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BEATIFICATION OF BRO. ARTEMIDE ZATTI: A SENSATIONAL PRECEDENT

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Rome, 31 May 2001
Feast of Mary's Visitation

1. THE MISSING FRAGMENT

The mosaic of our saints and blessed, though rich enough in the categories represented – Founder, Co-founder, Rector Majors, missionaries, martyrs, priests and young people, still lacked the figure of a coadjutor brother. Now, even this gap is being filled.

On 11 March of this year we had the joy of honouring as Blessed *the first seven coadjutor martyrs*, among the 32 members of the Salesian Family beatified as martyrs by Pope John Paul II. By their life and death they proclaimed very clearly the radical nature of their adherence to Christ and their fidelity to their vocation.

On 24 April the decree confirming the miracle obtained through the intercession of Brother Artemide Zatti was read. In the process of a Cause, this stage is a prelude to Beatification. He will therefore be the first 'coadjutor not a martyr' to be proclaimed Blessed. Three other members of our Salesian

Family are also close to the honours of the altars: Sister Maria Romero, Fr Luigi Variara, and Sister Eusebia Palomino. We expect that the beatification of Bro. Zatti will take place during the GC25: it will be an outstanding event in the Chapter's calendar!

I invite you to give thanks to God for the recent beatification of our Spanish martyrs and for that, soon to take place, of Artemide Zatti. This present letter is intended to prepare our communities for the coming event by gathering together the particular points stemming from the holiness of this confrere of ours. At the same time I want to highlight the relevance of the salesian brother, his value in our community life and mission and, above all, the need for a more decisive work for vocations.

The title given to this letter could rightly give rise to questions. And they should be faced without any alarm! That among our coadjutor confreres God's providence has raised up exemplary and even holy Salesians there was never any doubt. We have seen them, we have lived with them in our ordinary working communities and on the missions. We have experienced the valuable contribution they make competently and faithfully to the salesian mission. Some indeed have filled roles which may appear of secondary importance (doorkeeper, sacristan, infirmarian, cook, house maintenance, etc.); everywhere, however, they have been educators of the first order, confirming Don Bosco's words reported in the Biographical Memoirs: "A good doorkeeper is a treasure for a house of education".¹ And this without detriment to the highly qualified roles (in charge of workshops, teachers and headmasters, catechists and pastoral animators, etc.) filled by very many Brothers we could all name.

We have read the story of many of them or heard it recounted. They have received medals and decorations, from

¹ cf. BM 4, p. 383

which we can clearly deduce what it has meant for these men to live out their historic responsibility, full of the love of Christ and working in Don Bosco's orbit: in other words to attain their desire for holiness in pastoral charity, by living a total consecration in the service of the young. The fundamental aspects that have characterized their vocational experience are still decisive in our history even at the present day. Consecrated life is expressed, as it always has been, through holiness, which knows no substitutes.

I have known personally more than a few of these Brothers: biographies have been written about many of them, which enable us to understand their vocational path through life. They appear as "men of Don Bosco", attracted by him and identified with his spirit and mission. They would have said with Don Cagliero: "Monk or no monk, it is all the same to me. I am determined, as I have always been, never to leave Don Bosco!"² This is the underlying substance! It means a felt relationship with the Father, zeal and enthusiasm for Jesus Christ, the desire for holiness and perfect charity, and the conviction of the call of God to live all this in the salesian mission and fellowship.

Today's *precedent*, referred to in the heading of the letter, consists specifically in the inclusion of a Brother among those whom the Church has considered worthy, by public act, of being proposed as a model of spiritual life and charity to his brothers in religion and, on a broader scale, to all Christians. And this on the basis of the testimony of many people, confirmed by God through a "miraculous" event attributed to his intercession.

Artemide Zatti is the *first salesian coadjutor not a martyr to be beatified* and this fact, as I have said, gives a touch of completeness to the series of models of salesian spirituality, which the Church has officially declared to be such.

I have called this precedent "sensational", in the sense that

² BM 6, p. 181

it shakes us up, it challenges our fidelity to our charism and our ability to offer at the present day examples of the salesian lay vocation that are truly meaningful and attractive.

In referring in this letter to the salesian Brother, it is not my intention to enter into questions already dealt with in previous documents, such as the indispensable character of such a figure³ or the relationship between the service of salesian authority and the ministerial priesthood.⁴ Nor do I intend to address the question of the nature of our Congregation about which, however, I will say a word later on. There are other settings in which to reflect on these and other questions, and also times and appropriate authorities for dealing with them.

But what I do intend is to issue a pressing invitation to meditate on the figure of Zatti, so as to give rise to practical steps and a commitment, at provincial and regional level, regarding the vocation of the salesian coadjutor brother. When we cannot communicate with and inspire others at this level, our work is of little effect, and our dreams of global reform become sterile. To be truly effective it is indispensable to think globally but also act decisively at local level.

2. DON BOSCO'S COADJUTOR BROTHERS

Let us begin from Don Bosco and from the first experience of our particular style of holiness. From the first years we come across the figure of coadjutors, formed directly by the Founder, who had a strong influence on the appearance of the Congregation. We may think – for example – of a Peter Enria,

³ cf. GC21, 197-198

⁴ On salesian authority, and its relationship to priestly ministry, v. the reflection of the GC21 on the role of the Rector (GC21, 49 ff.), the circular letter of Vigano, E, *Animation of the salesian Rector* in AGC 306, and Vecchi J. *Spiritualita salesiana*, LDC Turin 2001, p. 184-194.

to understand how much poorer Valdocco would have been without his presence. They contributed decisively to making the Congregation great, especially in the area of trade schools and in the service to the poorest of the poor.

Every province, every country, every continent has its picture gallery. There is no lack of relevant publications illustrating the more outstanding of them, thus enshrining in history the contribution they have made to the sanctity of our Family.

This is the case, for example, with Brothers who have lived in the Holy Land and done honour to holiness in the native land of Jesus. Their most outstanding representative is the venerable Simon Srugi, who is linked with Zatti by their common role of infirmarian at the service of their sick confreres, whom we hope to see joining him on the altars.

Among **Don Bosco's first coadjutors** some were boys who had grown up at the Oratory, others came to him already adults with their life as laymen matured in the world and in the Church. In contact with Don Bosco, they came to understand that they could use the professional skills they had acquired by committing themselves to his educative and pastoral work. The enthusiasm grew in them which Don Cagliero expressed in the phrase: "I am staying with Don Bosco!" It was the spark of a true vocation, as indicated in art. 21 of our Constitutions: the fascination of the mission and of the Founder, the desire to continue his charism and spread his spirit.

Their early professional training, coupled with good intelligence, a mature temperament and already developed human qualities, made them able to give a valuable service to the community and educative environment. They were to be found not only in Turin, but even in the extreme south of Patagonia, cordial and trustworthy doorkeepers, front-line missionaries, building supervisors, heads of workshops.

The salesian vocation from the outset offered many possibilities for its realization, determined more by the promptings of charity and the call of the mission than by the importance of the service or the role in the community. For the identity and placement of the Brother there were no rigid norms, but a discernment which gave scope for his generosity, availability, community spirit and joy in his vocation.

Don Bosco looked at the quality. He does not seem to have been over-worried about the proportion, for example, between clerics and laymen. He welcomed those whom God sent him, priests or laymen, and united them in religious consecration, in the mission and in charity.

We can present a few examples, from among many others, to confirm what we have been saying.

Joseph Buzzetti was one of the first of Don Bosco's boys. He made his profession as a coadjutor brother at a much later date, because he "did not feel worthy", but in practice he lived and collaborated with Don Bosco all his life. He came to the Oratory with his brother Charles, who was to become a master builder who put up several salesian houses. Originally he wanted to become a priest, but after being wounded by a bullet aimed at Don Bosco by someone who wanted to kill him, he had to lay aside the clerical habit and passed through a difficult time. He was about to leave the Oratory, but after a conversation with Don Bosco he decided never to abandon him. He was an assistant, a teacher of catechism, in charge of the bookshop, choirmaster and organizer of lotteries: he was Don Bosco's right arm and a faithful witness to all the heroic deeds of our Founder.

Peter Enria was also late in officially becoming a coadjutor. He was quite a prodigy, able to turn his hand to anything: teacher, music master, producer of theatrical presentations, artist, cook, and infirmarian. It was especially in this last activity that he showed his gifts of sensitivity and delicacy.

He spent himself for Don Bosco in various situations, especially in the last illness which brought our Founder to his death.

Joseph Rossi was the first of the Brothers not to come directly from the ranks of the Oratory boys. At the age of 24 he came across the "Companion of Youth", written by Don Bosco. He immediately became fired with enthusiasm, left his village in the province of Pavia, and came to Valdocco. He made his profession in 1864. He looked after the linen-room, was an assistant in the workshops, and made the necessary purchases in the town; he was, in fact, an administrator, a man of trust, with responsibility for all the material goods of the Congregation. His duties made it necessary for him to travel at times, both in Italy and abroad. Don Bosco was very fond of him and used to joke with him a good deal.

Marcello Rossi had to wait until he came of age before he could freely decide about his future and go to live with Don Bosco, who entrusted him "temporarily" with the task of door-keeper, which he faithfully fulfilled with punctuality and trust for a "temporary" 48 years. He was known as the sentinel of the Oratory and Cardinal Cagliero pointed him out one day as the "real monument to Don Bosco".

We could continue with many other examples of Brothers of the early years. Because of his similarity with Zatti in his experience of emigration and falling under the "spell" of Don Bosco, I will refer briefly to **Sylvester Chiappini**, whose parents were Italian immigrants in Argentina. He had no particular tasks, but was the **first son of Don Bosco in the new world**.⁵ He was working as a cook in a hotel of Buenos Aires, and at the age of 18 met the Salesians in the church entrusted to them, where he himself frequently went to pray. He became part of the community and did the cooking. Later he asked to

⁵ This testimony on Sylvester Chiappini (or Chiappino, as appears in some documents) is from Joseph Vespignani, who refers in the obituary letter to the "first salesian profession in the new world".

become a Salesian. He was accepted, became a Brother and for forty years continued as a cook, infirmarian and odd-job man looking after many small needs of the community.

The salesian community whose members, beginning with Don Bosco himself, were so visibly hardworking, attracted others by the witness of their outstanding example, and this attraction was not limited to young people but brought in "good Christian" adults. The Institution became a house and a family, not least through the presence and sensitivity of the Brothers, and their creative contribution enriched the mission in new ways.

3. VOCATIONAL PROFILE OF ARTEMIDE ZATTI ⁶

Now let us direct our attention more specifically to Artemide Zatti and his experience of salesian sanctity. In anyone getting to know him at any depth for the first time some questions arise spontaneously. Who was Artemide Zatti? What does he represent for our Family? What words and messages have come down to us through his life? What challenges does he put to us at the present day? These are the things we shall try to discover by re-reading the details of his life and identifying the underlying messages.

3.1. Meeting with Don Bosco in Patagonia.

The call of Artemide Zatti to join the missionary ranks of Don Bosco illustrates various traits of the vocation of the first Brothers, though each individual evidently has his own originality.

⁶ Much of this section is taken, frequently in the exact words, from the *Positio* of the Cause for beatification, even though a reference is not always given in the notes, and quotations are not always enclosed in inverted commas..

As an immigrant looking for better living conditions, **Artemide Zatti** was 17 when, after leaving Italy with his family, he reached Bahía Blanca. His parents, *Luigi Zatti* and *Albina Vecchi*, had eight children, four boys and four girls. The Zattis, who lived at Boretto in the province of Reggio Emilia near the Po, had no property of their own but worked on land they hired from others.

Artemide, third of the eight children, was born on 12 October 1880, and was baptized the same day with the names Artemide Gioachino Desiderio. Though the family had few material possessions, they led an intense Christian life which was evident when they emigrated to Argentina. In the family circle, Artemide soon learned to face the fatigue and responsibility of work.

"In January of 1897", we read in the *Positio*, "we do not know whether on a sudden impulse or after due consideration or because of some fact in the family, Luigi Zatti, head of the family, decided to leave Italy and with his wife and children emigrate to Argentina. At the end of the century the emigration of Italians to America was a common phenomenon, justified by many reasons... The decision may have been influenced by the invitation of an uncle, Giovanni Zatti, who was already in Argentina in the growing town of Bahia Blanca, where he had found suitable employment"⁷.

"Separation from his own country opened for the Servant of God the possibility of exploiting in a new world not only the work of his hands, but still more the spiritual resources of a solid Christian education. It seems that he went, facing the unknown and following the path marked out for him by God"⁸, which was to lead him to meet Don Bosco.

The Zatti family reached Buenos Aires on 9 February 1897, and four days later arrived by train at Bahia Blanca, where they joined a large group of Italian emigrants already there.

⁷ *Positio*, p. 27

⁸ *Ibid.*

In addition to the positive elements, such as commitment to work and love of family, the emigration process also involved some important factors undermining cultural homogeneity. Among the emigrants was a sizable group who had taken with them the anticlerical attitude and opposition to the Pope and the Church that had developed rapidly in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century. Each year on certain special days, this attitude gave rise to noisy demonstrations against the parish and the salesian community.⁹

At Bahia Blanca the Salesians were responsible for the Parish of Our Lady of Ransom, and it was in this parish that the Zatti family went to live. The parish had two schools, a high-school and a trade-school. In the salesian work the Catholics and other people of good will, who included even some of the fanatical demonstrators, saw the signs and found a meeting place; many of them began to gather around the parish. Among those who decided to do this and so entered into the orbit of Don Bosco was Artemide Zatti. His family struck up a strong and fruitful friendship with the parish priest, Fr Carlo Cavalli, a good and zealous missionary, particularly concerned for the poor and the sick.

Artemide found in Fr Carlo a sincere friend, a wise confessor and a skilled spiritual director, who formed him to a daily life of prayer and weekly reception of the sacraments. He established with the priest a spiritual rapport and one of collaboration.¹⁰

With the example and encouragement of Fr Cavalli, Artemide joined to his desire for his own formation that of doing good to others. We read in fact that he used to spend his spare time in the parish church, and would accompany the parish priest on his visits to the sick, at funerals, in serving Mass, and in fulfilling the duties of sacristan.¹¹

⁹ For a humorous anecdote in this connection, v. footnote in the Italian edition of the Acts.

¹⁰ Cf. *Positio*, p. 35

¹¹ Cf. *Positio*, p. 36

The broad social field of Catholic workers was one of the sectors to which the missionaries were committed. Artemide Zatti was a zealous assistant of the groups of workers who used to meet on Sundays; he would spend the afternoon with them, making friends, taking an interest in their different circumstances, encouraging them, and urging them towards good works.

All this he did quite spontaneously, without any recompense, as an affectionate and generous service to God and to his neighbour. "As a young immigrant into the materialistic and commercial world of Bahia Blanca, more than this could not be expected of him. This kind of life and interior attitude he kept up for about three years from his arrival at Bahia Blanca in 1897 to 1900, while his vocation was maturing".¹²

3.2. Salesian vocation.

"The **salesian vocation**", we read in the *Positio*, "was bound to arise spontaneously, as something quite natural, in the life of the Servant of God. It was a consequence of the seriousness of his spiritual commitment and of his will to serve God and his neighbour. Moreover living in daily contact with Fr Cavalli and other confreres of the hardworking salesian community, meant that he had always before him a testimony bound to encourage him to dedicate his life in a most radical form".¹³ The apostolic generosity of Fr Cavalli, the salesian environment and the developing work of Don Bosco in Patagonia exercised a daily attraction and proved to be an ideal more powerful than any other prospect for a good but rather bewildered immigrant from Italy.¹⁴

In the parish library he was able to read the biography of Don Bosco, and was entranced by it. This was the true begin-

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Cf. Ibid.

ning of his salesian vocation. At the origin of the vocation of each one of us there is always an inspiring encounter with the Founder and with his followers.¹⁵

When Fr Cavalli suggested that he should set out on the road to the priesthood in Don Bosco's Congregation, Zatti had already shown a solid maturity with a supernatural sense, and an unyielding conviction of faith and zeal, and the ability which leads young and old to God.

And so, with the consent of his family and moved by the sincere desire of following his vocation, the 20-year old Zatti on 19 April 1900 entered with full docility into the rhythm of the life of the **aspirantate of Bernal**, which housed also the novices and post-novices. He found no difficulty in sitting in the benches with boys aged 11 to 14; he willingly carried out all the tasks which the Superiors, seeing his maturity and generosity, entrusted to him; he immersed himself in study to make up for lost time, without complaining of the physical work which interrupted his application. Following his vocation was always at the front of his mind and, without being upset by difficulties, he tried to make full use of all the resources placed by God at his disposal.¹⁶

"Letters written to his family during that period provide ample witness to the interior attitude of the Servant of God. Optimism, joyful involvement in the life of the community, cordial and faithful submission to Superiors, a profound religious sense which at the same time left him with a practical approach to everything, humble abandonment to God's will, tranquility in the face of every trial: these are the characteristics that emerge from his collected letters".¹⁷

In the Bernal aspirantate, Artemide Zatti passed nearly two years of study and intense formation.

¹⁵ Cf. Cost. 21

¹⁶ Cf. *Positio*. p. 41

¹⁷ Ibid.

3.3. The trial of sickness and its acceptance.

An unforeseen circumstance changed his life. Because of his reliability the superiors entrusted him with the task of assisting a young priest suffering from tuberculosis. Zatti carried out the work with generosity, but soon afterwards caught the same disease himself.¹⁸

The illness which put his own life in danger, and the consequent leaving of Bernal, seemed to place a large question mark over his progress towards the priesthood, and became a determining factor in Zatti's life.

"His state of mind can be easily imagined, but we are bound to say that he never spoke a word of complaint at what had happened, either in connection with the sickness itself, nor against the Superiors, nor against the circumstances in which he now found himself".¹⁹ On the contrary, this experience, which continued for years, and the uncertainty it implied, highlighted his spiritual strength through the conscious and generous acceptance of the evil, something not easy in a young man of that age.²⁰

On 4 September 1902, he wrote to his parents from Viedma to comfort them. "My dear mother and father, I think the letter I wrote about my health may have upset you, because although it said that I am getting better, I knew that you would not be pleased to hear that I cannot get rid of the cough. Dear parents, I am sure you will not forget the saying '*nothing happens unless God wills it*', and so if I am here in Viedma with a cough, it is *because* God wants it so for his greater glory, and for the benefit of my own soul by giving me this opportunity to do some penance for my sins... If you can do so, try to perform some good work, so that God may give me the grace to be conformed to his will, because very accept-

¹⁸ Cf. *Positio*, p. 47

¹⁹ Cf. *Positio*, p. 49

²⁰ Cf. *Positio*, p. 76

able to him are works done for what he loves. Be at peace, and *may the will of God be done* in everything".²¹

After seeking medical advice the Superiors had sent Zatti to Viedma, which was to become the definitive place of his mission. The flourishing salesian work there, the centre from which the missionary movement spread out into Patagonia and the residence of the Vicar Apostolic, the mild climate and the presence of Fr Evasio Garrone, the salesian physician, were the reasons for the choice.

The arrival of Artemide Zatti at Viedma coincided with that of Zeffirino Namuncurá, who came from Buenos Aires and was suffering from the same illness. The two lived together in a friendly relationship until Zeffirino left for Italy in 1904 with Mgr. Cagliero.

At the time of Zatti's arrival in 1902, Viedma had little more than 5,000 inhabitants of various origins and nationalities. The great majority of them were poor.

The salesian work was of great significance. Two colleges, one of the SDB and the other of the FMA, exercised a great influence in raising the moral and material conditions of the area. The Salesians had a complex work which included a primary boarding and day school, a trade school which trained Patagonia's first qualified workers, and an agricultural school on the outskirts of the town. At the centre of the salesian work was the Cathedral, which served as the parish church. Alongside the church were the Hospital and Pharmacy.

The St Joseph Hospital had been founded in 1889, with pioneering zeal by Mgr. Cagliero and the Rector of the salesian work, Fr Bernard Vacchina, to meet the needs of the poor. Fr Evasio Garrone, who had studied and practised medicine in Italy before becoming a salesian and missionary, was given the task of organizing and directing the hospital on 15 June 1889, a few hours after his priestly ordination.²²

²¹ *Positio*, p. 76

²² Information on the salesian work at Viedma: cf. *Positio*, p. 61-65

The Hospital and Pharmacy were to become Zatti's field of work.

3.4. Always with Don Bosco, as a Salesian Brother.

When Artemide Zatti left Bernal, he was not yet a Salesian. Despite his illness the Superiors had sent him to Viedma as an aspirant because of the good qualities they saw in him, and also because of his desire to become a Salesian, which he continued to manifest unwaveringly. It was an act of mutual trust between the Congregation and the Servant of God.

Artemide had not abandoned his initial inclination. He continued to think about a priestly vocation in the Salesian Congregation, not least because there came a point when his health began to improve and he was able to take up a continuous and exacting task in the pharmacy of Fr Garrone.

It is touching to note his **unswerving attachment to his vocation**, even when it seemed that sickness removed any possibility of achieving it. He wrote, for example, to his relatives on 7 August 1902: "I want you to know that it was not only my own wish but also that of my Superiors that I should receive the cassock; but there is an article of the Holy Rule which says that no one can receive it who has even the slightest problem about his health. And so it means that God has not yet found me worthy to wear the cassock, and so I trust in your prayers that I may soon get well and see my desire fulfilled".²³

At a certain point however, in order that the uncertain situation should not drag on indefinitely, a clear decision was made. The Superiors, while noting his improvement in health, could not be fully persuaded about his future prospects. With tuberculosis, at that time, one could never be sure of a definite cure; the curriculum of studies which the Servant of God

²³ *Positio*, p. 79

would have to face at his age (23-24) was long and hardly suitable for a sufferer from tuberculosis. On the other hand he had already begun to work, and this evidently with success and mutual satisfaction, in the pharmacy, doing a job suited to a layman; it may even be that Fr Garrone exerted some pressure to keep him working at his side.

Given all these circumstances, the Superiors had to suggest to Zatti, who was persevering in his desire to be consecrated to God, that he be professed as a salesian Brother: leaving aside the problems of precarious health this seemed a prudent solution. It would be the total donation of himself to God in the salesian life to which Artemide aspired in the first place. The proposal by the Superiors and its acceptance by the Servant of God must have taken place between 1904 and 1906, but we do not know at what precise point.

It does not seem that the decision implied a negative judgement on his intellectual capacity; indeed never was any doubt expressed about the confrere's gifts of intelligence, nor of his cultural preparation or level headedness.²⁴

Nor does it seem that the Superiors were ever aware of the promise he had made to Our Lady, at Fr Garrone's suggestion, to dedicate himself to the good of his neighbour if he should be cured; this seems to have become public only when Zatti himself testified to it in 1915.²⁵

It was in that year, in fact, on the occasion of the dedication of a tombstone on the grave of Fr Garrone, that was published a special issue of the review *Flores de campo*, which carried the following testimony of the Servant of God: "If I am now well and in good health, and able to do some good to my sick neighbours, I owe it to Fr Doctor Garrone – (as Zatti always used to refer to him, *Editor's note*) – who saw that I was getting worse every day from the effects of tuberculosis, coughing blood, and told me point blank that, if I did not want

²⁴ Cf. *Positio*, p. 79 ff

²⁵ Cf. *Positio*, p. 74

to finish up in the same way as so many others, I should make a promise to Mary Help of Christians to remain always at his side helping in the care of the sick and trusting in Mary, she could heal me. I BELIEVED, Because I knew of his reputation that Mary Help of Christians helped him in visible ways. I PROMISED, because I had always wanted to help others in anything I could do for them. And after God had heard the prayer of his servant, I RECOVERED". (*Signed*) Artemide Zatti"²⁶

It was a solemn declaration, signed and made public, which is a clear expression of the faith of the Servant of God and of his determination to dedicate himself totally and for ever to helping the sick.

In this way, Artemide Zatti, aware of his situation and – as we read in the *Positio* – “inclined as he was to see God’s will in the decisions of the Superiors, accepted to become a lay Salesian, and in this way to live out his firm commitment to consecrate himself to God. The promise made to Our Lady for his cure seems to fit in with this solution, to the extent that as a layman he could more fully and directly help in the care of the sick in a way he could probably not have done as a priest”.²⁷ “His fundamental attitude was always to do *whatever was pleasing to God*”.²⁸

We can see that Artemide Zatti sought the way of God before all else, and his firm intention was to stay with Don Bosco and be of help to him in any way possible. He already belonged to Don Bosco because God had brought him into con-

²⁶ We print the testimony in the original Spanish: “Si yo estoy bueno y sano y en estado de poder hacer algún bien a mis prójimos enfermos, se lo debo al Padre Garrone Doctor, quien viendo que mi salud empeoraba cada día, pues estaba afectado de tuberculosis con frecuentes emoptisis, me dijo terminantemente que, si no quería concluir como otros tantos, hiciera una promesa a María Auxiliadora, de permanecer siempre a su lado ayudándole en la cura de los enfermos y él, confiando en María, me sanaría. CREÍ, porque sabía por fama que María Auxiliadora lo ayudaba de manera visible. PROMETÍ, pues siempre fue mi deseo ser de provecho en algo a mis prójimos. Y habiendo Dios escuchado a su siervo y SANÉ. (Firmado) ARTEMIDE ZATTI.” (*Positio*, p. 75)

²⁷ *Positio*, p. 80

²⁸ *Positio*, p. 81

tact with this Saint who was so fascinating, and was indeed, in the land of Patagonia, the decisive prophet of evangelization and formation for a colourful group of God's people. He was therefore more than ready for a pilgrimage to holiness in the salesian life.

Priest? Brother? He himself once said to a confrere: "You can serve God as a priest or as a brother: before God one is as good as the other, provided you live it as a vocation and with love".²⁹

There was no sadness or reaction, therefore, at the change in his vocational perspective. On the contrary, there was deep gratitude for the fact of being a Salesian and for having had clear signs of God's will. And so he wrote to his family in January of 1908, after making his religious profession at 27 years of age: "With my heart full of a holy and enviable joy at this extraordinary grace which the good Lord, *beyond all my hopes has deigned to grant me* (but I attribute it to your prayers and those of others who pray for my intentions), I write to you now to beg you to join me in thanking the good God and the Blessed Virgin, by assisting at a holy Mass and receiving communion..."³⁰

Each one receives his own gift, expressed in charity, in the salesian mission, in holiness: these were the key words guiding his life. Zatti set about living out his own gift. And God did not fail him.

3.5. A full-time Good Samaritan.

At Viedma Artemide Zatti recovered his health and found his mission in the care of the sick; from being a patient himself he became an infirmarian, and the illnesses of others became his apostolate, his mission. He gave himself to it full-time and with all the uncompromising approach of *da mihi animas*, constantly extending his activities.

²⁹ *Summarium*, p. 310, n. 1224

³⁰ *Positio*, p. 84

It was from this perspective that he decisively planned his future. From then onwards, the different aspects of his unique personality, sparkling tranquility and good humour, and the development of his professional skills grew more and more, prompted by the internal desire to be faithful to God's grace and be of the greatest possible use to the mission. The latter he fully assumed, day by day, as it took on new dimensions and requirements, which Zatti met with a spirit of service and sacrifice.

The hospital and the houses of the poor, which he visited night and day, using a bicycle now considered a historical relic in the city of Viedma, were the front line of his mission. He lived the total donation of himself to God and the dedication of all his strength to the good of his neighbour, first as the efficient and generous collaborator of Fr Garrone, and then after the latter's death in 1911 (and especially from 1915 when the new premises were inaugurated), as the one with chief responsibility for it, the director and administrator of the work. He turned his hand to everything: received people, trained others, directed activities, and paid the employed personnel; he did the purchasing of whatever was needed, kept an eye on maintenance work, assisted doctors in their consultations and surgeons in operations; he dealt with families, but especially he worked to make ends meet because expenses were always greater than income.³¹ One of his sayings has gone down in history: "*Yo no pido a Dios que me dé dinero, sino que indique donde está*" ("I do not ask God to give me money, but to show me where it is to be found")³².

The hours he worked and his daily toil are practical evidence of his total dedication to the mission, his community sense, the care of his spiritual life and professional skill. Let us follow him through a typical day.³³

³¹ Cf. *Positio*, p. 93

³² *Positio*, p. 149

³³ Cf. *Positio*, p. 104-105

The Servant of God rose at 4.30 or 5 a.m., spent some time in personal prayer in the church, and then made his meditation with the community and assisted at Mass.

Then he would go to the hospital wards, where he always arrived smiling and with the cheerful greeting: "Good morning everyone. Long live Jesus, Mary and Joseph". Then he would ask: "Everyone still alive?" and the old men would turn towards him in their beds and reply: "Everyone, Bro. Zatti". "*Deo gratias*", was his jovial rejoinder, and then he would pass from one bed to another to see what each one needed, and also to see whether anyone in fact was no longer breathing; if so he carried him on his own back to the mortuary.

After this visit he had his breakfast, and then went round the sick again to provide them with what they needed. With this job done he next got on his bicycle with head uncovered and wearing a white shirt, to give injections to the many sick people scattered around the neighbourhood. When antibiotics became available his work multiplied, because it was often necessary to give injections every two hours and even at night. "Rarely", said one of his helpers, "did he sleep all night". He traveled everywhere by bicycle, or by truck if he was offered a lift, but never by car.

At 12 noon – and no one knows how he managed to be always punctual – he was there to say grace with the community before the midday meal. He prayed with faith, his eyes closed, his lips and hands clasped together to concentrate his attention. He was nearly always the bell-ringer to call the confreres; and he did it with devotion – they say – because it was the voice of God!

After lunch he used to join those who were convalescent at a game of "bocce", which he played with enthusiasm. The period from 2 to 4 p.m., more or less, found him once again on his bicycle. He never skipped tea, but afterwards went out once again into the town, or went round the wards again, or attended to accounts or repairs.

At 6 p.m. he was there for spiritual reading, and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on the days it took place. After the sick had eaten their supper he used to go round the wards once again to see that prayers were said, and to give the salesian 'Good Night', i.e. leave behind a good thought from the life of some Saint, from Don Bosco, or from the liturgy. Few words, but a serious thought. Then more work and a 'good night' to the nurses, to whom he left reminders and special indications and guidance for their work.

At 8 p.m. there was supper with the community, another visit to the wards, and finally to his own room to do some reading or personal work. During the night he usually had to get up at least once and usually more often for calls to the sick.

His life was lived in an environment in which the same difficulties were repeated every day, but where understanding and sympathy were also to be found. The maturity he had already attained and the help of a fervent community life could not but foster his anxiety and decisive will to become holy. The Servant of God lost nothing of what God was offering to his soul, and he made use of everything that would enable the heroic practice of the virtues.³⁴

Over forty long and laborious years the figure of the Servant of God grew continually in generosity of service and the seeking of professional skill. Artemide Zatti was not just a run-of-the mill kind of worker; he was an competent hospital administrator, endowed with deep practical knowledge, which medical authorities could not overlook. The "Department of Public Health" had given him an official recognition as an infirmarian (n. 7,253), while he himself through private study obtained from the La Plata University the qualification as a pharmacist, which was indispensable before he could open and manage the Hospital pharmacy.³⁵ The combined witness of

³⁴ Cf. *Positio*, p. 103

³⁵ Cf. *Positio*, p. 92

doctors, given individually by each of them, provides an admirable demonstration of the dedication, competence, faith and respectful attitude of Zatti in their regard.

During the forty years he spent at Viedma, there were several extraordinary facts that bore witness in various ways to Zatti's solid virtue and salesian spirit. We could recall the tranquility with which he accepted the few days he was put in prison, after a prisoner who had been hospitalized on the orders of the prison governor absconded from the hospital (1915); the prudence and patience displayed when, against his wishes, the old hospital was demolished and transferred to a new site that was not ready (1941); his deep salesian joy during the three months he was able to spend in Italy for the canonization of Don Bosco.

3.6. Towards a long prepared meeting with God: popular recognition as "kinsman of the poor".

After being cured of tuberculosis in the first years of the century, Artemide Zatti always enjoyed excellent health, which enabled him to face continual heavy work and great sacrifice. Only his burning zeal for the good of his neighbour can explain the labours he faced with nonchalant tranquility and without in fact almost any rest until the end of life.

But the Lord called him once again to be associated with him in his passion and to share the sufferings of those whom he himself was serving. It was in July of 1950 when, as he was being treated after falling from a ladder, he was found to have a faulty liver function, and later a tumour was diagnosed.

He accepted the fact and knowingly followed the development of the illness (he himself prepared his death certificate for the doctor!); he maintained his joyful serenity despite painful sufferings, and spent what remained of his strength in work and in the community, as he lived the final months

awaiting the call of the Lord. He recalled: "Fifty years ago I came here to die, and I have reached the present moment. What more could I wish for? I have spent all my life preparing for this moment".³⁶

The time for his meeting with God came on 15 March 1951.

On the day of the funeral no inhabitant of Viedma stayed at home: adults took part in the ceremonies through admiration and gratitude, and the children were there to learn at first hand a piece of the important history of their town.

The whole of Viedma did honour to the "*kinsman of the poor*", as he had been known for some time, the one who had always been ready to welcome those with particular maladies and people who came from the distant countryside; the one who had been able to enter the poorest of houses at any hour of the day or night without causing raised eyebrows; the one who, though he was always 'in the red', had maintained a unique relationship with the city banks, which were always open to friendship and generous collaboration with those engaged in the medical care of the citizens.

And we could continue in the same vein. The biography resulting from the testimony of the *Positio* is rich indeed, with abundant episodes, facets and assessments. We who have known him and remember his words and gestures, bear witness to the truth of these things. Stories of events circulated wildly among the people and often with exaggerations. It is not surprising that long before the cause was introduced, the general opinion among the people was that they had been in contact with a giant of charity, made even greater by the malicious and vague accusation of practising medicine illegally, from which charge he was cleared by the people themselves.

As though to prolong his presence in the city's life, one of the main streets was named after him, as also the modern State Hospital, and a monument was erected to commemorate him.

³⁶ *Positio*, p. 198

The salesian Brother Artemide Zatti was truly a “good Samaritan” in the style of Don Bosco, a “sign and bearer of the love of God”, of his compassion, of his healing and consoling presence, which opened up horizons of faith and hope to the sick and to the young: he loved them all, and was able to win their love in return, as Don Bosco wanted.

4. MESSAGE OF ARTEMIDE ZATTI: PROSPECTS FOR TODAY

4.1. Unique testimony to salesian holiness.

The brief snatches we have given of the biography of Zatti have introduced us to the heart of **his spiritual story**. As we contemplate the changes in him brought about by his salesian vocation, marked by the action of the Spirit and now proposed by the Church, we can discern some traits of the typical kind of holiness to which we too are called. We have already perceived some of its characteristic expressions: his deep sense of God and the full and serene openness to God’s will, his attraction to Don Bosco and wholehearted membership of the salesian community, his animating and encouraging presence, the family spirit, spiritual life and prayer cultivated personally and shared with the community. The attentive observer cannot fail to note his total dedication to the salesian mission lived in welcoming the poor of every kind, his concern for the needy and his medical care for those with contagious or repugnant ailments, in finding space for society’s outcasts, in his pastoral care in bringing the sick and dying to God. His was an active presence in society, completely animated by the charity of Christ which drove him on!

Some of his actions were not only unusual but even heroic, as when he gave up his own bed to the latest arrival.

Even though fifty years have now gone by since his death and there has been a deep evolution of Consecrated Life, of

salesian experience, and of the vocation and formation of the Salesian Brother, the **salesian path to sanctity** traced out by Artemide Zatti is a sign and message which opens up perspectives at the present day for all of us who are called to live Don Bosco's charism in apostolic consecration. In this way is fulfilled what is stated by our Constitutions: "The confreres who are living or have lived to the full the gospel project of the Constitutions are for us a stimulus and help on the path to holiness".³⁷ The beatification of this confrere of ours is a concrete sign of that "*high standard of ordinary Christian living*" to which we are encouraged by John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*.³⁸

His testimony is addressed to every Salesian, to every local and provincial community. It tells of vocation as an experience of life in God, in line with the characteristics of the charism given to us by the Spirit. This is the path we have to follow: if we stray from it, everything else will be adrift!

4.1.1. The magnetism of Don Bosco.

It is always useful to try to identify in God's mysterious plan for each one of us the underlying theme of our own existence. If I had to express in a simple formula the secret which inspired and guided every step in the life of Artemide Zatti, I think it could all be contained in the following words: **following Jesus, with Don Bosco and in Don Bosco's manner, always and everywhere.**

In this expression there is **the magnet** which constantly attracted him and guided him in the *following of Jesus: Don Bosco!* There is **the total dedication** – *always and everywhere* – without regard to place, role or occupation. There is **the educative slant** to every activity, *in the manner of Don Bosco.*

Let us pause for a moment to consider these elements.

³⁷ Cost. 25

³⁸ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31

4.1.2. Total dedication to the mission.

“Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life...”, say the Constitutions.³⁹ Artemide Zatti lived the salesian mission in the field to which he had been entrusted, by personifying educative pastoral charity as a **good Samaritan in the style of Don Bosco**.

His faith led him to see Jesus in the sick, and even in those with dangerous, deforming or repugnant diseases. A series of anecdotes show us that he cared personally for those of the sick from whom others recoiled because they were deformed, repugnant or difficult to treat. This already shows us the mentality with which he worked. But still more edifying are expressions like the following, related by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, his constant and sensitive collaborators, always willing to give their loving assistance in the section of the Hospital reserved for women: “Sister, please prepare some clothing and a bed for a Jesus of 14 (or 75) years”.

In long years of proximity to the seriously ill and dying, it never became for him a matter of routine: the suffering and death, especially of young people, always moved him deeply, giving rise to feelings of deep compassion but without making him lose his peace of mind. He had a special gift for dealing with sick youngsters and even for helping them to close their eyes in the Lord with a feeling of trust, joy and tranquility. Among many others, I like to recall the following anecdote related by one witness. To a young lad who had arrived at death's door, Zatti came close as a father and brother, and said: “Let us go to our Father: close your eyes and join your hands. Now let us say together: Our Father...”. During the prayer the soul of the youngster went to heaven. In this way Zatti accompanied him towards his meeting with the Lord.

This is certainly a gift of God, but it is also the fruit of unbroken union with him and of a charity that had become a way

³⁹ cf. C 3

of life, capable of being poured out on those we serve, and in whom we discern the love of the Father and the countenance of his Son. It is the personal dedication of a life totally consecrated to God and the service of our neighbour, which is like the driving force of the mission: Don Bosco condensed it into the expression *da mihi animas, cetera tolle*.

Artemide Zatti reminds us in a practical way of the deep meaning of our mission, totally centred on the love of God: a love which moves us interiorly and which we want to pour out on those to whom we are sent.

4.1.3. Infirmarian and educator.

Artemide Zatti was not only an infirmarian, but also an **educator in the faith** for everyone in the time of trial and sickness. In the Hospital he created a family atmosphere which – as I have said already – was reflected in the choral response to his morning wake-up call: “Everyone still alive?”, followed by personal assistance to the needy and thanksgiving to God. There was another family moment after lunch at the game of ‘bocce’, and the particularly salesian evening event of the “good night” each day. And to all this must be added his personal contacts with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the other collaborators.

It is said that the principal medicine he used was Zatti himself: his attitude, his jokes, his cheerfulness and loving kindness. Many people have borne witness to it. It was not just a matter of administering medicines to fight disease but of helping bystanders and the patients themselves to lend a hand, and see in the situation a sign of God’s will, especially when death was approaching.

Zatti, indeed, had made of the mission to the sick his own area for educative activity, where he lived each day the criteria of Don Bosco’s preventive system – reason, religion, loving kindness – in close and loving assistance of the needy, in helping them to understand and accept their condition of

suffering, in his living witness to the presence of God and his unfailing love. For this reason we can speak of the *educative slant* of the holiness of this our infirmarian confrere.

Here I would like to say a word about health care as an area of our mission. It is not without significance that the two Brothers on their way to the honours of the altars, Artemide Zatti and Simon Srugi, worked in this area; and to them we must also add Fr Luigi Variara. When we think of the part occupied by the care of the sick in Jesus' preaching, and also of the role which the question of health has in our missions and, in general, in the life of our members and the people we serve, we can draw inspiration from Artemide Zatti to identify aspects of fraternal charity as yet unexplored, where our availability can become a sign of God's love, responding to the urgent needs of people and especially of the young.

I want to draw attention to the possibility of this link between health and education, quite apart from any formal professional relationship. Sometimes we find both needs present in our pupils. I have had the personal opportunity and good fortune to attend two General Chapters of a Congregation of women, which had originally expressed their educative charisma through institutions of a specific kind, and then later, precisely because of contact with sickness, particularly among young people, had courageously accepted responsibility also for care of the sick. The discussion was enlightening: it was said that the role of the religious was to educate *in* and *to* sickness. The necessary medical decisions could be left to the professionals. As a matter of fact, in our larger educative communities we have always had to take care of the various aspects which concern all the needs of young people: instruction and culture, exercise, games and social aspects, catechesis, physical and mental health – both directly and indirectly, protection from the environment, etc. This opens the door to a variety of possibilities to be carried out with an education of quality and consistency.

4.1.4. "Sanctified work":

synthesis of spirituality and professional skill.

A careful study of the life of the Venerable Artemide Zatti will lead us to recognize in the content and manner of his service the recognition of the **dignity proper to human values** and daily activities, which are the daily background to lay life in the world.

It is the proof, lived for a lifetime, that everything that is human is open to Christian values, expressed in the theological virtues and through baptism, which the Council has proposed once again so forcefully.

Like our own, the life of the Servant of God was continually filled with the tiny daily details that belong to a service like nursing, and which could easily become routine. But everything was invested with constant **charity**, that so permeated and transformed it as to make it the driving force of unification of life and unspoken evangelization. Moreover his constant effort to make himself better able to fulfil his tasks – through study and ongoing formation – must be understood as a manifestation of the flower of charity through which the Salesian tries "to do everything with simplicity and moderation".⁴⁰

If on the one hand this derives from the legitimate autonomy of natural laws and realities, on the other it expresses the conviction that "what is good should be done well" and that Christ's members (i.e. the sick and poor, young people in difficulties) must be embraced with a charity enlightened by industrious and creative intelligence.

What stands out clearly in the life of the Venerable Artemide Zatti is his passionate search for a greater harmony **between the seeking of a more professional approach and growth in genuine spirituality.**

The seeking after professional excellence – which nowadays appears as an unavoidable requirement in our societies,

⁴⁰ Cf. C 18

and especially in those more developed – represents a challenge to the religious life. This, indeed, could run the risk of hiding behind the secular aspect, and making it the source of its identity, and concealing (or at least relegating to second place) the true identity of the religious life which is linked with supernatural motives.

Such a challenge must be met with the particular “*grace of unity*”, which transforms professional activity into a resource of the consecrated life and, if we may so express it, gives to it a higher quality.

At the basis of such a unity it is not difficult to discern an hardworking charity, a serene trust in the progress of science and technology, the need to be able to discuss with others at their own level, so as to strengthen our own vocation and its message to give to it the evangelizing vigour and competent presence of the Church.

The Servant of God had both well learned and well lived what Blessed Philip Rinaldi called “**sanctified work**”, asking a special indulgence for it from the Holy Father,⁴¹ and seeing in it an essential trait of salesian spirituality.⁴² The concept of “work” includes all the professional competence of which we are capable, and that of “sanctified” embodies the vitality of charity, self-giving, and a spirit of sacrifice.

Quality of this kind in our work is the fruit of a salesian life, ever careful to avoid the risk of a self-centred professional attitude aimed at promoting our own image or exclusively technical, in order to attain the objective of an altruistic professional approach directed to the good of others and their overall education.

⁴¹ Rescript of Pope Pius XI to Fr Philip Rinaldi, 10 June 1922. It should be noted that after the Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina* of Paul VI of 1 Jan. 1967 and the subsequent Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary, this Indulgence no longer exists. On 31 January 1968, the Penitentiary granted special plenary indulgences that could be gained by Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians on particular occasions.

⁴² Cf. C 95

The Salesian, by virtue of his experience, will therefore be in a position to lead his charges – first implicitly and then even explicitly – to a **new kind of professional attitude**, inspired by the Gospel and able to renew the quality of life. It is the harmonious result of specific technical and cultural competence, of sound relational ability, and of deep ethical and spiritual motivation. And it seems able to redeem and give new significance to the work of man – which is a substantial part of his life – and, at the same time, to sustain and encourage the civilization of love.

4.1.5. *Evangelically rooted reflection of God.*

What gave weight to all of this – dedication to the mission and professional and educative ability – and immediately struck those who came across it was the interior life of Artemide Zatti, that of a disciple of the Lord, who lived his consecration at every moment, in constant union with God and in gospel fraternity.

From the judgement of doctors who spent long periods at his side in professionally sensitive moments like lengthy operations, from the evaluation of colleagues and cooperators, from the words of public figures, and from the testimony of confreres, emerges a **complete personality**, also on account of that salesian level-headedness through which the different dimensions become joined in a harmonious, unified and serene personality, open to the mystery of God lived in daily life.

We find it wonderful that despite all his tasks and commitments Artemide Zatti never lost his sense of community, but always took part in and enjoyed the daily prayer, fraternal moments at table and occasions for sharing family joys, which he did in a manner all his own. For him the salesian community was the place where he experienced God and gospel fellowship.

We may quote some evidence taken from the *Summary* prepared for the declaration of the heroic nature of his virtues.

Speaking of the intensity with which the Servant of God lived his faith *in continual union with God*, Mgr. M. Pérez declared: "The impression I received was of a man united with God. Prayer was like the breath of his soul, and his whole attitude showed that he lived to the full the first commandment of God: he loved him with all his heart, with all his mind, with all his soul".⁴³

The same thing was confirmed by Fr. F. López: "It was evident that the Servant of God prayed continually: on his bicycle he prayed while he pedaled, when he was attending the sick he spoke quite naturally about faith and said things which uplifted the spirit, even with religious".⁴⁴

As regards religious and community life in general, in the *Positio* it is stated that the holy infirmarian **was in the first place a religious and member of a community**. The service he gave to the sick never became an excuse to absent himself from his duties to community life or a reason to distract him from his great familiarity with God.

Fr. Prieto testified: "In the fulfilment of community acts he was exemplary. I mean that he never made use of the freedom given him by his particular work to absent himself from community practices".⁴⁵ And he goes on: "The Servant of God was outstanding as an observant religious, unfailingly punctual and never absent. I never heard him say: 'I was not here because...' His was always a positive presence in the community...".⁴⁶

Let us listen again to Fr. López, who was his Rector, concerning his practice of evangelical poverty: "He showed it in an exemplary manner, and well beyond the obligations of the poverty of a salesian Brother. He showed in a perfect degree that he was detached from earthly honours and selfish desires. While he was autonomous in administration no one ever saw

⁴³ *Summarium*, p. 43, n. 160

⁴⁴ *Summarium*, p. 179, n. 73

⁴⁵ *Summarium*, p. 60, n. 231

⁴⁶ cf. *Summarium*, p. 65, n. 248

or knew him to acquire anything for himself or his personal satisfaction, nor did I ever hear of such a thing...The Servant of God loved poverty; we could even say that he was wedded to it. He was outstanding as a poor person".⁴⁷

With regard to the spirit of obedience. Fr L. Savioli declares: "I know from my personal observation that with the Superiors he practised a filial and reverential obedience. I remember that he sought advice from Fr. Pedemonte and my general impression is that he did the same with the other Superiors. I know that he practised an obedience which was always simple, prompt and joyful".⁴⁸

All this shows us the exemplary nature of the gospel witness of our confrere, whom we can well define as a "reflection of God".

4.2. The Salesian Brother.

I want to dwell in particular on the **specific nature** of the vocation of Artemide Zatti, that of the Salesian Brother, which has left its mark on all his activity and on his path to sanctity.

If it is true – as has been authoritatively stated – that the salesian charisma would be lacking in an essential element without the figure of the Brother, it is easy to understand the importance attaching to the fact that the Church is raising to the honours of the altars a representative of a component so unique and indispensable to our identity.

And so it is fitting that the whole Salesian Family should celebrate this event with particular enthusiasm and use it as a motive for relaunching the figure of the Brother, as he has matured alongside Don Bosco in sharing, in the *Da mihi animas*, in the warmth of his pastoral and educative charity, in the continual seeking after holiness: hence not as additional to the working strength, but as an experience of God, lived in the community and in the service of the young.

⁴⁷ cf. *Summarium*, p. 187, n. 768-771; p. 51, n. 199

⁴⁸ cf. C.P. f. 730 t.

4.2.1. *The figure of the Brother in the salesian community.*

In Artemide Zatti's experience as a salesian Brother some eminent characteristics emerge of this specific vocation, and we are offered a particular grace to accept it, live it, and propose it in our communities and formation activities.

The path lived by Artemide Zatti in the salesian vocation calls for careful study because it is typical of the original source to which we must always return.

We have already explained briefly how the first nucleus of Brothers was formed around Don Bosco at the service of his educative and apostolic mission: some of them came from the ranks of the Oratory boys, others were mature laymen with a leaning towards works of charity, who found in Don Bosco's community the possibility of satisfying that leaning and increasing it for the good of the young by many contributions in line with the professional training they had already received. In Don Bosco's environment they grew at a human, professional and religious level, and became real treasures, not so much for the role they assumed, but rather for the educative quality they displayed.

In this way, in the environment of the Oratory of Don Bosco, and in the first salesian communities, the figure of the salesian Brother was forged, with the characteristics that still remain in the Congregation as an authentic expression of the charism, albeit with the changes and adaptations that have taken place.

The Constitutions, at art. 45, present the essential elements of some of these traits; they place the Brother within the one salesian vocation and mission, to which he brings his own specific contribution as a consecrated layman, "a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life",⁴⁹ while the salesian priest "brings to the common work of promoting human development and of educating in the faith the specific quality of his ministry".⁵⁰

⁴⁹ C 45

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The figure of the salesian Brother must be viewed in the context of the consecrated salesian community with its many rich qualities. In this connection I do not think it out of place to recall what I wrote three years ago in the letter on our apostolic consecration: *The Father consecrates us and send us*,⁵¹ which I consider of fundamental importance, under the sub-heading of: *The many gifts of our consecrated community*.

"The salesian community", I said, "is enriched by the significant and complementary presence of the salesian priest and the salesian brother"⁵². Together they provide an unusual complementarity of energy for witnessing and the educative mission.

We may wonder **what exactly the figures of the salesian brother and the salesian priest demonstrate** in the experience and witness of apostolic consecration; what does the lay character emphasize in 'consecration', and what does 'consecration' give to the lay state, both of them moulded and fused by the salesian spirit? Similarly we may wonder what the ministerial priesthood highlights in salesian consecration and what the latter gives to the ministry.

The special value is not found in external additions of status or categories of members, but in the resulting character of the salesian community itself.

The **salesian Brother** "combines in himself the gifts of consecration with those of the lay state".⁵³ He lives the lay state not in secular conditions but in the consecrated life; as a salesian religious he lives his vocation as a layman, and as a layman he lives his community vocation of a salesian religious".⁵⁴

"To his consecrated brethren", declares the GC24, "he recalls the values of the creation and of secular realities; to the

⁵¹ Cf. AGC 365

⁵² cf. GC24 174; C 45

⁵³ GC24, 154; cf. 236

⁵⁴ cf. *The Salesian Brother*, Rome 1989, n. 119

laity he recalls the values of total dedication to God for the cause of the Kingdom. To all he offers a particular sensitivity for the world of work, attention to the local environment, and the demands of the professional approach associated with his educative and pastoral activity”⁵⁵.

In his professional skills, secular fields of work, practical forms of involvement show their basic orientation towards the ultimate good of mankind, especially the young, and towards the Kingdom. “Everything is open to him, even those things which priests cannot do”, but everything is placed in the light of the radical love for Christ, polarized in the direction of evangelization and the eternal salvation of the boys. [...]

Especially in certain contexts and in face of a certain way of perceiving and conceiving the priest as a sacred or cultic figure, the style of consecration of the salesian brother proclaims in a concrete manner the presence and communication of God in daily life, the importance of becoming disciples before being teachers, the duty of witnessing to a personal experience of faith over and above functional or ministerial commitments. [...]

In the salesian community clerics and laymen build and bear witness to a model brotherhood, eliminating the separation based on roles and ministries through their ability to share different gifts in a single project. This relationship is the source of mutual enrichment and stimulus for a harmonious experience, in which the priesthood does not eclipse the religious identity and the lay characteristic does not conceal the radical nature of the consecration”.⁵⁶

It must be said that the presence of the lay religious in the **Orders and Congregations** is a common fact but, depending on the origin, evolution, objectives and location in the community, his appearance varies. It is one thing to be

⁵⁵ GC24, 154

⁵⁶ AGC 365, p.40 ff.

born as monks and be spiritually “monks among monks”, but quite another to have heard the call to collaborate in a “pastoral” community, which places the sacramental relationship with the Trinity at the highest point in the formation of young people and the faithful in general. Certainly we are not the only Congregation that considers its lay confreres an essential component for its particular identity and mission. Recent studies – including those undertaken by the Committee set up by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, with the task of analyzing more deeply the “form of Institutes” – have indicated that in each Institute the figure and situation of the consecrated lay member must be decided in conformity with each charism, giving due weight to sociological and theological considerations in general, but without separating them from the particular charisma and mission.

For us in this connection, there has been a reflection put forward authoritatively by the GC21,⁵⁷ taken up by Fr Egidio Viganò,⁵⁸ and endorsed by the Constitutions.⁵⁹ It explains how the lay dimension traverses the whole of our life and family, even to leaving a deep impression on our character: we are educators, working in many fields of secular activity where management, administration and pastoral guidance are intermixed. Included in our mission are secular commitments which follow paths of human development such as work, teaching and sport. Within the compass of the Salesian Family and in our own works we work with lay people to quite a large extent (cooperators, past-pupils, collaborators). For this reason the religious community, and still more the educative community, shows the countenance of the Church, the people of God in human history.

⁵⁷ Cf. GC21, Documento 2; *The Salesian Brother*, n. 166-211

⁵⁸ Cf. *The lay component of the salesian community*, Circular Letter of 24 August 1980, ASC 298

⁵⁹ Cf. C 45; *The project of life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*, p. 415-419

And yet the point of attraction or our principal activity remains quite clear: to place young people in a sacramental relationship with God, to reveal to them their condition as children of God and enable them to live accordingly. In our communities the lay dimension is fused in a unique manner with the pastoral dimension and the priestly ministry, in which we all have the task of representing and bringing to life once again Jesus Christ who is the foundation of the community. It was Don Bosco's wish that superiors should use their gifts of priestly ministry for the good of the community through the exercise of the Word, the ministry of sanctification, and the guidance of all towards the goal of sacramental communion with God. This is why, according to the Constitutions,⁶⁰ Rectors, Provincials and the Rector Major must be "priests" of their respective communities, and not only guides or coordinators of activities.

The consequences are by no means insignificant, both as regards the exercise of authority and the spiritual life of communities. The latter are not simply groups requiring technical coordination and management, but communities to be sanctified in line with what Jesus did with his disciples, uniting them vitally with the Father using all possible means.

But in this context, the Brother has no less possibility of contributing to the sanctification of his confreres and the young, of assuming important responsibilities in the educational field, or of following in a mature manner the paths of salesian spirituality.

The Brothers do not lack opportunities for taking full and mature responsibility, which have their effect on community life and the apostolic mission. There are vast educative and lay sectors which are necessary for overall pastoral work. The vocation of the Brother is open to charity in all sorts of different forms. And these are the expressions of his consecrated vocation.

⁶⁰ cf. C 121

This shows the **very many ways** in which the vocation of the salesian Brother can be realized within the salesian community. "The concrete possibilities of living the consecrated state in the Congregation are many and varied",⁶¹ as is proved by the life of Artemide Zatti and many other confreres. The lay characteristic of the salesian mission, attention to poor youngsters and critical situations, sensitivity and skill in the world of work, involvement in the social context, the areas of commitment which occur in the missionary dimension among ordinary people and in social communication – all these find, as they have always done, a particular accord with the vocation of the salesian Brother; they are found in well known traditional roles, and are also open to new forms and expressions, as is made clear by present-day experience.

Salesian history teaches us that often the Brother has been able to give weight and effectiveness to the community's mission to the young and the poor by a particular contribution, even on missionary frontiers. Think, for instance, of the unique relationship that exists between dedication to poor youngsters, trade schools, evangelization of the poor and the salesian Brother. It is a many-sided contribution but it is not undefined. Lack of definition leads to vagueness, but the plurality of complementarity forces enriches the community and the mission. One should never think, therefore, that humble tasks, that seem from a human point of view of little consequence, are without their importance. Earlier I recalled Don Bosco's expression: "A good doorkeeper is a treasure for a house of education". It was the expression of a man who well knew that education depends on the sum total of all the relevant factors, and I myself could tell the story of a doorkeeper who was a treasure in the far-flung "pampas" of Patagonia.

⁶¹ GC21 301; FSDB 324

4.2.2. Some particular points.

As I mentioned already, in speaking of the salesian Brother it has not been my intention to deal exhaustively with all the different aspects of his vocation and mission. Drawing inspiration from the figure and experience of holiness of Artemide Zatti, I have considered some elements which touch on the identity of the Brother, his particular contribution to the mission and his place in the community.⁶² There are others that could be analyzed at greater depth. I will now refer to one or two particular aspects.

4.2.2.1. *The Institutional form of Institutes.*

What I said a little earlier about the presence of lay members in numerous Orders and Congregations, has direct reference to the institutional form of the Institutes concerned. We know that this is at present the object of discernment at ecclesial level. On the occasion of the Synod on Consecrated Life, in fact, the suggestion was made once again that there should be reflection on the relationship between the various charismata, the figures of the members and the *different institutional forms of the Institutes* (clerical institutes and lay institutes). In the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* the Pope spoke of an appropriate Committee to be set up by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, for the purpose of going more deeply in this context into the theme of the so-called “mixed” Institutes.⁶³

With specific reference to this proposal and in relationship with the work of the said Committee, the GC24 provided the following guideline, in view of an updated reflection on the “form” of our Society: “In the light of the Apostolic Exhorta-

⁶² On these elements of the vocation and mission of the salesian Brother, cf. also: GC21, doc.2; *The project of life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*, p. 415-419; *Il salesiano coadiutore. Storia, identità, pastorale vocazionale e formazione*, Editrice SDB – Rome 1989; FSDB, *passim*

⁶³ Cf. VC 61

tion *Vita consecrata* and of the juridical developments now in progress on the "form" of Religious Institutes, the GC24 considers it important that a study be made of a possible "mixed" form of our Society, and that there be a deeper investigation to see whether the innovations in such a form respond to our charism and to the original project of the Founder".⁶⁴

We are aware that the above-mentioned Committee has not yet completed its study, and hence we do not yet have any authentic and definite guidelines. But at least we know that in any case what will prevail will be the criterion of charismatic fidelity in each Institute.

The urging, however, of the GC24 remains valid that the matter should be taken up again when the results of the Committee's study are made known; they can enlighten our reflections in association with what has already been decided about the aspects of our charism in preceding Chapters.

4.2.2.2. The salesian Brother and lay collaborators.⁶⁵

A theme on which I have often been questioned, in the context of the GC24, includes queries of the following kind: What place has the salesian Brother in the new operative model made up of Salesians and laity? If the subject of the mission, the operational nucleus, is composed of Salesians and laity, what is the specific contribution or effectiveness of the Brother? Does not the presence of so many lay people, who share in Don Bosco's spirit and mission, render less meaningful the presence of the Brother as an expression of the lay dimension of the salesian vocation and mission?

Let it be said at once that if we are going to put religious consecration in parentheses, so as to argue in terms of roles and actions, this not only changes the terms of reference but completely alters the dimensions. Rightly in recent times has the

⁶⁴ GC24, 192

⁶⁵ The GC24 dealt at length with this theme. Cf. analytical index under: *Relationships between Salesians and Laity*; and specifically re Brothers in n. 154

same Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life emphasized the triple condition in line with which the Christian lives his union with Christ: minister or priest, layman, consecrated according to a particular charisma.

Here then you have the first substantial difference between the lay religious – and hence the salesian Brother – and lay collaborators: it stems from his identity as a “consecrated” person, even though with lay connotations, i.e. how he lives the covenant relationship God has established with him, and his own rapport with God. There is no future for a religious who does not express immediately, and almost emotionally, a transcendent dimension – like an arrow pointed to the divine and to love of his neighbour, which stems from the divine. It would be a pointless exercise to look for the difference on the basis of roles, importance or hierarchy. We should read again those Gospel passages which speak of the service of the disciples to others.

The weakening of the identity of the salesian religious community as the specific animating nucleus, or its merely functional presence in the EPC without a witnessing role, could lead to a leveling down of the consecrated salesian and the lay collaborator to a practical equality, especially in their activities. These are preoccupations which are evident in the following expressions of the Chapter document: “The maturing in the period following Vatican II of the lay vocation challenges the SDB identity from the specific standpoint of consecration. In some SDBs one notes sensitivities which give rise to concern: (...) it seems to some that lay persons can now do everything or nearly everything that the consecrated person does, while still remaining a lay person; others think that the good they can do as consecrated religious in a community which “limits” their activities, they could do more efficaciously outside, as committed laymen”.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ GC24, 45

To these preoccupations the GC24 replied by referring to the salesian community and the Salesian seen as a member of the community of consecrated persons, especially when speaking of the "community of consecrated persons which is the soul of the EPC".⁶⁷ I myself emphasized the point at the conclusion of the Chapter, when I declared that many participate in Don Bosco's charism, "but the latter is concentrated in the SDB community in a special way by virtue of the force of consecration, the community experience, the plan of life (profession), and total dedication to the mission".⁶⁸ And in my recent letter on pastoral work for vocations, inviting you to put forward clearly the vocation to the consecrated life, I wrote: "It is true that these lay people can contribute a great deal, but it is equally true that Don Bosco wanted at the centre of his Family a community of consecrated persons".⁶⁹

On the other hand, it is evident that no one can demand that a man engaged in educative work should express only the religious dimension. There are activities with valid secular aspects which call for special skills, and they are distributed among those qualified in this respect. But for the consecrated person there is another and deeper dimension; his ideal of life is the rapport with God that Jesus wanted for his disciples: i.e. consecration as the reference point and paradigm of sanctity.

4.2.2.3. *The formation of the salesian Brother.*

Another question that is often raised, and rightly so if it is asked "with discernment", concerns the process and level of the formation of the Brother. In effect, the formation and qualification of the Brother remains the key to a meaningful experience, a formation which renders effective his presence and contribution.

⁶⁷ Cf. GC24, 149-155

⁶⁸ GC24, 236

⁶⁹ AGC 373, p. 41

The argument needs to be treated sensitively, in the sense that we need to be clear that spiritual, educative and pastoral formation are the foundation of our vocation, while specific technical or professional qualifications are related to concrete and personal forms of educative activity. The *Ratio*, which has been recently revised, with the contribution also of Brothers, has addressed this point with due concern. And in the various regions practical implementation can already be seen.

We can safely say that a quality formation, which gives meaning to the Brother's vocation and also to his presence and specific contribution in the mission, is the secret of the Brothers' future. Among the Brothers presented earlier there is a clear link between qualification and the daily practice of educative and pastoral charity.

In this connection we have already traveled a fair distance in the field of initial and ongoing formation, a process the *Ratio* prompts us to continue.

The fundamental trend of the Congregation is clear in what refers to every Salesian, brother, priest or candidate for the priesthood, and must be responsibly applied by the Provinces.

With regard to formation, the Constitutions say that "it normally follows curricula of equivalent level with the same phases and similar content and objectives. The necessary differences are determined by the specific vocation of each one, by his personal gifts and inclinations and the duties of the apostolate".⁷⁰

In the *Ratio* are indicated the formation requirements for every salesian educator and pastor, the criteria, content and conditions for ensuring an equivalent but not standardized formation; one that is specific and differentiated, so as to provide professional qualifications suitable for the mission, for the many ways of participating in it and the capacity of the confreres.

Particular attention on the part of those responsible must be given to the quality of the formation process to specific consecration formation; and to professional qualification and initiatives to support the process of ongoing formation. For this purpose, in some cases it will be indispensable to have recourse to interprovincial collaboration. The essential points must never be lost sight of, nor allowed to take second place in the life of young candidates or of mature Salesians. "We Salesians", the Constitutions remind us, "form a community of the baptized. Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor".⁷¹ If we ever lose this, our identity and our project go with it.

5. PASTORAL WORK FOR VOCATIONS: INVITATION TO A SPECIAL COMMITMENT.

From the reflection on the vocation of the salesian Brother, in the light also of Artemide Zatti's experience of holiness, and from the conviction concerning the effectiveness of his presence in the salesian mission and hence in the Congregation, derives the need and importance of a special commitment to the promoting of this vocation at the present day.

If it is true that around our Father and other Salesians, men of God, there has been a force of attraction which needed neither manuals nor great organization, it is also true that history, through practical efforts and shared experiences, has revealed to us different ways and conditions for the birth and growth of this form of vocation, in view of the salesian mission and its full realization – even to the point of sanctity. The deeper study which has been done has shown up its originality, its beauty and its efficacy.

⁷¹ C. 2

We must therefore seek to discover this gift where it has been given, and to cultivate it. We must commit ourselves decisively to vocational pastoral work, which includes approach, contact and proposal. To recognize and welcome God's gift is the first attitude to be adopted in all work of this kind. We are convinced that the Spirit has raised up this kind of religious in our community and continues to do so.

Of pastoral work for vocations as one of the primary obligations of our mission, and of its characteristics at the present day, I spoke to you a few months ago in the letter "*Now is the acceptable time*",⁷² and the third part of the book "*The Salesian Brother*" is dedicated to the same theme.⁷³

It is not my intention to repeat what you can find in these two sources. I prefer rather, on the extraordinary occasion of the beatification of Brother Artemide Zatti, to ask from every Province, every community and every confrere in the coming years – beginning with the present one – **a renewed, extraordinary and specific commitment for the vocation of the Salesian Brother**, within our vocational pastoral work: in praying for this, in suggesting and proclaiming it, in welcoming it and following it up, in living it personally and together in the community. The first reflection and practical application of this must take place in the local context: in every house and in every Province, and then at interprovincial and regional level. A worldwide Congregation like ours lives in widely differing contexts, just as the sensitivities, possibilities and perspectives, even as regards those referring to the figure of the salesian Brother, are diverse. Among the Superior Generals we often come across this plurality in the vast phenomenon of globalization, and we are aware of the importance of charismatic communion without resorting to rigid models and standardizing formation processes.

⁷² Cf. AGC 373

⁷³ Cf. *The vocation of the salesian brother in salesian pastoral work for vocations*, in *The Salesian Brother*, – Rome 1989, p. 133-161

Commitment for vocations was proposed by some Provinces as the theme for the coming Chapter. Even though it was not selected as the specific point, it has its place within the capitular discernment which will verify the conditions that can foster a joyful experience of the vocation in the community, and it is not difficult to foresee that there will also be reference to the different forms of the salesian vocation.

I know that every time we reflect together on this vital point, there immediately emerge **challenges to be faced and difficulties to be overcome**.

A first and evident challenge arises from the **small number of Brother vocations** and from their slow and progressive diminution in the Congregation, a phenomenon experienced in all Institutes, often in a still more serious form, and in particular in lay Institutes. At the time of Artemide Zatti's death, the Congregation was living an era of strong development of the Brother's vocation, both as regards growth in numbers and commitment to qualification. From this standpoint the situation has undergone a profound change, as we can see very clearly from statistics. They are indicators which apply to the broadest context of the vocational situation, of consecrated life, and of the various areas in which the Congregation is present.⁷⁴

The statistical aspect can be a consequence also of **other challenges or difficulties**, which the above-mentioned book on the Salesian Brother presents as follows: "There is a certain difficulty in presenting to young people the religious, spiritual and apostolic physiognomy of the lay Salesian in all its richness, in a manner which they can understand and may meet their aspirations. Various congresses on the vocation of the lay religious have sought to specify the causes for this: the somewhat obscure role played by the lay faithful in the Chris-

⁷⁴ It cannot be said however that there were no Brother vocations. The yearly average of Brother professions from 1990 to 1999 (10 years) was: first professions 57.3, perpetual professions 32.8.

tian community, the scarcity of models with whom to identify, the “clerical” mentality of some religious communities, the lack of distinctive signs about the lay religious, a history which at times may have made him look like a secondary figure in religious families predominantly priestly in character, the line of approach in the vocational apostolate, and the natural tendency of young people to link vocation with religious service to people”.⁷⁵

In my letter on vocations I emphasized the **present-day difficulty of proposing the vocation to the consecrated life**. “Our society, and often the Christian community itself,” I wrote, “does not have an adequate knowledge of the religious life, so as to understand its meaning and value. Our way of living the consecrated life has lost visibility and in several aspects seems incomprehensible. This is something that becomes more disturbing in face of the growing presence of laity in the Church and, for us, in the salesian mission”.⁷⁶

These difficulties, of which we are well aware, far from weakening our resolve should stimulate it and **make it more convinced**. In this connection I consider most opportune the words of John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* referring to vocational difficulties and perspectives: “New situations of difficulty are therefore to be faced with the serenity of those who know that what is required of each individual is not success, but **commitment to faithfulness**”.⁷⁷ It is a matter of fidelity to our commitment: fidelity to God’s gift and to Don Bosco’s project.

Our first attitude must be one of **trust in God** and of **recourse to him**. In this connection I can quote some words written to me by a Brother: “Today too resounds the call ‘Come and follow me’. And I find it always a source of wonder that even today there are young men who seem to lack nothing

⁷⁵ *The Salesian Brother*, n.165

⁷⁶ AGC 373, p. 41

⁷⁷ VC 63

they would need for heading towards the priesthood, and instead they choose to become consecrated laymen in the Salesian Congregation. And so in our pastoral work for vocations we must have faith in this vocation which is complete in itself, and pass on to others esteem for it as by osmosis, without any forced comparisons or distortions in respect of the clerical figure. We must be convinced that there are young men who do not identify with the priestly model, but are attracted by that of the consecrated layman. What are the reasons for this choice? All reasons are insufficient: fundamentally it is a mystery of Grace and freedom”.

There are many **ways for proposing** the vocation of the salesian Brother: recounting incidents from Don Bosco and salesian history, presenting the Congregation's experiences of the present day, bringing people into direct or indirect contact with models, and deepening the lay character of vocation.

We know the **conditions for ensuring** a reawakening of interest, for animating, encouraging and following up vocations.

It is indispensable that we **make known the vocation of the salesian Brother by a specific and explicit presentation**, which highlights consecrated life according to Don Bosco's unique charisma and explains how it is realized in the Brother and in the salesian priest. In this perspective can be indicated the criteria for specific discernment, avoiding any stereotyped decisions or those based simply on the absence of requisites for the priestly vocation.

Such a presentation may be opportune, and sometimes even indispensable in the “ecclesial” environment in which the vocation of the lay Christian and hence of the lay religious – like the salesian Brother – is often little known or indeed not known at all, and this even in the context of the Salesian Family.

But I cannot recall any well-founded salesian vocations without the following four characteristics: the thought of God

and desire for him, to the extent of giving him first place in love and in the organization of life; attraction of Don Bosco; a passion for the educative and pastoral mission to the young; and the sense of kind, tolerant and generous complementarity in the community, without any complexes about respective status.

It is often said that the vocation of the salesian Brother, though complete and significant in itself, is **not easily perceived**, and this refers especially to his experience as a consecrated person, as an educator and pastor, and to the fact that he is able to animate and communicate the values of the charisma. This is a point that challenges every salesian and every community in the present context and new 'working model'. What can we do to get across to our youngsters and collaborators the basic motivations in our life which make it unique, and stir up in them the desire to follow the same path?⁷⁸ The answer can come from the fostering of our personal experience of life, from its communication, from the quality of formation, and from the **exploitation of those forms of "visibility"** that manifest the underlying significance which we live and to which we give witness. We shall also need to be attentive to certain forms of "visibility" of which we are reminded by the Constitutions and Regulations, such as the "responsible and effective participation" in the life of the local, provincial and world community, the selection of those responsible for government, and presence in Chapters and the teams for formation and animation.⁷⁹

An organization or explanation which lacks authenticity will evidently be useless. The interaction of persons required for the practice of the preventive system, the welcoming and attractive presence, the radical following of and witness to Jesus Christ, the primacy of God and his love, are nowadays more than ever the factors and motivations behind every reli-

⁷⁸ Cf. AGC 363, p. 26

⁷⁹ Cf. C 123; R 169; FSDB 234. 284

gious vocation. It is deceitful to base vocational appeal on other attractions. Only a robust Christian formation can give rise to the following of Jesus Christ. And, as is always the case, anyone who receives this gift has the responsibility of making it known and passing it on to others. Vocation is passed on by direct contact. So it has always been among charismatic men, and so it will continue to be through the beauty of this vocation. The more convinced and serene are the confreres in living their life in God, the more effectively will they be able to attract others to their experience.

It is helpful if our centres of spirituality and ongoing formation organize meetings and courses of study on the different vocations – lay and priestly – which make up our community and are the driving force behind our mission, each in its own way. Such studies are not only useful for a deeper and updated knowledge of our vocation, but are also a stimulus to effective pastoral work for vocations. I have asked in particular the Province of the Middle East and the centre at Cremisan to promote initiatives of this kind: the biblical aspect – in the land which has known the experience of the Word of God made flesh – can open up significant perspectives.

The intercession of Artemide Zatti and the flourishing of vocations: an outstanding testimony.

It will be worth our while to listen to one who has experienced the efficacious intercession of Artemide Zatti precisely with reference to the vocation of the consecrated layman, and kindly made it a point to tell us of his experience. He is His Eminence Cardinal Giorgio Mario Bergoglio, now Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires, who was Provincial of the Jesuits at the time of the following testimony.

I quote from the text of a letter written to Fr Cayetano Bruno SDB, dated: Buenos Aires, 18 May 1986.

“Dear Fr Bruno: Pax Christi! In your letter of 24 February you asked me to write something about my experience with Bro. Zatti (who became a great friend of mine) concerning the vocations of Brother confreres. [...]

We had a great dearth of lay confreres. I take as an example the year 1976, when I first got to know of the life of Bro. Zatti. In that year our youngest lay confrere was aged 35; he was an infirmarian and four years later died of a tumour on the brain. The next youngest was aged 46, and the next after that was 50. The others were all of venerable age (though many still continued to work as best they could despite their 80 years). This demographic picture of the lay confreres in our Argentine Province led many to think that the situation was irreversible and that there would be no more vocations. Some, in fact, wondered whether the lay confrere had any longer any relevance among the Jesuits, because – looking at the facts – it seemed that he would soon be extinct. Moreover efforts were being made in various places to outline a ‘new image’ of the lay confrere, to see whether by this means a stronger appeal could be made to young men to follow this ideal.

On the other hand the Father General, Fr. Pedro Arrupe S.J., insisted strongly on the need of the vocation of the lay confrere throughout the Society, going so far as to say that the Society would not be the Society at all without lay confreres. The efforts made by Fr Arrupe in this area were great indeed. The crisis was not one of only a few Provinces, but was general throughout the Society (in respect of lay confreres).

In 1976, and about September as far as I recall, during a canonical visitation of the Jesuit mission in northern Argentina, I stayed for a few days at the residence of the Archbishop of Salta. There, as we were chatting together after a meal, Mgr. Pérez told me about the life of Bro. Zatti; he also gave me a biography to read. His example, that of a complete

lay religious, made a deep impression on me. At that moment I felt that I must ask God, through the intercession of that great Brother, to send us some lay vocations for the Jesuits. I made novenas and got our novices to do the same. [...]

At Salta on various occasions I had felt inspired to recommend to Our Lord and Our Lady of Miracles an increase in vocations in the Province (this in general, and not specifically in brother vocations, as I did with Bro. Zatti). Furthermore I made a promise that the novices would make a pilgrimage on the feast of the Lord of Miracles if we reached the number of 35 novices (a number we reached in September 1979).

I come back to the request for lay vocations. In July 1977 the first young brother entered (he was aged 32, as a matter of fact). On 29 October of the same year came the second (he was aged 33)".

And the letter goes on, detailing year by year a list of 16 other lay-brothers who entered between 1978 and 1986. The letter then continues:

"From the time we began to pray to Bro. Zatti 18 young lay-brothers entered and persevered, with another five who left during the novitiate or juniorate: a total of 23 vocations.

The novices, students and lay-brothers have several times made the Novena in honour of Bro. Zatti, asking for lay vocations. I myself have done the same. I am convinced of his prayers and intercession for this intention, because the numbers involved make it a rare case in our Society. As a mark of our gratitude, in the 2nd and 3rd edition of our Booklet of Devotions to the Sacred Heart, we have included a Novena asking for the canonization of Bro. Zatti.

Another interesting point is the quality of those who entered and are persevering. They are young men who want to be the kind of lay-brother that St Ignatius himself wanted, without them having to be spoon-fed. For us the vocation of the lay-brother is very important. Fr Arrupe used to say that without them the Society would not be what it is meant to be.

They have a special charisma which is nourished by prayer and work. And they are a benefit for the whole body of the Society. [...] They are hard workers, pious, happy and level-headed, of manly bearing and well aware of the vocation to which they have been called. They feel a special responsibility to pray for the young Jesuit students who are preparing for the priesthood. They display no inferiority complex for the fact that they are not priests, nor do they have any idea of applying to become deacons, etc.; they know what their vocation is and that is how they want it to be. This is helpful, and a very good thing.

These have been the general lines of my relationship with Bro. Zatti on the question of Lay-brothers for the Society. I repeat that I am convinced of his intercession, because we have prayed so much through him as our advocate.

And that is all for the moment.

Affectionately in the Lord and his Most Holy Mother,
Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J. “

This is a wonderful stimulus for us too to ask for the intercession of Artemide Zatti for an increase in good and holy vocations of Salesian Brothers.

Conclusion: our vocation to holiness.

Dear confreres, let us prepare ourselves to welcome the grace and message given to us by the Church through the witness to salesian holiness of this confrere of ours.

The figure of Artemide Zatti constitutes an encouragement and inspiration to make us sensitive to new areas in urgent need of pastoral work at the present day, and especially to prompt us to rethink with generosity and breadth of outlook the presence of the salesian Brother, marked by the following typical traits:

- the determination to stay and work with Don Bosco in line with *da mihi animas*;
- the living out of a total consecration, which has its immediate and strongest expression in participation in the community mission and in brotherly love;
- the continuous updating and untroubled development of personal preparation as a means of doing good.

The occasion of his Beatification, which will propose him as a unique model to our Family and the Church, emphasizes a fundamental element of our life as consecrated persons at the beginning of the third millennium: it is *the priority given to the spiritual dimension of life*, a new consequence and prophecy following from the Incarnation, which is manifested in a charity capable of performing man's greatest actions. It is the main prophetic form of Christianity: to surprise others by our radical choice of love, fearlessly rejecting all ambiguity, and fighting decisively against the evil which humiliates people. Perhaps what is urgently needed today is not the foundation of a large number of institutions for formal education, but to revise the message transmitted by our personal and community life as the gospel unfurled at the present day,⁸⁰ and as a prolongation of the life and actions of Jesus. In a word, *our sanctity!*

I cannot conclude without a reference to the presence and role of Mary Help of Christians in the vocation of Artemide Zatti and in his road to sanctity.

"I believe", declared one witness, "that the Servant of God had a devotion to Mary Help of Christians that was matched by few others".⁸¹ And in the *Positio* we read: "To understand the flavour of his love for Mary, one must go to his letters in which he advises his relatives to have recourse to her (S, p. 2, p. 3, etc.), where he declares that if he is in the Congregation he owes it to

⁸⁰ Cf. VC 62

⁸¹ *Summarium*, p. 270, n. 1080

her (S. p. 17), where he recognizes that to Mary he owes his life (S. p. 33) and where there are continual reminders to seek her help and intercession (S. p. 15, p. 16, p. 20 etc.).⁸²

In effect, as we have seen, it was to Our Lady that he attributed his recovery from tuberculosis, and on this account dedicated his whole life to God in the persons of the sick and the poor. Every day he honoured her by the recitation of the Rosary, even as he cycled through the streets of Viedma, and he also got the sick to recite it every day. Characteristic was his Marian greeting on entering houses: "Hail Mary most pure".⁸³

These are all signs which bear witness to the constant awareness of the presence of Mary which sustained the Servant of God in his mission, and from which he drew the faith and inspiration that prompted him to imitate the Good Samaritan in the service of those in need. Realized to a wonderful degree in Artemide Zatti – as it must be realized also in us – was what our Constitutions say: "Mary Immaculate, Help of Christians, leads us to the fullness of our offering to the Lord and gives us courage for the service of our brethren".⁸⁴

Dear confreres, may the Virgin Mary, our Mother and Helper, support the pilgrimage of each one of us and of the whole Congregation along the road to salesian sanctity for the benefit of the young people to whom we have been sent.

This is the finest thing I can wish you, not least in view of the GC25.

Affectionately in Don Bosco,



⁸² *Positio*, p. 229

⁸³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁸⁴ C 92