

I. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Rome July 1972

Dear Sons,

I confess that in dating this letter from Rome I am deeply moved. You will understand immediately the reason why. With the transfer of the seat of government of the society from Turin to Rome a chapter of our history is closed — and what a chapter! Turin saw the first daringly inspired enterprise of Don Bosco on behalf of poor and needy youth. It was in Turin that the congregation was born and grew-up through all manner of difficulties and obstacles; it was from Turin that Don Bosco and his congregation set out on the road which was to lead them across the continents of the world, — something which only the holiness and the extraordinary charism of our father can explain. Valdocco, with all it holds and keeps safe of the memories of the father and of his best sons for more than a hundred years has become a magnetic centre — the end of journey for thousands and thousands of souls who have found there in the «land of his dreams and of his achievements» motives for strengthening their vocation. Generation after generation, has left the basilica of Valdocco for the mission fields of the world, radiating the enthusiasm and creative optimism of the father, with their hearts filled with the memory of these places truly blessed. They have translated this into a loving fidelity that distance, however great, did nothing to diminish but rather grew the stronger and the more generous.

Valdocco is for us all. It is our home, the place of our father and mother — our birthplace. The place also which for so many years was the scene of the remarkable enterprise of Don Bosco, the place also where on January 31st, 1888, he was to breathe his last, and after his death was to witness that ever increasing run of notable happenings which began on the very day of his funeral.

Leave-taking of Turin

Such immense richness, accumulated over more than a hundred years could not be left behind without feeling the pang of parting. This sense of pain we share with the confrères of Turin, especially those of the mother house, as also with the Turinese people themselves, who through the highest civil authority expressed their sense of great loss at the transfer of the Superior Council and the void it would cause for the city, which has always considered Don Bosco and his congregation as one of its spiritual riches to be shown proudly to the world.

With all this in mind — and how could it be otherwise? — our departure was not without sorrow. But as I have repeatedly written and said in recent times, if our Superior Council has to come to Rome, our hearts are forever where Don Bosco is. Our spirit, now that we have left Turin, must ever be that left us by our father. Before the actual departure, the Council proclaimed this publically, when in the basilica, before the urn containing the remains of Don Bosco and in the presence of the confrères of the local communities, we declared: « *May we remain faithful sons: now not only do we promise personal fidelity but together we bind ourselves to maintain and foster in the congregation a renewed sense of fidelity to the genuine spirit of Don Bosco.* » This indeed is clearly our duty and something indispensable for the vitality and fruitfulness of that mission which divine providence has confided to the congregation, the more especially at

this present moment when all salesians are committed to that spiritual rebirth we call renewal.

What will become of Valdocco? Valdocco esteemed as the historical and spiritual centre of the congregation will be zealously cared for and all its salesian richness preserved to become the centre of attraction for members of the salesian family from all over the world and to which they will be drawn to find there the possibility of re-living awhile the golden years of the congregation to restore their spirit exhausted perchance by work or by the passage of years.

Reasons for the transfer to Rome

As you already know, since 1 June, the Superior Council together with dependent offices has been at work, exercising its function of government from Rome. I do not consider it a waste of time to recall to mind the solid reasons which have brought us here. It was in 1965 that the General Chapter proposed this transfer. The Superior Council therefore had the obligation of carrying out its decision. Indeed this was not something new. Given the development of the congregation and the new situation, there was motivation not to be undervalued. It is also very interesting to note that Don Bosco himself, as is to be seen in the *Memorie Biografiche*, before the approval of the rule, played with the idea of an active presence of the congregation at the centre of the catholic world and near the Pope (*M.B.* « *Centre of unity, of the magisterium and of authority* » XIV, 570). Rome held a special fascination for him. There was nothing he wanted more, after the seal of providence on his work than that of the Holy See. As a memento for the first mass of Don Rua, and seeing as he did the mission of the congregation in his own lifetime and after his death, he wrote these words — « *Esto romanus* » (Be loyal to Rome). Pope John XXIII, looking back on Don Bosco's life, rightly summed it up when he declared him to be a « *sacerdote romano* » (« a truly Roman priest »).

If our presence near to Peter is in line with the desire of our father, it is clear that it is demanded today by the very universality of the congregation. This point was made by Paul VI in the general audience at which the Superior Council was present immediately after its arrival in Rome from Turin.

The congregation, especially at this moment of time has both the need and the duty of entering deeply into the life of the church and taking its part in all the apostolic and spiritual movements, which go out from the centre and radiate to the whole world. It cannot remain on the side-lines receiving only at second hand that vital stimulus; it must be in close contact and be fruitfully committed to the many rich enterprises which originate at the centre and thence spread outwards.

It is the importance of her mission in the church of today that brings the congregation to Rome, rather than a more adequate service to its own special spiritual and apostolic aims; it is an awareness of its responsibility and of its ecclesial service flowing from the status it has in the world.

There is no need to elaborate or put in evidence the advantages there are for frequent and easy contacts with the many ecclesiastical ministries with which we always have important problems to discuss.

Audience with the Pope

These notes on our presence in Rome I believe received most authoritative and significant approval when it was referred to in the above mentioned audience. Let me speak with simplicity.

As soon as we reached Rome, I hastened to send a telegram of courtesey to the Holy Father and at the same time I requested permission for the Superior Council to take part in the general audience of Wednesday, 7 June. This was immediately conceded. We all found ourselves in the front row in the enormous Audience Hall, with thousands of the faithful of every tongue and every

nation. The surprise came when, as soon as the Holy Father began to speak, he presented the Superior Council of the salesians to the immense assembly, saying at the same time that he would have liked to have met them in a special audience, but he was very happy to see them « among the people » because the salesians by reason of their vocation preferred to be for and with the people for whom they worked.

There was more to come. At a certain point in the presentation he invited the Rector Major to stand up so that all might see who the successor of Don Bosco was. You may imagine my feelings!

Reflecting on what was said and on the gesture called for by the Holy Father, I seemed to detect both a sign and an admonition, evident and to the point. The congregation represented by the Superior Council with the Rector Major received the official sanction from the Holy Father for its transfer from Turin; not only this, but it was presented to the People of God; as a congregation dedicated to work for the people. The Rector Major, and with him the congregation, is thus committed by the word of the Pope before that mass of people, visibly representing the whole church to a twofold fidelity — to the Pope and to its own mission among the sons and daughters of the people.

Dear sons, those moments at the audience moved me deeply and the sentiments they provoked I would like to share with you all. The Holy Father never ceases to show our modest congregation signs of esteem, confidence and great good-will; this demands from us all our recognition and in a special way our unswerving fidelity — with hearts as that of Don Bosco.

With Don Bosco: hence with the Pope

It is no rare thing today to hear serious and irreverent opposition to Paul VI, not only to him as a person, but to him as the Pope, Vicar of Christ, and to his magisterium. This

attitude is not restricted to matters of just discipline or of marginal importance.

To members of our own family I have just this to say, and, quite independent of other equally valid arguments, it is rooted in values which form part of our spiritual tradition. He who declares that he is and wants to be a son of Don Bosco and yet does not love the Pope, aligning himself with the critics and those who oppose him, is beyond the pale of our true tradition; Don Bosco could not recognize him as a son.

It is sufficient to have only a superficial knowledge of Don Bosco's mind, his feeling and his way of acting to be aware of his position. The *Memorie Biografiche* has page on page reflecting Don Bosco's attitude to the Pope, whether as a simple priest or as a founder. Here are just a few quotations from among the hundreds spread over the nineteen volumes.

« Faith to be living and fruitful must always be illumined by the Vicar of Christ. » (*M. B. IX 228-1*)

« He who does not build with the Pope pulls down and destroys to the very bottom of the abyss. » (*M.B. XII 171*).

« I stand by the Pope and I'm proud of it. » (*M.B. XII 423*).

Speaking to his salesians these are his feelings and his fears:

« Remember well, we stand with the Pope; our salvation stands here alone — with the Pope and in the Pope. » (*M.B. V. 577*).

« The word of the Pope for us is our rule in all and for all. » (*M.B. VI, 494*).

« The prime aim of the Salesian Society is to sustain the authority of the Pope. » (*M.B. VII, 562; X, 762, 946*).

On his death-bed he confided his papal testament to Card. Alimonda: « ...I have always loved the Holy Father and have obeyed him as a son... and my congregation was always and everywhere at the service of the Holy See. » (*M.B. XIX, 15*).

It is therefore not merely by chance that Pope John XXIII in 1959 wrote in his own hand to Don Ziggotti: «One cannot fully understand the spirit that animated St John Bosco, if one leaves to one side his very special devotion to the Roman See.»

This was Don Bosco, and this is his legacy to us, this the path he taught and pointed out with such clarity that there is no room for doubt at all in the mind of anyone who feels himself to be his son.

But you, my sons, I am sure of it, are with Don Bosco and therefore with the Pope: in the classroom, the confessional, in what you write and print, in the pulpit, in the doctrine you hold, in your pastoral work, in the sacraments and liturgy, with young people and adults, with the ignorant and with the learned. We all offer him our intelligent following as our master, but we also want to give him the comfort of our affection as sons, just as Don Bosco did and as he teaches us by word and by example. Fidelity and love for the Pope — see in this the call our Father makes to us as the congregation comes to Rome, near the Vicar of Christ; it is the very same exhortation Don Bosco gave to his salesians on his death-bed, the seal on his whole life and on his mission he left his sons then and for all time.

Encouraged by this meeting and blessing of the Holy Father we are down to work in the new site in Rome. The confrères called to work with the superiors and in the various offices are in good part already here; others will shortly arrive. Indeed there are signs that all is well on the way to the creation of a new community in such a way as to fulfil as far as possible that envisaged by the Special General Chapter and laid down in the new constitutions.

I just add this: whether at Rome or in Turin the new Generalate is the home of all salesians. You will always be very welcome!

Two items of good news

Since our arrival here we have received two pieces of good news, as pleasing to us as they have been long expected. We received them within a few days of each other.

On 22 June the Holy Father declared the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God, Zeffirino Namuncurà. This decree you can read for yourselves in the present issue of the Acts. It is the official recognition that he practised the virtues of the christian life to a heroic degree. His personal holiness is therefore recognised by the church. The next step is beatification! May the Lord hasten the day!

The motives for our joy at the news are readily understood. It is a particular grace for the congregation. It is enough to reflect a little at the time at which this declaration was made known to us. We are into the post-capitular period in which there is a common effort throughout the society to bring into effect a genuine renewal; and all around there are the rumblings of crises. We are within two years of the centenary of our mission work in America. It seems to me that the Lord may be planning to seal and confirm with this « flowering of holiness » the power of our salesian method and the fruitfulness of our missionary work, in a word the goodness of the way pointed out by Don Bosco to us to fulfil the mission providence has given the congregation in the church.

There are circumstances in this happening which increase our joy and our gratitude to the good God:

— here is the first flowering of holiness, now officially recognised, sprung out of our own missionary work and from out of our own preventive system. Zeffirino entered the College of St Charles, Buenos Aires when he was eleven years old;

— he is a genuine model for boys: he died when he was nineteen. He is a model too for those wanting to become priests — he used to dream of the time when as a priest he might bring Christ to his own people;

— he is also the son of that continent and of that third world which is today the centre of the efforts and hopes of the church; still more, he is the son of that Patagonia called by Don Bosco his second native land, whither he, with his usual foresight sent the very best sons he had.

What is our response to be to this very special grace? Stand up and be counted with those who are committed to a more consistent religious life, to new missionary effort, to an effective and practical striving after holiness; committed also to the preventive system along the lines pointed out by the Special General Chapter (n. 188).

To be very practical, I suggest that each province give well-planned coverage of this event, spreading information of this life so rich in interest. It can have value even for the youth of today and can be fruitful in obtaining the two miracles required for the beatification. Let us all pray and get others to pray the Lord for the good of the church and especially for the good of the youth in South America that he deign to glorify soon this candidate for canonization — the Ven. Zeffirino Namuncurà.

The second piece of news, awaited with some impatience by the whole salesian world came from the office of the Secretary of State in the early days of July. The Holy Father has so disposed that the beatification of the Ven. Don Rua will take place on Sunday, 29 October this year.

I have already spoken of this event so rich in significance for us. I shall have occasion to return to it again and again during the coming year. In the meantime while those responsible arrange how best to participate in the beatification and how celebrate it worthily and best profit from it, let us find a way of making contact with the new « Beatus » and seek to know him more intimately, in his life, in his ideas, in his spirit which he received from the father in their daily life together and their extremely close collaboration. Let us make him known wherever we are, especially among young people. He is a person of great stature and not only on account of his sanctity but for the inestimable

work he did for the consolidation and development of the congregation.

These events taken together lead me to touch on a matter which has special interest and is of exceptional importance.

The Missions our way to renewal

Provincial chapters are at this moment almost everywhere in various stages of preparation or in actual discussion at community level how best to apply to their provinces the programme of the five ways outlined by the Special General Chapter. In this work I hope that no one has overlooked the one I have in mind to talk about — the missions.

When I presented the Acts of the Special General Chapter, I spoke of the « way of the missions » as one of the highways along which we have to travel to renew our mission towards youth and the people, and thereby to renew the congregation.

It is not a matter of a rhetorical agreement, or to give some consolation to our missionaries or just a unilateral and superficial interpretation. It is rather what results from the deliberations of the Special General Chapter and from our long uninterrupted tradition.

In this letter I invite you to reflect with me on the implication of what we have said above.

What follows from the fact that the missions are the highroad, and obligatory, for the renewal of our mission in the church?

Why and to what measure does the revival of missionary enthusiasm involve the whole congregation and touch its very life?

Let us reflect together in the first place on the second question.

To be « missionary » is a characteristic of the salesian congregation... In the article 15 of the new constitutions we find this clearly affirmed: « ...mission work is a mark of our society... » The evident sense of this affirmation is that missionary work is

not a marginal element in the congregation as if it were something added, superficial, something which need not be, not touching its nature; but it is an indispensable element; it characterizes it and touches its very life as I had occasion to say once before: ...« the congregation was born and grew up and has always advanced as a missionary congregation » (Discourse to the Volunteers of Don Bosco for Latin-America - Ponte Mammolo: 24 September 1969.)

The missionary vocation of Don Bosco

Let us try to go deeper into the historical and charismatic foundation for this relationship between the congregation and the missions.

This foundation must obviously be sought in the intention of Don Bosco and in the things he actually did as a founder. This makes it quite certain that we are not dealing with a purely personal charism but with a « charisma foundationis ». Development of this fact of history reveals the measure of its belonging to the very essence of the congregation.

Let us recall some of the fundamental data: the idea of being a missionary he never abandoned, writes Don Lemoyne of Don Bosco. (*M.B.* 11, 203)

Right from childhood the two ambitions ran side by side, the call to work for poor boys and the no less strong call to become a missionary. They had the same root and sprang from the same soil — the love of God and zeal for his kingdom — zeal fed by the very needs of the abandoned youth he found in the gaols of Turin or on the streets of the city or in the desperate condition of people living without the light of the gospel, a condition he became aware of while reading the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith to which he was devoted. There was a time in his life when the missionary call seemed stronger than the other, but counselled by Don Cafasso under the guidance of divine

providence he discovered a way to unite both. This synthesis was not just a matter of putting them both together side by side, but rather a kind of « symbiosis » As we shall see later he made of the missions a place where he could exercise his special vocation as an apostle of boys and (with a missionary zeal) know how to approach them, and viceversa. Through his special vocation towards youth he made boys and young people the object of his special care everywhere, including the missions, and he used his own method of education as a means of evangelization.

The dream he had when he was nine, in which he was convinced he received an indication of his mission from God, contains sufficiently clearly his twofold call. This became more and more explicit with the years and with the later indications from the Lord.

This is the thought of Don Albera and of Don Rinaldi who saw the missionary vocation of Don Bosco implicitly contained in germ in that first dream.

To send missionaries to primitive people was always near the heart of Don Bosco; and he did not fear being counted wrong when he affirmed that Mary Help of Christians, from the very earliest of her manifestations, granted him while still a young man a clear intuition of it. » (Don Albera, *Circulars* p. 132).

And now to Don Rinaldi. While commemorating the first dream of the then Ven. Father we have implicitly celebrated the beginning of all salesian work: it was at that very moment when one could say he was consecrated the apostle of youth, father of a new religious family, missionary of primitive people: then it was that there arose within him the ardent desire for the religious life and for the evangelization of the infidel » (*A.S.C.* 6, [1925] 364). And even more explicitly: « Little by little as he grew in years and progressed at study he came to understand ever better that the command received in a dream to work for youth referred to primitive youth as well.» (*ibidem* p. 366).

This Don Bosco affirmed decisively in a report to Leo XIII

in 1880. « the foreign missions were always something longed for by the salesian congregation. » (*M.B.* XIV, 624).

And when the moment ordained by providence came he launched the project with quite extraordinary and even disconcerting daring, he spared neither expense nor sacrifice and with a courage that went well beyond human prudence in favour of the enterprise he himself called it: « *the great undertaking of the congregation...* » the missions in America.

The source of this missionary activity was his ardent apostolic zeal, his longing to save souls which literally made him suffer when faced with the situation of people who did not yet know Jesus Christ. « ...I hear voices which come from afar off and cry out... "Come save us!" They are the voices of so many souls who await a helping hand to save them from perdition and set them on the path of salvation », he wrote to the pupils of the school at Lanzo (*Ep.* 11, 438). And in a circular letter to the salesians: « ...My dear sons, I am profoundly sad thinking of the abundant harvest which everywhere is ripe but must remain unreaped through lack of workers » (*Ep.* 111 7). His biographer makes this comment: « If he listened to what his zeal told him he would have embraced the whole world with his charity. » (*M.B.* XI, 409).

His first successors tell us just what the missions in America meant to him, revealed in his interest, anxieties and the yearnings of his apostolic heart: « ...from then onwards (after the departure of the first missionaries) the missions were « his heart's desire » wrote Don Albera, « it seemed that he lived for them alone. It was not that he neglected his other numerous works, but he gave preference to his poor primitive sons in Patagonia and Terra del Fuego... those who heard him speak of them remained astonished and highly edified at the ardour he showed for the salvation of souls. »

« It seemed that each beat of his heart repeated « *Da mihi animas* » When speaking of the missions his voice had a fascinating quality which instantaneously stirred a prodigious number of voca-

tions for the apostolate and his benefactors poured in their generous offerings for the work of the salvation of souls.» (*Circular letters* p. 134).

Don Rinaldi recalling his earliest memories: «...in his great heart over the years there accumulated the apostolic ardour of a St Francis Xavier fed by a living flame which made the future clear to him through his dreams... speaking for myself, I don't think there has ever been a missionary seeking to make his mission known who was more zealous and indefatigable than he. I can see him now, a well loved father in those early memories I have of my salesian vocation in those very years of his keenest missionary fervour; he was a true missionary, an apostle eaten up by a passion for souls.» (*ASC.* n. 6, p. 367).

Don Ricaldone, that vigorous power behind the missionary campaign launched in the thirties, after he had cited: «...the missionary zeal which consumed Don Bosco and which drove him to make such great sacrifices in those early days of the congregation to send his sons to work for the conversion of pagans, affirms that: «the missions, as you well know, held the first place in his heart.» (*A.S.C.*, n. 67, p. 193).

Missionary work as the mandate of Christ

In addition to his ceaseless apostolic zeal I would like to underline another facet both theological and ecclesial which to my way of thinking influenced in no small way Don Bosco in shaping the missionary aspect of the congregation.

I refer to Don Bosco's profound conviction that the mandate of our Lord to the apostles to preach the gospel to the whole world «*euntes in mundum universum*», while it committed all christians, was applied much more to organized groups who would join the army of Christ under the leadership of the popes and bishops.

The sense of « mission » and of the apostolate as an imperative to evangelize from Christ, through the apostles, to the soldiers of Christ, was very vivid to Don Bosco.

In his final farewell talk to the first missionaries this point of view and motive become very clear. Don Bosco relates the mission he is about to undertake with the mission of the apostles and the mandate of Christ. After having recalled the words of Christ: « Ite in mundum universum... » he went on, « these words of the Saviour are not a counsel, but a mandate so that they go out into the whole world to bring the light of the gospel... then he showed them how the apostles, faithful to the charge, put into practice this precept of the Master.»

And forestalling the objection of anyone who should consider the missions as a work supererogatory in the church, to be undertaken when christianity had been consolidated at home, he asks: « But would it not be better if the apostles had remained where they were to win over the inhabitants of Palestine and Jerusalem, especially as that would have given them a chance of meeting together and of discussing the fundamental points of the christian faith and how best to spread it so that no one remained in the region who did not believe in Jesus Christ? » He answers that objection by showing that the apostles kept faithfully to the mandate of Christ and what they could not do themselves they did through others as did the successors of St Peter. And then he adds: « ...now looking to see how best to carry out the precept of Christ within the limits of our own modest resources: when the possibility of this mission was being discussed, then the very first thing to do was to find out the mind of the head of the church... » (*M.B. XI, 376*).

Later when departure was imminent he sent his first missionaries with the same thought in mind to receive the « mandate » from the Holy Father... » (*M.B. XI, 376*).

Here is the reason why Don Bosco in the discourse already cited affirms: « I feel a great sense of consolation to see the congregation consolidated... » (*M.B. XI, 386*). For him his mis-

sionary enterprise was the crowning achievement, a sign that the congregation had finally grown up and become fully adult and fully catholic by reason of this missionary enterprise.

There is nothing to wonder at if Don Albera called the missions the second end of the congregation (*Circular letters* 31 May 1913, p. 133). Don Rinaldi, continuing along the same line of thought, put the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the cooperators in close relation with the missions insofar as they were instituted «...to assure (to the missions) more abundant life now and in the future.» (*A.S.C.*, n. 6 p. 368).

In harmony with this manifest and constant will of Don Bosco, the congregation has never ceased to consider the missions as one of its principal interests as the numerous missionary provinces, the many missions accepted and the uninterrupted expeditions of missionaries show.

Along this same line of thought the XIX General Chapter, following the constitution "Ad Gentes" of Vatican Council II, was to affirm: «...the salesian congregation shares the aspirations of the church of today and relives the ideal of Don Bosco and desires that the work of the missions should become the permanent concern of the congregation in such a way as to become part of its nature and final purpose.» (*A.G.C.*, XIX, p. 178).

The missions the specially favoured field for our MISSION in the church

From what we have said above on the thought of Don Bosco and his successors regarding our congregation it is helpful to reflect on the first question asked — in what sense can the missions be the highroad to renewal of the congregation?

In this connection we find a very explicit affirmation of Vatican Council II: «...the grace of renewal cannot have any growth in communities, if each does not enlarge the scope of its charity to the very ends of the earth, showing those who are

distant the very same sollicitude it has for those who are its own members.» (A.G., 37).

This is said of christian communities, but with still more reason it can apply to religious communities who enjoy the same rich spiritual gift to which they are committed by reason of their vocation to live the christian life more intensely.

The Special General Chapter therefore did not hesitate to apply it to our own congregation (n. 463) and to emphasize it in these words: ...«missionary revival will be the thermometer of the pastoral vitality of the congregation and the efficacious antidote to the blight of easy living. (*ibidem*)

To understand better the full import of the council and chapter judgement, it is necessary to look deeper into the implications of what has already been said above: the missions are at the centre of the salesian vocation. It is full of substance demanding fuller enquiry. The missions are not merely a work (even though very important) and cannot be aligned with other «works» such as schools, colleges, oratories, hostels, etc.; they cannot be considered as spheres of action which could include a number of enterprises.

I think that in the salesian tradition the missions have to be seen in a different way — neither as works nor as activities but rather as a specially favoured field in which to fulfil the whole salesian MISSION endowed with the spirit to carry it out.

It is in this sense a synthesis which englobes all our MISSION.

At first sight it seems a contradiction that a congregation so clearly engrossed in education such as ours should be so completely involved by vocation and by charism in missionary activity. It could seem to be a loss in specialization and in character.

That would be the case perhaps if we think of it as one of the many works undertaken by the congregation, but it is quite otherwise if we see it as a favoured field where our mission can be fully accomplished.

In addition to the obvious comment that it is on the missions that those to whom our work is directed are to be found in vast numbers, young people... the poor... the abandoned, it is an historic fact rooted in the explicit will of Don Bosco as he directed the activity of his first missionaries, that he wanted them to undertake work which would be very largely educational and to use it as their means of evangelization and human advancement.

In this connection one could bring a most abundant documentation, not only directly from Don Bosco himself but still more from the salesian activity on the missions where our best results have come from our work in education. It is enough to cite the following.

Don Bosco reporting to Cardinal Franchi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Faith, 10 May 1876., on the work begun the previous year, writes: «The work which seemed to be preferred is that of the establishment of reception areas, colleges and boarding schools and houses of education in the primitive areas. Relationships begun with the children facilitate communication with their parents: in this way we slowly move ahead» (*Ep. III*, 59).

Let us think a moment of the actual development of our missions, for example, among the Kivaros Indians of Ecuador, where Mgr. Comin affirms that the only efficacious way to obtain positive and permanent results in conversion has been the boarding school for the children.

It gives me a special pleasure to quote from what Don Rinaldi writes on his conversation with Pius XI: «I was very much struck by his insistence that we should at all times and everywhere extend our system of education on the missions — twice in different ways he urged that we develop our way of running schools on the missions, with the system of Don Bosco, his means, in his spirit, which everywhere has given good results» (*Act of Sup. Council*, n. 3. p. 77).

It seem to me that the new constitutions clearly imply this conception of our missions, the field so well favoured for our

mission in the church. In art. 24 we read: « The essential missionary task is « to plant the church through the patient preaching of the gospel. It offers us an ample field for the exercise of every aspect of our educative and pastoral mission.»

The missionary spirit is essential for renewal

The missions stand at the very centre of our salesian vocation, and for this reason, that genuine missionary activity has a spirit all its own — that missionary spirit which seems to identify itself with the nucleus of the salesian spirit. In art. 40 of the constitutions it is stated: « pastoral love, young and alive, is at the very heart of our spirit, just as it was for Don Bosco as seen in the very beginning of our society. It is this ardent apostolic drive which makes us « seek souls and serve God alone.»

Wherefore, from all we have said of the apostolic zeal of Don Bosco, which was for him, as it should be for every salesian, the prime motive of all missionary activity, we may conclude that the missionary spirit should be present as a fundamental attitude in all our pastoral work pointing to an identity between « apostolic charity » and « missionary spirit ».

I do not wish with this to misunderstand and confuse the concept of missions in the strict sense, which is the preaching of the gospel, founding the church among people who do not yet believe in Christ (*A.G.* 6); but in our congregation it has always been used from the time of the first expedition in 1875 in a wider and more familiar sense and for very good reason, because it puts the accent on and characterizes two fundamental and indispensable elements in every missionary activity — availability and zeal.

From this point of view, those who have left their native land moved by apostolic zeal to help new groups of christians or those in special need (as for example is the case of the many salesians now working in Latin America) have always been con-

sidered as missionaries by us. This is our traditional way of conceiving the missions in the wider sense as one of the elements which underlies what we have said of the missions as a favoured field for the fulfilment of our mission in the church on behalf of youth and the common people.

The other point to emphasize is that the missions interest all the congregation, and if one is permitted to use the expression they *are* all the congregation, not just the business of this or that province nor just the concern of the Superior Council.

This observation emerges clearly from the decree "Ad Gentes" with reference to the universal church and its local churches; it applies also to the congregation, and the Special General Chapter XX says: « The missions are an object of general concern to the whole congregation. » (*Acts S.G.C.*, XX, n. 480).

These considerations put in evidence the close relationship between the missions and the congregation and serve also to explain why it is not possible to speak of true renewal without at the same time accompanying it (or better, anticipating it) by a flowering of missionary initiatives in their widest extension.

Indeed, a strong growth in missionary work in quantity, and still more in quality, supposes and demands missionary spirit of the congregation because it demands:

- a vision of faith
- a fervent desire for the kingdom
- an awareness of the urgency of evangelization
- a spirit of sacrifice, detachment and solidarity
- a love for work.

and a whole series of virtues and dispositions which signal the spiritual renewal of the congregation.

Call of the Council

We must now recall to memory the appeal made by the Vatican Council II to amplify what we have already said. Towards the end of the decree "Ad Gentes," the Council turns to all cate-

gories in the church, to the People of God, to religious communities, to bishops, priests, religious institutes to call them to their « missionary duty ».

It puts a series of questions to the religious institutes of active life, inviting a serious examen of conscience. We are asked to examine ourselves on the following points:

— whether we cannot broaden our activity in favour of expanding God's kingdom among the nations;

— whether we might not leave certain ministries to others so that we ourselves can spend our energies on the missions;

— whether our members are involved as much as possible in missionary activity;

— whether our type of life bears to the gospel a witness accommodated to the character and condition of the people (*A.G.*, n. 40).

Previously the Council had reminded all the faithful as living members in Christ that they are in duty bound to co-operate in the expansion of his body so that they may bring it to fulness. Having therefore: « a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world. They should foster in themselves a truly catholic spirit and spend their energies in the work of evangelization.»

And it stressed that « their first and most important obligation towards the spread of the faith was to lead a profoundly christian life. For their fervour in the service of God and their charity towards others will cause new spiritual inspiration to sweep over the whole church. From this renewed spirit, prayer and works of penance will be spontaneously offered to God that he may make the work of the missionaries fruitful by his grace. Then missionary vocations will be generated and the resources which the missions need will be forthcoming.» (*A.G.*, 40).

Turning then to priests the Council exhorts them: « to understand fully that their life has also been consecrated to the service of the missions; » and therefore « to organize their pastoral

activity in such a way that it will serve to spread the gospel among non-Christians and stir up and preserve amid the faithful a zeal for the evangelization of the world; instructing them in catechism classes and in sermons about the church's task of announcing Christ to all nations — by teaching Christian families the necessity and the honour of fostering missionary vocations among young people so that from among them may arise future heralds of the gospel.» (A.G. n. 39).

Call to the congregation

(or the congregation mobilized on missionary footing)

Having in mind all the motivation offered above — the missionary character of the congregation — the close relationship between renewal and missionary work — the appeal of Vatican Council II — and accepting above all the deliberations of the Special General Chapter, I intend by this letter, in this decisive moment in the life of the congregation, to issue an urgent invitation to all confrères to effect a rebirth of the salesian spirit and missionary work in a way which is practical, courageous and enthusiastic, through the reawakening of the best energies to co-responsibly unite all the forces of all salesians together who love their congregation.

To this end I call for the collaboration and effective help of all salesians in whatsoever position and responsibility they find themselves. Let no one consider himself free not to respond according to his means — with the excuse — I cannot be bothered — I call on all equally. Our mother the congregation needs it. I therefore beg that you give your generous support to bring into effect those things I shall point out, and those other initiatives which will be set afoot — I hope abundantly — in the provinces.

I am very well aware of the difficulties, the burden of problems and anxieties of the present time; I am fully aware that

we feel crushed beneath problems which here and now seem insoluble. I know the many urgencies there are to be faced in the normal run of life. And then we are fighting at the same time on too many fronts. But not on this account would I want this appeal to be heard as a facile poetic gesture, or as a passing burst of enthusiasm as are so many of the nice things written — they may serve to arouse a good thought but end in nothingness alongside so much other wishful thingin. Before writing these lines I prayed much. I am completely convinced that our Lord wants this from us.

Some may say that the whole congregation is already committed to the renewal proposed by the Special General Chapter and that this call for a revival of missionary endeavour could find itself at cross purposes with the pastoral alignments and programming already in progress in the provinces.

To this objection I would reply by saying that what I am calling for is already a way and a means to help the renewal of the provinces along the lines demanded by the Special General Chapter; what I am asking gives general direction for all the congregation towards what is expressed or contained in the deliberations of the SGC.

In the name of Don Bosco and for the good of the congregation I ask:

a decisive and generous effort to bring to life within you and in the communities of the congregation the missionary spirit; and this presupposes a chain of spiritual attitudes which I would call to your attention.

A) *Vision of faith*

The genuine missionary spirit has its root as a foundation, source and motive power, in a clear vision of faith which enables one to perceive the urgency of the kingdom, of its coming and of the need for evangelization which produces an apostolic enkindling

in face of the need of souls, the scarcity of workers and the need to preach Christ.

This vision of faith is a quality necessary for evangelization and still more for every priest or religious who would follow Christ, who would share his lot and announce his love to man.

It is the lack or the weakening of this perspective of faith that is to be found so often at the root of many defections; it also explains the mediocrity of so many lives consecrated to God; they drag their feet sadly without enthusiasm and without drive, their lives entangled like prisoners of so many evasions and infidelities, incapable of any flight at all towards new apostolic horizons where the air is purer and there is more promise.

With that sincerity which the matter demands I must confess with sorrow and with keen preoccupation that from recurring signs I see that the level of faith is dangerously low in certain strata of our congregation. Of course it is true that it is very difficult to give a judgement on a matter so personal and intimate. But unfortunately I find myself in front of things I cannot but fear... defections... the diminution of zeal, of spiritual impetus, the abandonment of any form or means that nourishes piety and faith; they are all warning bells.

It is true that faith today is more than ever exposed to so many dangers and a continued cross-fire that gives no respite.

There is also a change in culture with so many consequences for thought patterns; there is need to deepen and to re-think the data of revelation which demands a new theological vision, a thing not easy to come by; there are not a few pseudoscientific and one-sided publications which distort the presence of God in history; in some sectors we are swamped in a sea of opinions, audacious and personal and opposed to the teaching of the magisterium.

It is not difficult to see the security of one's own religious convictions diminish and become lost, right to the point of the explosion of a crisis of faith.

In many cases the problem is a faith insufficiently protected

and not cultivated by real prayer either personal or in community and more often than not compromised by behaviour in no way in accord with one's profession, and that also goes for the quality of belief. For these reasons faith languishes dangerously and ends up by becoming a non-faith. Many sad letters come, and a large number end up on my desk; they announce almost incredible failure in very splendid vocations; but be that as it may, 90% say that it all began and little by little got worse with progressive negligence and then finally with the total abandonment of the means both positive and negative which defend and nourish the faith.

Dear sons, faith must come alive again, whatever the cost. Whoever looks at his own life and his own work in the congregation and there finds the purpose of his vocation obscure and his relationship with God in a fog, and begins to feel a distaste for all apostolic work, needs to hasten to put things right, to bring himself at once to a renewal of faith. Means to do so are not lacking, but they have to be used. It is necessary to develop faith, and nourish it theologically with study and reflection. But I have to say again, there is need to defend it, sustain it; and this is done primarily by humbly asking for it by real prayer. Pride and presumption are the fatal enemies of faith.

It is against this background that the force of what the SGC says is to be taken when, speaking to all salesians, it says that each salesian be urged to the "rediscovery" by his personal experience of the profound sense and dimension of our mission to reacquire and to keep alive the sense of being sent by the Father and united intimately with him in love and filial dependence.

B) *Pastoral or apostolic charity*

The "vision of faith" in our consecrated life in our mission of apostles of youth, must lead to pastoral charity rightly defined by the Special General Chapter as "centre" of our salesian spirit.

This “pastoral charity” is the love of God which tends towards action. — it is fervour, drive — passion for souls. It is the choice again today with renewed understanding and enthusiasm of being “signs and bearers of the love of God for young people” It is the discovery with all the freshness of our first “yes” to the call of God, that we are in the hands of God “efficacious instruments for the salvation of the needy.”

Urged on by the imminence of the kingdom which makes its advent every day, we must dedicate ourselves with fervour to their total salvation, and accept being “consumed” by this work. We must also discover through the heart of Don Bosco, immense as the sea-shore, the consuming zeal of Christ.” (*Acts of Spec. General Chapter.*, n. 91 sqq).

It is finally to choose Christ definitively and allow him to dominate absolutely and exclusively our life, to give him really, not only by word, everything, to be happy to sacrifice ourselves and spend ourselves for him.

C) *Witness*

There is still another element which is both consequence and sign of an authentic faith, especially today.

Faith which flowers in apostolic charity must be sealed by « witness » of one’s own life, to proclaim by example the truth and authenticity of what we believe. As we have seen above, the council itself invites this revision to see whether the life religious live can be considered witness to the gospel (*A.G.*, 40) and turning to all the People of God it affirms without distinction: « ...let all realize that their first and the most important obligation toward the spread of the faith is this: to lead a profoundly christian life. » (*A.G.*, 36).

Without descending to details, which will be the object of specification and will be able to be studied and determined with care and precision at provincial and local levels, I call your attention to three areas in which there is ample space for

witness and unhappily also real danger of the very opposite; this demands courageous vigilance, examination and conversion.

I refer to poverty, work and temperance. These things are closely bound together. They were central to Don Bosco's preoccupation, causing him great anxiety. On this point I invite you to meditate on the rich content of the text of the Special General Chapter to be found in Document II on salesian poverty today. In my letter on Poverty in 1968 you will also find abundant material for reflection and study.

This vast area of our life is the most menaced by the real danger of middle-class comfort. It penetrates without being noticed, introduced by the level of life with its comforts and pleasures enjoyed by those who are around us, justified by the specious reason of progress, of convenience at work, of advantage to the apostolate, etc. And when we stop to look at our own life we find ourselves immersed in a life that has the standards of the well-to-do; slaves of so many demands and comforts, we have become soft, languid, without spiritual energy and drive, swayed here and there by a host of temptations; we live suffering the acute self — disapproval of our inconsistency but without the strength to get out of it — for we are dried-up and parched in a sterile apostolate!

In the dream of 1881 Don Bosco summed up in three short words the characteristics of *middle class comfort* — *lectus, habitus, potus*. On the other side, in the predictions he made of the future of the congregation the very first places were given to work and temperance. On them depend the development, the continued life and the very existence of the congregation. Here are the words of his spiritual testament: « On the day we begin to live an easy and comfortable life our society will have run its course. » (*M.B.* XVII, 272). These words should make a man tremble who feels that he carries on him the signs of the tomb!

For Don Bosco the danger of the « good life » was not imaginary. In 1876 he already had this to say: « I see a tendency towards the easy life so accentuated, it frightens me! » (*M.B.*

XII, 383). In conversation with Don Barberis he said: « There are three things which can bring the congregation down. The first is sloth — too little work — we have to set ourselves tasks well beyond our powers and thus force ourselves to do all we possibly can do. The second cause is the excessive search for abundance in food and drink. Beware when the custom begins for bottles, strong drink, biscuits and sweets to be kept in one's own room. Beware when this begins to show itself at table — when I want this and more of that — we have already begun to go along this path and I fear it greatly. » (*M.B.* XII, 384). And yet we all know how poverty was the mark of the life at the Oratory in 1876. We need courage to ask ourselves what Don Bosco would say at the present level of work and temperance in many of our communities and then draw some salutary conclusions. The «*scrutinium paupertatis*» is an exercise for our own safety to be gone through seriously from time to time.

This vision of faith, apostolic charity and the witness of a poor laborious life lived in our own salesian way ought to blossom among us to bring us joy, which is the fruit of interior peace and the love of God.

P. Masson, expert on mission affairs, speaking of the missionary church says that it must become a church of hope. He adds: « Our own world in spite of its organization, its arsenals, its universities, its laboratories, its projects and its planning, shows itself so often a sad world; it lives but does not know any longer why it lives... it is left for the promise of the resurrection. » (Conference for Missionary Day 1965).

Our Special General Chapter, following the same line of thought, but with the stress on our way of doing things, says this: « in Document 3. Evangelization and Catechesis — « Faith is the source of joy, and joy always accompanies real faith. Consequently one of the characteristics of catechesis must be our joyful witness in our work in the liturgy, in the community, in life and even when we have to suffer. Our faith must show us that the gospel is the breath of hope... it is necessary to

rediscover the genuine spirit of Don Bosco which enabled both the salesians and the boys to experience faith as happiness... » (*Acts S.G.C.* nn. 327-8).

Suggestions for missionary revival

I call also for an effective generous revival of our missionary enterprise.

« The Special General Chapter appeals to all the provinces and even to those who are poorest in numbers of salesians, that, by obeying the invitation of the Council and following the the courageous example of our Founder, they may contribute, even in a temporary manner, to the spread of the kingdom of God.»

I repeat today this same appeal to the whole congregation. It must not remain a dead letter, or a moment of enthusiasm, or be soon forgotten in face of what is thought to be more urgent, only because it is more immediate or because it touches us more closely.

How great the need is for men of apostolic work in all our missionary outposts is known to everyone.

But what I am asking for is not to be done as a matter of organization — a planned distribution of forces. It should come from a much deeper motive like that which urged Don Bosco in 1875 to send out the first ten missionaries when the congregation had only 171 men all told; this was zeal for souls. I hold that no community, provincial or local, can count itself happy and at peace if it does not collaborate effectively to provide personnel and vocations for the spread of the kingdom of God in the mission field. And what if they lack something as a result? I have to tell you that each year now the number of those destined for the missions grows smaller; it is an alarming indicator. This year only twenty will go.

Don Bosco sent his best

I know all the objections, reasonable enough on the purely human plane: — We do not have sufficient staff to maintain the works we have in the province; how can we think of sending men to the missions! If those who ask to go are the best, how can we so impoverish our communities in quality! Or... each province must adjust itself to the means it has... it has to make fire with its own wood... hence the work being done is limited to the men we now have...

All these objections and others like them have elements which are true objectively and under certain aspects plausible enough, but along this line of thought we come to the point when we are no longer inspired by faith and by apostolic charity. Let me help you to see how Don Bosco would have seen and judged this problem and how his immediate successors in word and deed did same, so that you too may see it from a different point of view, the view held by the Vatican Council and by our own Special General Chapter.

As you know Don Bosco chose his first missionaries from among the best men he had. Particularly significant is his choice of John Cagliero. We read in our Annals: «...many salesians asked to be chosen... Don Cagliero, with his degree in theology from the University of Turin, taught moral theology to the clerics of the oratory, he was the spiritual director of several convents in the City, he was an incomparable teacher and a gifted composer of music, he was called upon to take part in discussions of all the important business of the house, so that no one imagined for a moment that he could be spared even for a short time; yet Don Bosco had his eye on him...» (*Annals of the Sal. Soc.*, I, 252-3). In the succeeding expeditions he continued to send salesians of special merit — Fagnano, Costamagna, Lasagna, Vespignani, etc...

Let us listen to Don Rinaldi: «They were the mainstay of his flourishing oratories and Colleges at that time, so that to

lose their services by sending them on the missions was a great sacrifice, because he had so little personnel. But he let them go serenely and without hesitation.» (*Acts Sup. Coun.* n. 6, p. 368).

It could be considered a foolhardy thing to do to take away valuable staff from work which was just beginning. In fact such an objection was made to him in just that sense. Don Bosco on the evening of 10 december 1875 explained his mind to the Superior Chapter: « As far as the congregation is concerned, *although it is repeatedly said that we have need to consolidate*, I also see that *when we work very hard things go better*. The consolidation we can attend to at a slower pace and it may prove to be more lasting — we see it with our eyes shut! *While there is this great movement, we go ahead with full sail and the members of the congregation have indeed great good will to work!* » (M.B., XI, 409).

The first result: increase in vocations

The very first result of the missions to America was to be of great advantage to the congregation: it began to be known even abroad, vocations increased in extraordinary proportions, the spread of new foundations undertaken was breath-taking. It is more than interesting to follow this remarkable explosion in the letters of Don Bosco to Don Cagliero and his sons in America. Through the brief tense items of news you can sense the astonishment of Don Bosco at such massive intervention of Providence. Let me cite an example or two. It is a good thing to hear our story told by Don Bosco himself.

Letter to Cagliero 12 December 1876 « ...great stirrings to go to the missions: lawyers, solicitors, parish priests, professors ask to become salesians ad hoc... » (*Ep.* III, 95). 30 November 1876 still to Cagliero: « Listen to this wonderful news. Six priests leave for America, six other priests enter the congregation; seven clerics go with them, seven clerics ask to enter

and are already here. Twelve lay religious go to America, to Albano and to Trinità, twelve new religious brothers, very zealous, ask to enter and are received by us. See how God guides our affairs! » (*Ep.* III, 121). In another letter he adds: « If you could but see with your own eyes what our congregation is doing, you would say it's a fable. May God help us to correspond... » (*Ep.* III, 102 - 13 Oct. 1876).

It is indeed true that Don Bosco profited by each new happening to « enkindle zeal and enthusiasm among his sons, to strengthen the spirit of his young salesians, for in the quite extraordinary expansion, in this turning point for the congregation there was something of the prodigious. In that farewell discourse of Don Bosco we can find words which now sound prophetic: « ...in this way we set on foot a great work, not because we ourselves have any pretensions or that we imagine that we are going to convert the whole world in a few days. No, but who knows that this departure of this small group is not like the small seed which will grow into a great tree? Who knows that it is not like a seed of millet or a mustard seed which little by little will spread out to do great good? Who knows that this departure has not awakened in the hearts of many the desire of consecrating themselves too to God on the missions, to become one of us — reinforcements for our company? » (*M.B.*, XI, 383).

The effect to which we have already referred remained indelibly impressed on his sons and on his successors, who, when the missions called, followed the same pattern of daring generosity — total trust in God — who would know how to supply in abundance replacements for the missionaries who had left, since he is the Lord of the harvest.

To confirm this it is sufficient to remember the more than one hundred expeditions since that first departure, and some of them with 200 names to their credit.

An objection: lack of personnel

But first listen to Don Albera, who in 1920, in the difficulties and the penury in personnel that followed the first world war, exhorted the provinces to be generous with the missions, not counting the cost.

« Prepare many good missionaries » this was his word of command, « and there will be some who will say, how can we answer this call, if we lack personnel for our own needs? » I reply it is in order that you should have abundant personnel that I tell you — prepare many good missionaries! The greater the number of missionaries a province sends to the distant Americas, to the primitive savage people of Terra del Fuego, to Patagonia, to Paraguay, to Brazil, to Ecuador, to Africa, India and China and wherever else we have missions, the greater the number of vocations the Lord will send to that province.»

« This is no rhetorical assertion, it is the genuine mind of our Father Don Bosco. He himself answered those who said that to do as he asked would mean the closing of houses through lack of trained staff: « have no fear, for every missionary you send, I am certain, quite sure, that two or more vocations will come to you.» And this really came about and it is attested by Don Rua, who through his long period of office as Rector Major never ceased to instil in his sons, as his father had done before him, love for the missions and preparation annually for a missionary expedition.» (*Circular letters*, p. 327).

Other forms of missionary work

Dear sons, the example and words of Don Bosco and the unanimous and constant sense of our tradition ought to move you to receive this invitation of mine with open and generous hearts and to look to the future with the eyes of faith and full of hope.

Now I turn to those confrères whom God may have called to make known his kingdom on the frontiers of the church, so that they keep themselves available and attentive to the voice of God. I have great hopes that this coming year we shall have a good number of generous hearted missionaries from our provinces.

It is clear that this special vocation can have no other motive than that of faith, the love of God and apostolic zeal. It cannot be just a way of escape, curiosity, a tourist adventure or scientific research. Any purely human motivation would falsify in the root something which is and must remain a choice made for God alone. Confrères with the help of the confessor and with the advice of their superiors should make this choice with discernment. But once a confrere is satisfied that it is God who calls him he should not close up his heart for motives or interests that have little to do with faith.

I now turn to provincials to help us carry the burden, weight and anxiety and responsibility of the «mandate» to announce the kingdom in foreign lands, and I ask it in the spirit of co-responsibility and communion which inform our structures of government. And above all I ask loyal generosity to encourage, even at the cost of great sacrifice, those who seriously desire to go to the missions.

But it is clear that the work cannot stop here.

For this reason I wish to invite also our communities to demonstrate concretely and systematically the sense of fraternal solidarity with the missions, paramissions and work economically in need.

It is true that there are provinces which show sensitive awareness of the need and they have been very generous; we are all grateful to them and for the example they show. It is also true that some participate little in this mission work which is doubly fruitful. This brotherly solidarity shown towards confrères who work and suffer not a little beyond the narrow circle of our own small world is a very helpful way of enlarging

the vision of our members to the world community — the whole congregation taken together.

Lent, one of the great moments in the liturgical year, is a very good time in which to promote the missions, and the confrères, as experience shows, will know how to respond with sacrifice and with that generosity which is a source of joy to him who gives as for him who receives.

It is important to arouse real missionary enthusiasm by fervour leading to action. This is the purpose of my letter; it is also the message of the Special General Chapter to the congregation. It is not now a question of solving personal problems but of putting the whole congregation in the mood of one who lives for the coming of the kingdom of God and who senses the urgency of its needs and is prepared to risk his life that Christ be preached to all men.

May I quote Don Albera again who insisted with rectors and provincials that they shared with him the burden of taking to heart the missions: «Your work will reach others either speaking with enthusiasm of our missions (avoid) repeating «it is possible to be a missionary anywhere»; this is absolutely false for one called to the apostolate among the pagans) or by describing the beauty of this apostolate to the boys in our Oratories, that they may at least give a little to the missions, while our co-operators offer all they can spare.

Many houses complain that offerings are becoming scarce. The real reason is not that benefactors are not there, but that the temptation to divert alms and offerings to local needs becomes too strong, to the neglect of the needs of the missions... » (*Circular letter*, p. 136).

The Special General Chapter offers considerations which provide matter for reflection in depth and for the programming of the local and provincial communities. Let us go over some of them.

The Salesian Bulletin — unhappily ignored in many parts — is well adapted to this purpose; it is important to facilitate

the reading of it especially on the part of the confrères — but the boys and benefactors should not be forgotten. (*Acts S.G.C.*, n. 4476).

Among the practical directives you find

— provincials should be generous in allowing such confrères as have the necessary qualities to consecrate themselves to missionary work if they so desire;

— each province should cultivate missionary vocations by presenting the salesians as a missionary congregation and promising the fulfilment of their ideals to those who want to do such work:

— the different communities should keep themselves informed of the missionary problems of the church and of the congregation; let them create a true salesian spirit in each house and thus form an atmosphere in which missionary vocations can develop; let projects be also undertaken for the benefit of the missions.

Don Ceria referring to the effect produced when the first missionary expedition was announced makes this comment: « vocations to the priesthood and the religious life multiplied and there was a notable increase in the number of those who wanted to join the congregation, a new fervour in the apotolate took possession of many who became novices.» (*M.B.* XI, 148).

In the *Annals* he writes: « And truly for the Oratory and for the congregation there began a new page in its history.» (*Annals* I, p. 249).

Dear Sons, the times in which we live demand from each of us and from the whole congregation, another page in our history, through personal spiritual renewal calling for generosity, enthusiasm, apostolic work. It is a matter of fidelity to our vocation. That rediscovery of stupendous values made by the Special General Chapter has to be followed up in our lives, in the way we work to build up to this « new page of our history. »

One secure road we have seen is the way of the missions.

Let us be united together, in the name of Don Bosco, and inspired by the Holy Spirit who renews us and promises us victory, to set out on the road with the zeal and daring of our Father.

And may Our Lady Help of Christians be with us always along the road.

affectionately in Dno.,
LUIGI RICCERI, Rector Major