria of our preventive pedagogy.

This is in line with our charism. We must therefore pursue its expressions and, if necessary, make up for lost time.

Oratories, schools, parishes and youth groups must be

helped – I do not say to get into the media culture, because they may be already immersed in it; but to become accustomed to a clear orientation: i.e. to adopt an efficacious program of education with adequate usage and check-ups.

It should be kept in mind that it is the “small means”, at domestic level and within the reach of all, that represent a communicative richness and help to lift the quality of the environment: leaflets, reviews, celebratory moments of a more or less formal kind, and the like.

Let us not be content with facile criticism of what we receive from the mass media. Rather let us follow, decisively and systematically, a process of preparation of young people and adults towards a responsibility and knowledge of the media corresponding to their stage of growth.

Applying the new technologies to teaching

When here I speak of teaching, I include everything of an educational and pastoral nature realized in a salesian foundation: interpersonal relationships of friendship, of other roles or of priestly ministry; formal teaching in schools, group discussions, evangelical suggestions through preaching; an ordinary or extraordinary moment of celebration, be it cultural or religious.

Nowadays it is necessary to adopt perspectives of a global communication, asking ourselves how we can be efficacious in what we are offering. The community needs to verify the consistency between its verbal language, the message it wants to communicate, and the meaning it actually and unintentionally conveys. It is not enough just to decide on the content; we have to study also the references, the manner in which the content is presented, and the context in which it is to have its effect. The new media technologies serve precisely to centre and improve the elaboration of the content chosen.

What is needed here is a change in the personal and communal way of working that may cost us something. But it will be to the advantage of those to whom our mission is directed

and of the values we want to present.

The GC24 pointed to this same objective: "To exploit communication in all its forms and expressions: communication at interpersonal and group level, the production of messages, critical and educative use of the means of social communication".³⁹

Develop all the communicative potentiality of individuals.

Salesian education has given to civil society many past-pupils who have distinguished themselves in the field of social communication. It would be difficult to present a complete list of names and communication sectors where they are to be found and the roles they have. We can point to the theatre, singing, acting, musical and other spectacles and many other aspects of popular entertainment and culture. We may recall numerous writers who were prepared in salesian environments: journalists, authors of scholastic texts, romances, educational and formative literature, poets in popular and in cultured language.

Nor must we forget all those creative persons belonging to our family who, when the occasion was presented, have been able to exploit their personal talents to create communication enterprises: reviews, publishing houses with various cultural and educational objectives, radio and television networks, and news agencies.

All this is a sign that many young people have found in our midst the space and support for the development of abilities which would otherwise have remained hidden.

It would be indeed a great loss if this richness of our educative tradition were ever to fade!

And so let us have confidence in the young! In the arena of communication they are present on a massive scale. They feel a pressing need to accept diversity, to make contact with those of a different culture or sensitivity, to communicate

³⁹ GC24, 129

their experiences, to animate encounters. They grow up already equipped with more than one language. They show a surprising ability at becoming at home in new technologies and languages. This cannot be other than a source of satisfaction; and precisely because of this ability they have, we must have trust and confidence in them.⁴⁰

Young people, said the message for the 24th World Communications Day, "have had the advantage of growing up with the new developments, and it will be their duty to employ these new instruments for a wider and more intense dialogue among all the diverse races and classes who share this 'shrinking globe'. It falls to them to search out ways in which the new systems of data conservation and exchange can be used to assist in promoting greater universal justice, greater respect for human rights, a healthy development for all individuals and peoples, and the freedoms essential for a fully human life".⁴¹

If we are able to guide them in the proper use of these instruments, they can become protagonists in the pursuit of what can guide us to educational objectives of great importance in the new millennium.

I apply this primarily to the young Salesians. Some or many of them, suitable prepared, must be led to occupy in the field of the media those spaces which are addressed to children and young people. This is an "occupation" which well responds to our pastoral work and to the salesian spirit with a vast educative and evangelizing influence.

Helping the new poor classes.

There is a new kind of poverty in the world: that of those who are excluded from the information circuits. The inequality is already evident, and sociologists and educators foresee that it will become ever greater.

⁴⁰ cf. *Communio et progressio*, 70

⁴¹ Message for 24th World Communications Day, 24 Jan. 1990

There are the rich who have access to all the channels of communication with the possibility of adding to their culture and further increasing their good fortune. This protects them from unpleasant surprises, because they can update themselves in everything and even anticipate difficulties, risks and conflicts.

Then there are those who are at a disadvantage because they are kept on the margin of a sufficient and useful communication. They do not have the necessary instruments, or they do not know how to use them successfully; they do not have the necessary elbow-room or the necessary competence to enter into dialogue with others. And so they are exposed to manipulation. There is even talk of a new kind of illiteracy.

An educational institution like ours can consider it part of its mission to set up space for communication for more simple people, even with alternative means: meetings of groups, associations and families, festive and cultural opportunities. And similarly to bring competence in the media to young people and environments where exclusion is more widespread, just as in earlier times it made efforts to provide remedial education and instruction through the schools. It is a field where groups of volunteers can make a contribution. And not only this. If a public institution is not able for various reasons to make terminals available to all, the salesian community should consider how it could create such possibilities. If we do not consider the new techniques a luxury, but an important condition for education, it falls within our remit to facilitate access to them to young people who are poor, and to marginalized persons.

Inserting media competence into the educative project.

From time to time it seems desirable to add new aspects to the formation project for the Salesians and the educative plan for the young.

The fact is that new dimensions and new problems are continually turning up in our daily lives, and the need to respond to them demands fresh attention.

Social communication – messages, instruments, culture – open up or close paths for interpreting and shaping life. From it frequently stem the vision of the world and behaviour models. By now the quality of life is linked with what is presented directly or in a concealed manner by the mass media.

The individual is qualified through his freedom for self-determination, through his concrete options and the contribution he makes to coexistence in society. This is a reflection which would really require a longer and more detailed examination, but the few remarks I have made will be sufficient for me to draw a practical consequence which I entrust to the local communities.

To prepare people to use suitable instruments to enable them to exercise their own freedom, and live in a more complete form the demands of society, is a direct part of the responsibility of an institution which claims to be educational in its purpose.

To ask for the insertion of communication in the educative and pastoral project after considering the various aspects, possibilities and risks, means nothing other than asking the salesian and educative communities to acquire and offer the necessary skills with respect to the culture in which we are inserted and the society in which we have to live.

In this sector the laity can carry out a specific task. They, in fact, can identify and put together messages which respond more closely to the present situation and actual needs of the young and of people in general. They can often use a terminology better suited to the expression of values or convictions, because it has been coined through secular experience combined with a first-hand knowledge of the ordinary conditions of life. In particular those among them who belong to specific professions can be valuable collaborators in Don Bosco's mission.⁴²

In connection with media competence today, I think it indispensable to add a few words about the latest informational revolution: the *Internet*.

⁴² cf. GC24, 132

This great network is extending farther and farther and we too are caught up in it. We are learning how to use it; and we must learn also to appreciate its usefulness and try not to be trapped in it; above all we must be able to give guidance to children and young people who run the risk of getting lost in its labyrinths and reaching sites which will certainly be of no help to their growth.

Ours is a great educative task with respect to an area which is virtual, true enough, but which can have serious reflections on the real life of children and young people; there is also a task regarding its use from a cultural and ethical standpoint with its regulation and responsibilities, from which we cannot stand aside and which we can in fact promote.

The *Internet* makes knowledge available, creates direct contacts and offers ample space for communication and the sending of messages. We cannot remain aloof from its possibilities; but we must adopt proper attitudes in its regard and be able to assess the influence it has on practical life and on our educational activity.

There is no doubt that the *Internet*, even though in a subdued form at present, is giving rise to a kind of anthropological revolution, which affects not only the ability to use it but also forms of thought, habits of daily life and even conscience itself. The web makes us acquire a new concept of the notions of space and time, eliminates frontiers and barriers between nations, and makes possible interaction in which all feel equal. An open world is being born without geographical and functional barriers between individuals, an interactive world and one therefore which is varied and lively. Many things have changed and others will still do so at a relational, cultural and commercial level; there are certain to be upheavals in every form of service, activities of intermediation, the influence of the virtual dimension of transactions, of work, of entertainment, of means of transport.⁴³

⁴³ cf. AA.VV. *Internet: L'informazione senza frontiere*; Paolini, Milan 1997, p. 138

The implication of this revolution cannot yet be fully assessed, but it is giving birth to the “electronic citizen” which we must help to be “upright” and be open to an “other” beside the web and recognize the fatherliness of God, so as to be a “good Christian”.

Provincial commitments

From the institutional standpoint many obligations can be expressed with regard to social communication. I group them around general themes, and in this case I entrust them to the study of the provincial communities and their organisms, and to the communication committees which work within the provinces.

Know the law and your own rights

The provincial office for social communication, among its other obligations, assumes that of knowing the laws which govern the field of communication in the country concerned. There are to be found also the rights of the citizens, of recognized institutions, and of formal groups.

Starting from the different forms of legislation one can come across many ways of defining various urgent aspects for the common good and work to support them.

Around the structures of the mass media develop financial, political, cultural and religious interests with hidden powers. It is not easy to penetrate their dynamic operations. But the first step to take is always to get to know the relevant laws, so that our actions may be legal and secure and we do not cause difficulties either for ourselves or still less for our apostolic activity or salesian institutions. Nowadays, in fact, many aspects are regulated by laws, the violation of which involves penalties as well as dishonesty (copyrights, right to privacy, taxes and other charges, various declarations, reproductions, etc.).

But legality means also seeing that the law is observed by

all, ordinary persons and those in power. An awareness that needs to increase among ourselves and in the educative communities is the right to protection. The common good and the defence of the dignity of the person frequently call for clear and public interventions. The individual citizen and associations have the right and duty to express their views in forthright fashion to appropriate officials using the means they deem most opportune and efficacious.

The subject is a vast one with many implications of an ethical and legal nature, but it rules out of court at once any passive or resigned acceptance or helplessness in face of the great organizations.

Develop certain points of attention.

Following on what we have just said, I now point out some items that need further development. They are all related to the priority for the young in education and evangelization which determine our objectives.

The first is the *right of defence* of children and young people. The experience of recent years has often shown us the suffering of those who are small and weak in face of the media content and criminal organizations reached through media technology.

Violence, racial hatred, moral seduction, the very publicity addressed to a youthful public, are an offence to the human person, and exert a negative influence on intellectual, emotional, moral and psychological development.

Our educative communities can intervene individually or collectively in defence of the legal requirement, as well as educating young people and families to the proper use of *zapping* (surfing the net).

Next comes *defence of the family*. Many spectacles which enter a house through the mass media do nothing to facilitate a cordial rapport among the members of the family; they do not

support fidelity in love and are at odds with the gospel criteria for married life.

The producers of such spectacles cannot unload all the responsibility on those who watch these shows, as if communicative democracy should be without internal self-regulation.

The groups working in our environments have the legal right to intervene and make known what audiences expect to see.

And then there is the *defence of the quality of service*. You often hear it said, in a somewhat specious manner, that quality is a purely subjective concept, that each one likes a certain kind of quality and this is what he is looking for. On the other hand it is certainly possible to define indices which help in the making of an objective judgement on the products offered. The technical level, the professional quality, the skill in interpretation shown by actors and in the scenarios, the intensity of the plot, the ethical dimension of the story are some of the criteria for making a judgement on what is offered by the TV. It is best that everyone should be aware of them so that they can make a competent assessment and intervene without any complexes.

This too is a setting in which lay persons working in salesian structures can make a valid contribution.

Finally I put the *defence of privacy*. The only concern of the great instruments of communication is simply the search for financial profit.

We often find ourselves witnessing a ruthless competition that takes place in seeking the biggest market audience, and in the manipulation of personal data so as to impress the public.

This leads to the patent violation of personal rights and the breaking of norms established by law. The so-called 'scoop' is not just a technique; it is a well-tried gambit for making more profit.

The spontaneous reaction we feel in the face of information which does not defend personal data is a just one. Everyone has the right to decide what personal facts about himself can be

made public and what should remain reserved. It remains to be seen whether in a “social question” like communication, our “just” reactions remain always private and individual or succeed in influencing customs and conduct.

These are just examples. To have pointed out the theme will serve to help reflection on questions which are new and in coming years will become ever more pressing, and will in consequence need clear definition, adequate approach and original solutions.

Be open to synergy and collaboration.

In the Regulations we read: “These services should be established on secure juridical and economic foundations, and there should be liaison and cooperation between those in charge of them and the Councillor General for the Salesian Family and social communication”.⁴⁴ “Publishing houses in the same country or region should devise suitable methods of collaboration, so as to adopt a unified plan”.⁴⁵

A first comment concerns the management of communication enterprises. I look with particular attention at the numerous publishing houses we have in the Congregation. They must respond in the first place to the criteria which shape our educative and pastoral mission. But it must also be kept in mind that publishing activity be organized with business criteria, and must be managed in accordance with well-defined professional principles, with clear objectives and frequent and efficient control on the part of the salesian institution.

A second observation following from the text of the Regulations is that social communication extends beyond the restricted confines of a province. It must be thought of in network terms. What cannot be realized by the efforts of a single province can be attained by the joint effort of many. There are various aspects in continual and rapid change, and this means that if we do not

⁴⁴ R 31

⁴⁵ R 33

seize the opportunity at the appropriate moment when the situation and cost are most favourable, the enterprise may fail and be forced out of the market. Hence the need to avoid overlapping, to avoid the repetition of efforts that can be made in common.

There have been meetings in the Congregation in which several publishing houses have got together to program a future of collaboration and linkage.

The process must be continued on an even larger scale, trying out and comparing practical means of realization. Union is indispensable at the present day if we are to be present in this field in an efficacious and competitive manner. We note continually in every part of the world amalgamations, agreements, linkages between enterprises of every kind (banks, airlines, motor industries etc.), to improve services, resist competition and reduce costs so as to concentrate more on innovations. We have no material products to offer, but plenty of good ideas to spread abroad in both ecclesial and civil cultural environments. We have to find a way of making them very practical, even by small adjustments, so that they can be spread as widely as possible.

The ideal target would be that, once we have tried out such collaboration on a limited scale, we could go on to launch an exchange at world level of knowledge, products and projects. After first positive experiments of collaboration we can mature to this global strategy at congregational level.

Become equipped with useful functions.

Here and there one gets the impression that communication has remained somewhat generic in character. The last two General Chapters have singled out necessary interventions for exploiting social communication in a province. The GC23 pointed out to the Provincial the need to appoint a provincial delegate for social communication, and set out his duties;⁴⁶ the GC24 invited the delegate, in agreement with the Provincial, to

⁴⁶ cf. GC23, 259

form a team including also qualified lay people. and with them to “draw up a provincial plan for animation, formation and consultation in the area of social communications, foreseeing suitable structures and instruments”.⁴⁷ These options and concrete realizations should improve the utilization of social communication and integrate it into the pastoral action of the province. But there is need also for attention to other points and sensitivities.

The Regulations go on to indicate: “As far as local possibilities permit, the provincial with his council should promote our pastoral presence in the social communication sector.

He should prepare confreres to enter the fields of publishing, the cinema, radio and television; he should establish and build up our centres for the publishing and diffusion of books, aids and periodicals, and found centres for the production and transmission of audiovisual, radio and television programs”.⁴⁸

The commitment required is not small by any means, but it is important. A communications structure, well organized and directed, is as good as another foundation in the territory for the young and working-class people to whom our mission is directed. Indeed, the ability to reach a vast public and influence its mentality makes it more efficacious.

I am well aware that not all provinces have the same possibilities. But there are two points that nearly all should find possible.

The first is the improvement of the *Salesian Bulletin* or its solid and permanent support. I do not need to say any more about this. You can read over again what has already been published in the Acts of the General Council.⁴⁹ I recall only the importance it has in our history and present identification, in the spreading of our image and in the union of the Salesian

⁴⁷ GC24, 136b

⁴⁸ R 31

⁴⁹ cf. AGC 366, pp. 98-117

Family and of the Movement of the Friends of Don Bosco.

The work of renewal and relaunching which has been started, linking the directors and editors of the different editions gives us confidence in the incidence it now has. But it must be said that the support structure, the compiling, the office and instruments, must be kept up to date if the Bulletin is to remain a salesian enterprise fulfilling all its possibilities.

Similarly it must be added that it is no help to the Congregation if houses or provinces spread their own salesian reviews and do not concentrate their efforts on what is the expression of Don Bosco and his mission in the world. This is a point to be kept in mind by the committee for social communication.

The other function concerns our *ongoing communication with the world of the media*. In the course of my visits I have seen provinces properly equipped to make their voice heard on the occasion of our own events or the discussion of problems of interest to us. Their relationship with the organs of public opinion is of great value. But there were others where we did not seem to form part of the human community.

A spokesman, a press office, a team – not necessarily full-time but advised in advance and involved – could give us an authoritative voice in newspapers, radio and television, at times when we have urgent need to be heard or a statement is necessary for charitable or pastoral purposes.

It is indispensable to be able to participate in circles where communication messages are elaborated, especially for young people or about them, and to let our educative influence be felt.

Conclusion.

When the Congregation saw the importance of communication and of its many applications in educative and pastoral work, it decided to set up, despite internal and external difficul-

ties, a "Higher Institute for Social Communication", now known by the name ISCOS.

Today it is a Faculty of the Salesian University. As such it inspires a dialogue and an enriching exchange between theological disciplines, educational sciences and social communication, and aims at the theoretical and practical formation in its own field of specialist educators and pastors.

The originality of its aims amongst similar institutions has made it a point of reference for many students. On our part it must not only be supported and encouraged, but also filled with Salesians and lay people who are preparing to work in this sector of the salesian mission.

As I conclude these reflections, my imagination goes to the celebration of the opening of the Holy Door which is now imminent. Perhaps the most striking feature of this opening with respect to all the others that preceded it, is that the whole world is going to be present. In every corner of the earth it will be possible to hear the Pope's voice; everyone will be able to see the Gospel story in the sixteen panels of the Door, assist at the celebration and enter spiritually into the Church, symbol of Catholic communion, of Christian ecumenism, of religious dialogue, of worldwide human solidarity. Entry into these settings of communion is among the goals of conversion proposed for the Jubilee year. And communication will take the news and invitation to the whole world.

May Jesus Christ, of whose Birth we are celebrating the bimillennary, give to us Salesians and to the entire Salesian Family the communicative strength which is proper to his Gospel and make us ever more capable of transmitting it to young people in this Year of grace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Juan Ferrer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'J' that extends downwards and to the left, forming a large loop.