

acts

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

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

N. 333
anno LXXI
may 1990

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE FAITH

**DOCUMENTS OF THE 23RD GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES**

Rome, 4 March - 5 May 1990

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SIGNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

art.	article
can.	canon
chap.	chapter
cf.	compare
ib.	ibidem
n.	number
p.	page
v.	vide

Ecclesial documents

AA	Apostolicam actuositatem
CL	Christifideles laici
DV	Dei Verbum
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
GS	Gaudium et spes
IP	Iuvenum Patris
LG	Lumen Gentium
MC	Marialis Cultus
RH	Redemptor hominis

Salesian abbreviations

ACG	Acts of General Council
ACS	Acts of Superior Council (before 1984)
BM	Biographical Memoirs
C	Constitution n.
CC	Cooperators
DBV	Don Bosco Volunteers
FMA	Daughter(s) of Mary Help of Christians
FSDB	Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco ('Ratio')
GC	General Chapter

GC21	21st General Chapter
GC22	22st General Chapter
MB	Memorie Biografiche
pp	Past-pupils
R.	Regulation n.
RM	Rector Major
SDB	Salesian(s) of Don Bosco
SGC	Special General Chapter
SYM	Salesian Youth Movement
SYS	Salesian Youth Spirituality

PRESENTATION OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

My dear confreres,

We are beginning a new six-year period, and we do so full of trust in the Lord, convinced that in the GC23 we have had a visit from his Spirit. He will guide us in the path we have to follow. The attitude that every confrere and every community must cultivate will be that to which the newly beatified Philip Rinaldi bore such eminent witness, as we have seen in the deep study we made of him in the circular of the beginning of this year (AGC 332, 1990).

1. THE ACTS OF THE GC23

I present to you the Acts of the GC23, with their rich contents for the guidance of our life and apostolic activity.

In them is collected together the official documentation of the Chapter's work: i.e. the document on educating young people to the faith; the modifications or additions concerning the Constitutions and Regulations; practical interpretations of some texts from the Rule; deliberations regarding the grouping of provinces; a practical directive for our presence in Africa; a brief chronicle of capitular events; and the "Letter to Youth" that the Assembly asked for from the Rector Major. You will find as well various addresses of greetings and good wishes, especially those made to us by the Holy Father and His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life. All this precious material represents the fruit also of a long period of work of preparation; it began in August 1988 with the convoking of the Chapter (AGC 327) which was subsequently carried out as a wide community effort. The provincial chapters sent in contributions of interest, of which the precapitular commission made a faithful analysis and summary, and then produced a stimulating synthesis for the drawing up of a possible capitular text, rich in apt considerations.

Influencing the Chapter's work were also the two volumes of the "Report of the Rector Major" on the six-year period '84-'90, and the general "Statistics" of the Congregation: these two present a concrete and logical picture of the present reality, progress made, expectations, problems and possibilities.

2. THE CHAPTER DOCUMENT

In two months of intensive work and exchange of ideas, the capitular Assembly was able to reach valid conclusions. Its starting point was the diversity of contexts in which our communities are working; it noted the complex nature of the youth scene, interpreted the attitude of young people in relation to the faith and identified the more significant and widespread challenges. To the many problems it has responded by proposing an educative process that draws its inspiration from the typical pedagogical and pastoral experience of Don Bosco. Then to ensure that this was put into practice it indicated some concrete steps for the purpose.

It may be useful, I think, to emphasize certain aspects which form the foundation of all the rest. A consideration of them will help in interpreting the document correctly, and will foster the application of its deliberations and guidelines.

2.1 It is important in the first place to keep in mind that the process of educating young people to the faith takes place in the setting of the "*new evangelization*" (cf. AGC 331). This has various implications. The basic requirement is to concentrate on the authenticity of the faith, on its interior assimilation, on the degree of belief of the one professing it, so as to be able to interpret the new signs of the times and to tackle the challenges of irrelevance, distance, and the multiplicity of messages and suggestions. The Holy Father has told us that the education of youth to the faith is "one of the key issues of the new evangelization, and it is right that at the present day you should look for suitable ways and appropriate language for the purpose, in complete fidelity to your charisma and all the Church's teaching" (Address to the GC23, 3).

The document does not spend time on examining our various kinds of institutions; these were already dealt with in preceding Chapters when the way was opened to new initiatives. The important aspect to which the Chapter wanted to give priority, as the one for

which was felt most need, was to adapt ourselves, wherever we are or may be in the future, to the problems arising from the emerging cultures and the challenges of the factual situations. It is urgently necessary to kindle in young people a lively desire for the christian faith and, once the desire has been implanted, to accompany them step by step to the fullness of life in the Spirit.

From us the new evangelization demands in concrete terms a "new education" to be rethought in fidelity to our origins. The burden of the text concerns the quality of our educational activity. The key to its understanding is the project of a pedagogical journey permeated by the Gospel.

This means dedication to a progressive growth of faith until it reaches maturity, and not just the sowing of an occasional seed, a sporadic suggestion, or some traditional gesture or rite. The journey proposed by the Chapter document requires not only commitment to the sowing but also constancy and skill in cultivating it, and concern to bring it to fruition; i.e. it requires a truly original pedagogy of holiness.

2.2 The subject responsible, and in our case indispensable, for accompanying youngsters in the journey of faith is *the community*, provincial and local. The document does not dwell on the nature and structure of the salesian community, points that had already been studied in depth earlier, but on its quality and credibility. The community must be a visible sign and school of living faith. Unless it responds to the appeal the document will remain no more than words on paper. The journey proposed starts, in fact, from the explicit faith of the community so as to expand and grow in the faith of youth: "from faith to faith!" (cf. Commentary of Rector Major on the Strenna for 1990).

The salesian community is the first subject of the whole business, the guiding principle that links together the different parts of the text: it lives the following of Christ with joyful intensity, confesses his mystery with consecrated testimony, examines carefully and attunes itself to the situation in which it is working, discovers in it the seeds of the Gospel, interprets the desires of faith, deduces intuitively the steps to be taken on the journey, dedicates itself to following the route, continually verifying in the light of God's Word the progress that has been made.

The document is therefore addressed primarily to the community, and to the community the GC23 entrusts the responsibility for its realization.

2.3 The credibility of the community in respect of its salesian method for educating youth to the faith, is based by the GC23 on two characteristic and complementary columns: “*spirituality*” and “*pedagogy*”. These are two dynamic elements on which converges the preventive system that Don Bosco has passed on to us “as a way of living and of handing on the gospel message and of working with and through the young for their salvation. It permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved” (C 20). Don Bosco has left us a rich and original heritage from which to draw our inspiration: think of all the description of the “salesian spirit” codified in Chap.2 of the Constitutions. This “spirit” is the soul of our style of living with the young and accompanying them on the journey of faith. The Pope spoke to us of “spirituality” in both his initial Message and his address of May 1: “Spirituality means a living participation in the power of the Holy Spirit... The young must be aware of the new life given to them in the sacrament of Baptism and fully developed in that of Confirmation; they must know that from it proceeds that strength of personal synthesis between faith and life that is possible to those who foster in themselves the gift of the Spirit” (ibid, 5).

But our own spirituality is characterized as “pedagogical”. The pastoral quality of the community is measured by the extent to which it evangelizes “by educating”. It is a matter of being able to patiently cultivate the seed sown in the heart of the young, even by other sowers. The whole community is called to follow attentively the young people in a dialogue of faith, that goes beyond the simple fulfilment of institutional obligations; this is not just a question of repeating clichés but of intensifying the ability to animate and involve others, getting them to share responsibility – or in other words of educating.

2.4 But the community cannot kindle and develop the faith of youth unless it lives in an active and updated form the communion of guidelines and initiatives put forward by the Church.

Among the pastoral priorities proposed by Vatican II and various Synods that have followed it, there is that of the *animation of the lay faithful*. The Chapter document speaks of this in connection with the education of youth to the faith, and it is emphasized by the Rector Major in his closing address, in which he declared that this commitment obliges us to take our place on the frontiers of the new

evangelization and the new education (cf. Christifideles laici).

In the deliberation of the Chapter there are indicated two precise areas for our animation and involvement of this kind: that of the “educative and pastoral community” and that of the “Salesian Family”. In both of these many lay people are at work with different roles, methods and possibilities.

The GC23 asks the community at every level – local, provincial and world – to commit itself during the next six years in this sector of animation for the benefit of youth. For this purpose it indicates concrete tasks for both Houses and Provinces, and suggests to the Rector Major with his Council to “offer elements and guidelines for a ‘lay-project’ in the Congregation.”

2.5 Finally the Document proposes as an indispensable means for growth in spirituality and pedagogical competence, and also for growth in the animation of the lay faithful, that of *ongoing formation*.

The first of the capitular deliberations refers precisely to this task of renewal: “In the next six years,” it states, “the Congregation will have as its *primary obligation the continuing formation and qualification of the confreres*. It will give particular attention to the internal apostolic conviction which is both pastoral charity and pedagogical ability” (n. 221).

Once again ongoing formation is put to the community as a point of primary importance. In fact it is a matter of “the witness of a community in continual renewal.” It is the priority subject of our qualitative growth with its daily witness, shared responsibility and discernment, with active participation in the communion of the local Church, and in dynamic fidelity to the Founder, overcoming the various dangers of that subtle genericism singled out as a menace in the evaluation of the life of the communities (cf. Report of Rector Major, 291-298) and is an aspect of our superficiality in spiritual matters.

3. THE EVENT OF THE GC23

Every General Chapter should be, according to the Constitutions, “the principal sign of the Congregation’s unity in diversity” (C 146); i.e. it should have a vital significance that goes far beyond its own documents.

This the GC23 has been without any doubt, even though every

human event has its less positive aspects and some shortcomings. In this Chapter we can point to two extraordinary signs of a particular ecclesial dimension: the solemn beatification of Don Bosco's third successor, Fr Philip Rinaldi, in St Peter's Square packed with the faithful, and the personal intervention of the Holy Father John Paul II with his initial message and his historic visit to the Chapter itself.

But there have been too so many other strongly positive aspects: the happy family life shared by all the capitulars, the interchange of widely differing experiences (the famous "Good Nights"!), the harmony of all with the Founder's spirit, the growing awareness of the importance of our worldwide communion, the sensitivity and respect shown for cultural differences, the mutually declared feeling that we were living a special time of grace, the high level of intentions promoted from the outset by the spiritual retreat guided by our well-deserving Honduran Bishop, Mgr. Oscar Rodriguez, and the fact that we were an "ordinary Chapter" of a new brand.

The GC23 was indeed "a sign of the Congregation's unity"; the members have taken its promise of vitality to all the provinces as a particular gift of this "visit of the Holy Spirit". We can truly say that by means of this Chapter "the entire Society, opening itself to the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, (has sought) to discern God's will at (this specific moment) in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service" (C 146).

4. THE COMMITMENT FOR THE COMING SIX YEARS

I invite you therefore, dear confreres, to study and translate into practice what the GC23 asks of us in order to be "missionaries of the young".

The application of its directives and guidelines will place us in the front line among the workers in the vineyard: both because the Church is looking for a pastoral method suited to the new times, and because she is looking with priority to the new evangelization of youth. This I have said to you already in commenting on this year's Strenna. We shall have to verify whether we are able to go so far ahead; it is our hope that this may prove true for all, young and old, healthy and sick, so that all may make their contribution in the measure of grace which the Lord gives to each one in so many different ways.

The secret of success lies in the witness of apostolic interior conviction which, through its grace of unity, makes us “shepherds” and “educators”: educators, because shepherds of the young; and shepherds because christian educators.

I closed my Report on the period 1984-1990 “emphasizing the fundamental condition which is most urgent for our salesian activity: it can be expressed – I said – in a word that becomes an appeal: ‘spirituality!’” (p. 272). In fact, as the Constitutions say: “Like Don Bosco we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery” (C 34).

Let us ask the Help of Christians, the Star of evangelization, to help us to become ever more deeply immersed in the mystery of Christ, our Brother and Lord, so that with him we may not walk in darkness but have – for ourselves and our young people – the light of life!

Rome, Feast of the Holy Trinity
10 June 1990

Fr Egidio Viganò

The secret of success lies in the witness of a noble mission
education which through its grace of mind makes us "philosophical"
and "educators" educators because shepherds of the young and
shepherds because Christian educators.

I closed the Report on the period 1951-1959 emphasizing the
fundamental position which is most urgent for our educational activity. It
can be expressed, I said, in a word that becomes an appeal:
"Simplicity" (p. 275). In fact, as the Constitution says: "Like Don
Bosco we are all called to be educators to the faithful in every
opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ
and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people His unchangeable
truth of His mystery" (C 34).

Let us ask the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of evangelization, to
help us to become ever more deeply involved in the mystery of Christ,
our Brother and Lord, so that with Him we may not walk in darkness
but have "for ourselves and our young people" the light of His

Report, Feast of the Holy Trinity.

10 June 1960

Don Bosco, Vercelli

**EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE FAITH:
A TASK AND CHALLENGE
FOR TODAY'S SALESIAN COMMUNITY**

FOR TODAY'S SALESIAN COMMUNITY
A TASK AND CHALLENGE
EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE FAITH

INTRODUCTION

1 The Salesian Congregation

The Salesian Congregation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in fidelity to the Founder's charism, has carried out in recent years a process of renewal and of defining its own identity. Let us briefly look back over it to note how we have progressed from the idea of salesian "mission" to that of the "journey of education to the faith".

The Congregation's educative and pastoral commitment is not in fact a mere agglomeration of events and activities following on one another without sense or sequence; it is the sum total of the experiences we have realized, under the animation of God's Spirit, in the history of salvation.

2 in solidarity with the world and its history

Our mission as educators keeps us deeply united with the world and its history.¹ To educate means in fact to share lovingly in the growth of individuals and in the building of their future. We approach this history in the light of the divine plan of salvation, guided by the Church's wisdom which is its sign and instrument.

Current trends in the world emphasize the centrality of the individual in all the problems that mark human events. "We are witnessing the birth of a new humanism, where man is defined before all else by his responsibility to his brothers and at the court of history".² In this context therefore the education of the individual becomes a matter of both urgency and priority.

¹ Cf. C 7

² GS 55

3
in the heart
of the Church

In Vatican II the Church, guided by the Spirit, accepted the "signs" of the present time; it reawakened the awareness of its essential mystery; it renewed its internal communion and rethought its presence in the world in the light of its mission. As an expert in humanity, it felt itself called anew to educate man and remain at his side.

Authoritative documents and assemblies have offered practical guidelines for the realization of all this. Much has matured in the meantime in the life and awareness of the faithful.

4
at the service
of the new
evangelization

In the last few years an urgent need has arisen for a "new evangelization": "new in its enthusiasm, in its method, and in its expressions".³ It finds its justification in the previously unknown "ecclesial, social, economic, political and cultural" situations, characterized by a growing rapidity of change and the accumulation of questions which are the responsibility of everyone. Its context therefore is new, as also are the general objectives towards which it tends: it is a matter of renewing the human texture of society, by accepting as the primary task the renewal of evangelical spirit in ecclesial communities.

The "new evangelization is addressed to the individual, "the centre and summit of all that exists on earth".⁴ But it is also conscious of the fact that respect for the person requires solidarity at world level too, and of this solidarity charity is the soul and support. The individual and society thus become transformed by a "new culture", attentive not only to the demands of individual morality, but also to the human being's every need.

³ John Paul II, AAS 75, 1983, p. 778

⁴ CL 37

5
starting
from the mission
(GC20)

The Congregation has declared itself “deeply united with the world”⁵ and in communion with the Church,⁶ placing its own brief history in the great channel of humanity’s journey.

The SGC concentrated attention on “our own specific mission”, and indicated two conditions for its realization. The first was to allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit in rediscovering the Founder’s charisma, in participating deeply in the Church’s life, and in responding to the appeals of the young in the history of the world in which the Spirit is the hidden ferment.

The second was to be willing to follow with faith new paths and new options. In fact a timorous attitude in facing life, or one of suspicion regarding the new culture, or lack of enthusiasm in tackling the great tasks that lie ahead, would never be accepted by today’s youth.

6
taken up by
the community
through a
project

Six years later, all this had become better understood by the confreres, and so the GC21 set out to indicate the consequences in a more concrete and practical manner. It perceived that there was a happy coincidence between our mission and the expectations of the young; and that in our evangelizing mission was to be found the fundamental characteristic of our identity.

But how are we to evangelize the young?

The GC21 appealed to two priorities: the first the salesian community as the subject of the mission and animator of numerous apostolic forces; and the second an educative and pastoral project.

The community became the “centre” of communion and sharing; and the project, i.e. the preventive system rethought and brought up to date, would be our own particular way of bringing about the evangelization of the young.

⁵ C 7

7
as an apostolic
consecration
(GC22)

The GC22 completed the drawing up of our Rule of life, and recognized definitively the inseparable unity that exists between apostolic mission, community life and the profession of the evangelical counsels,⁷ making of this apostolic consecration a fervent “option for God” through love for the young who are his children. By reawakening in their hearts the feelings of sonship and the conviction of the Father’s presence, the salesian achieves his “radical experience of the Gospel”.

8
New challenges

This reading again of our salesian history, inspired by a deep communion with the Church and solidarity with the world of the young, and especially the poorer ones among them, has made us regard them with a more practical love. Their manner of existence and life has given rise in us to some urgent and important questions: – For them at the present day, just what is God? What effect does faith have in their lives? How do we undertake our mission as educators to the faith in these new times and situations?

These questions have made us think deeply, and our reflections have been enriched by the events and youthful manifestations of the centenary year. Young people have shown that they are sensitive to the values of a new plan of life which finds in Don Bosco a teacher capable of suggesting “a new education which is at once both creative and faithful”.⁸

And so the desire to accompany them in a journey of faith arises quite naturally and spreads in the light of the pedagogy of salesian youthful holiness.

9
noted by every
province

The provincial chapters, prompted and guided by this sensitivity, sought to be practical in their considerations aimed at verifying the efficacy of salesian education with regard to the life of faith of youth. The dis-

⁶ Cf. C 6

⁷ Cf. C 3

⁸ IP 13

turbing questions that emerged were those that always arise; but under the pressure of the imminent new era they had a certain novelty in their tone and their demand for a practical response: – How is faith to be understood in contexts in which it has to become both light and salt? How is the life of faith to be related to personal experience? What is meant at the present day by educating to the faith? How can we communicate the faith, and how do we accompany young people in their approach to it?

10
to which the
GC23
responds

The route to be followed must be tailored to the young people concerned who have to be made able to live the demands of faith in the present phase of history. In this way the plan will attain its objective.

With this as its starting point and after long and careful reflection, the capitulars settled on three fundamental themes: the situation of the young in their own context, their faith-journey, and salesian youth spirituality.

11
drawing
inspiration
from the
pedagogy
of the Father

Education of youth to the faith takes its inspiration from the action of God: “Through a providentially gradual process, he has disclosed the mystery of his love, leading men in the course of history and the ancient covenant to meet Christ. He has given help to men through events and words with which they were familiar, speaking to his people in a manner suited to their various historical situations, and showing his greatest possible self-abasement in his Son who took flesh”.⁹

12
witnessed
to by the Son

The coming of the Lord Jesus sums up all the educative work of the Father. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is recognized by his followers as “Rabbi” and “Teacher”.¹⁰ He is endowed with an original teaching

⁹ Documento di base (Italy), 15; cf. DV 4. 7. 13

¹⁰ Cf. Jn 3,2; 9,2

authority; he is able to lead his disciples to reflect on human events without regard to current prejudices; he forms them with care, and is ready to use the most appropriate means of communication.

Jesus manifests the pedagogy of love in a convincing manner in the giving of himself to others, in his welcoming and defence of "sinners and little ones", and in encouraging the young to look beyond their ordinary objectives, good though they be, and set out on the higher and more demanding road of the Kingdom of God.

Certainly Christ is very much more than a genial educator. He is the Son of God who has become man, He who gives the fullest sense to everything of human value and importance. To Him as the true and definitive revelation of God's design for his children is now addressed the fundamental work of education, which must learn to become truly christian if it is to be totally human.

13
and spread
by the
Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit renews and diffuses in the Church this "pedagogical wisdom". He it is who leads us to rediscover Christ and his Gospel, to find once again the specific characteristics of the Founder's spirit, to grasp the pleas of the world, and to share actively in the Church's life.

The Church, already expert in humanity, becomes expert too in education. Everything in her is ordained to man's growth. Within her have always been born and formed masters, shepherds and teachers, who took up in an intense way her love for mankind and her educating ability. Through their fruitful work and by means of institutions of inestimable human and cultural value, the history of the Church is identified in no small measure with the history of the education of many peoples.

14
that the young
may have life

In this wide expanse, in this mission of infinite possibilities, we Salesians follow Don Bosco and take our place, in the conviction that faith conquers

the world,¹¹ and that “the glory of God is man fully alive”.¹² We want to dedicate all our efforts to the life of the young, following Christ’s words: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”.¹³

¹¹ Cf. 1 Jn 5,4

¹² St. Irenaeus

¹³ Jn 10,10

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CL 1 1634
St. James
B. 1010

THE YOUTH REALITY CHALLENGES THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY

1. THE CONTEXT IN WHICH SALESIAN COMMUNITIES LIVE

*The Word became flesh and dwelt among
us*

(Jn 1,14)

15
**A pastoral
glance
at the contexts**

Our communities, located by God's will in a specific human setting, feel that the latter is the particular place where they are called to express their own faith in credible witness and the proclamation of life.

And so they are committed to a deep understanding of the context of their locality and to sharing the hopes of the people, of which they make a careful study in the light of the Word of God. In this way they discern with greater clarity the questions put to the faith today by society and culture. And they come to a better understanding of the conditions in which is realized the human and religious growth of youth, and the difficulties they meet with in their efforts to mature as christians.

16 Our study of the education of youth to the faith therefore begins from the prevailing cultural environment, i.e. from criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, and models of life.¹

It is a pastoral study, aimed at discerning the relationship between these elements and the "plan of sal-

¹ Cf. EN 19

vation" that God has entrusted to his Church.² It makes use with confidence of the contribution of competent sciences and is based on authoritative analysis. But it does not pretend to be exhaustive. It brings to light only those aspects singled out by our communities as having greater influence on the growth of young people in the faith.

17 The presentation of *different contexts* helps to an understanding of the complexity of the situations in which the communities find themselves working. And it makes them realize that they must consider seriously their own context if they want to accompany the youngsters on a faith-journey.

On the other hand we must not forget that the world, even with the differences mentioned, is becoming ever more a "global village", especially because of the mass media and ease of transport. Cultural trends, fashions and ways of life rapidly become widespread. One sees lying ahead therefore an era in which it will become necessary to be open to different contexts, get to know their problems and be in tune with them.

The "types" of context we shall examine are characteristic of specific geographical areas, but in none of them are they found in an unmixed state. They quite easily become intermixed in the same geographical area, mutually conditioning and modifying each other.

Their description centres around four points of reference which interact with one another: the social, political and economic system; certain cultural trends; religious attitudes; and the youth situation.

It is precisely from the standpoint of this last one that the other three need to be considered.

² Ibid.

Many communities find themselves working in *contexts marked by an abundance of material goods*. In such situations problems of food and housing, employment, education and social security seem solved. The primary human requirements of the people are guaranteed; they are in an advantageous position for the acquiring and development of their own culture, and they have available the means needed for their overall development.

The political system in turn tends to ensure an ample margin of freedom and of participation in public life. The less well-to-do can attain a better economic and social growth. The role of women is also better recognized and given greater importance in the various aspects of social life.

Technology is a constant spur to greater wellbeing, and removes some restrictions on freedom. But if a technological mentality be allowed to develop without due thought, it will condition ways of thinking and every other approach to life. The right to privacy seems to become ever more extensive, particularly in what concerns moral matters, and reaches a point where no restrictive norms at all are acknowledged except those concerning the regulation of social life.

When society is geared to profit-seeking, it leads to old and new forms of poverty. This gives rise in the same context to consistent minority groups who are dissatisfied, and poorer countries feel heavily the consequences of such policies.

All this cannot leave us indifferent because it leads to a certain manner of approach to life and to the relationship between individuals and society which has an effect on everyone, and especially on the young.

19 The Church is aware that from a quantitative point of view she is in a minority and progressively more irrelevant in the cultural field, and for this the responsibility sometimes lies to some extent at the door of christians themselves.

But we are also witnessing a growth in the number of people able to live with coherent intensity the values of the Gospel and who are determined to remain members of the Church. They are convinced that the Church is called to be the "sign and instrument of man's salvation",³ and seriously engage in projects of animation, solidarity and social advancement.

20 In such a context too we find numerous expressions of popular religious practices. They have become stronger through the centuries and have reached the level of authentic devotion. They are evident in more than a few families and can be admired in religious manifestations and in characteristic places of cult.

Also spreading are new forms of religious observance, and autonomous sects of theosophical, neo-eastern, or neo-pagan inspiration.

21 On the other hand young people are also present in a consistent manner in the social field. They are committed to movements of an ecological or pacifist nature, or for the advancement and defence of human rights, and frequently suffer unpleasant personal consequences in their struggle against various forms of injustice.

Even though, through lack of formation in political duties, some of them remain aloof from the various parties, we nevertheless find them deeply involved in voluntary work experiences to which they are committed for the transformation of society.

Young people too form a notable and significant part of ecclesial movements. On the other hand they are offered ample and even excessive opportunities for recreational experiences. It is quite easy to get involved in the pursuit of something immediate, which renders one incapable of deferring the satisfaction of one's needs, and to be obsessed with a utilitarian ap-

³ Cf. LG 1

proach that dulls the appreciation of such values as sacrifice and giving without seeking a return. All this is made worse by the pressure of the mass-media.

In a social climate like this many are prompted to seek new experiences, to live their sexuality solely as a means of pleasure, to seek refuge in drugs and alcohol, or to have recourse to violence.

Numerous salesian communities find themselves in societies which are structurally in disorder. They are societies in which it seems impossible to arrest the progress of *economic, political and cultural impoverishment* because of the combination of many factors, such as injustice and institutionalized violence, economic dependence, and foreign debt which accentuates the gap between North and South.

There is a large number of people, often the majority of the population and their number grows with every crisis, who want access to the goods indispensable for a human way of life, but they never achieve it. Essential goods are the minimum required for health and survival, economic sufficiency, work, basic instruction, professional qualification, a just retribution for work done, the recognition of elementary rights and the opportunity for the individual to defend his opinions in social life.

A determining element in a mature collective awareness and in a well formed christian conscience is the knowledge that this state of affairs is not only provoked, but is maintained and made worse by structural factors, prevalently of an economic kind, brought about by external forces but with powerful collaboration from the reality within the various countries.

23 Despite the suffering which is a feature of their daily lives, and in the simplicity of the latter's expressions, the people still preserve and manifest the patrimony of their culture. There are values rich in hu-

manity, such as cordiality, a welcoming reception, solidarity, a sense of communion and of festivity. They live a popular religious experience with a deeply felt reference to God; they keep up their fundamental devotional practices and religious ideas, even though these may not always permeate their personal life or prompt them to a serious and decisive social commitment.

- 24** Especially in areas where the Catholic population is in the majority, the Church has frequently become the 'voice of the poor', making her own their aspirations for liberty and freedom to defend human rights. This decisive preferential option has become her critical yardstick in respect of particular political and economic choices.

In these difficult situations many ecclesial communities become living manifestations of the 'good news', and the expression of a Church committed to evangelization and the building of the Kingdom.

On the other hand sects which exploit the natural religious feelings of the people are becoming more numerous and widespread.

- 25** In these countries a large part of the population is made up of young people who suffer the consequences of the social, economic and educational extremes to which they react with different attitudes, either of hope, frustration, rebellion, and sometimes violence.

It is deeply disturbing to note how numerous are those who do not know what youth is, because they pass suddenly from a childhood of penury and want to a prematurely adult life, lived in the precarious search for the work they need so badly.

- 26** But despite all this there is the clear and significant phenomenon of youngsters coming together in a common commitment, both in the ecclesial environment and in social and political circles.

Quite a number of communities are working in settings strongly characterized by the presence of *great and ancient religions* like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, and other traditional religions. Although these differ profoundly from one another, they can be grouped under a common denominator: a religious sense towards the Transcendent.

These religions have been for hundreds, and sometimes thousands of years sources of spiritual energy.

Some of their intuitions and fundamental truths concerning human life, the world, the ultimate mystery at the basis of everything that exists, exercise a particular influence on many young people. Some religions offer motivations which are valid, and sometimes even surprising, for helping their followers to face up to the trials of life. The advent of technology and secularism has not brought about any decline or disintegration of these, but has rather led to their further development. They seem indeed to have acquired new strength and to be extending their influence beyond their traditional boundaries.

28 One of the most evident characteristics of some of these religions is their strong embodiment in culture; this enables them to blend well with the life of the people, to permeate the whole texture of society, to inspire forms of behaviour, and in this way to foster the formation of a precise identity and a well defined image.

Where there is need to live in the same plurireligious context, these religions frequently inculcate a spirit of tolerance, of peaceful coexistence, of welcoming hospitality, despite occasional outbreaks of violence caused by intransigent tendencies.

But alongside these positive effects on cultures, one cannot be blind to certain negative effects, sometimes as regards principles but more often in the ways in which in practice these beliefs in some environ-

ments have lent support through the centuries to maintaining the status quo in societies where unjust discrimination prevailed. In practice they have displayed a certain tendency to deny the values of freedom, and have endorsed and exasperated the division of populations into castes and social classes, or the discrimination between men and women, adults and youth.

29 The social and economic picture of the societies in which such religions are found varies a good deal.

Some countries have attained a high technological and economic level; others have set out to achieve significant development objectives; still others display serious forms of collective poverty and grave shortcomings in political structures. In this last case a struggle is in progress to enable the majority to enjoy a dignified way of life.

30 In contexts of this kind the Church is in fact a minority. Her presence is unwanted or even obstructed. And so it becomes difficult, and sometimes impossible, to proclaim the Gospel openly and preach christianity.

Salesian communities are generally accepted because of the social and cultural service they offer.

Situations like this can lead to suffering and discouragement in the confreres, but they do not close the door on dialogue, though it must be admitted that this is not always easy, because not everyone is open to it and it is often difficult to find appropriate expressions.

31 For their part, young people often suffer from the complexity of such situations.

The great majority of populations are now below 24 years of age. Many youngsters, because of their poverty, live in very precarious conditions and have no possibility of achieving even a minimal level of instruction and preparation for work.

Insecurity about their future, coupled with present dissatisfaction and other forms of pressure, prompt some of them to seek relief in drugs, alcohol, delinquency, suicide, or emigration.

Those on the other hand who live in favourable economic situations can profit by social services of education and advancement. But although they may be committed to improving their state of life, they easily become exposed to the temptations of the consumer society.

- 32** But there is also a positive aspect that emerges from the life of these youngsters: in the present struggle for social transformation many of them play a role which gives a thrust to progress. They set about re-awakening people's consciences by gathering together and organizing groups that work for justice and peace, and by themselves becoming social workers and community animators.

33
Newly
independent
countries

Because of the large-scale commitment of the Congregation in recent years to extending its presence in the African area, there has been an increase in the number of salesian communities working in contexts in which an *irreversible process of decolonization* is in progress. It is a process set in motion by the recent gaining of political independence, but it requires too that a certain cultural and political servitude be overcome.

In the development of social life in such a context, it is quite easy to meet a series of difficulties resulting from political instability, the consequences of inefficiency, corruption at leadership levels, and the interference of foreign powers.

In an attempt to promote a national cultural unity, evident efforts are being made to integrate group sensitivities and tribal traditions which stem from different cultural heritages..

Important attempts are also in progress to amalga-

mate local cultural demands with forms of life imported from outside, but results are not always satisfactory. And then there are also real tensions, which occasionally break out into conflicts, between fidelity to one's own roots and the process of modernization which rolls relentlessly on and is accompanied by the myth of consumerism. This delusion, which drives people to the adoption of western ideas and behaviour even in the most remote villages, can result in an almost complete loss of tribal values.

34 In general education has not been successful in putting forward real models, able to harmonize with the situation of individuals and of local society. Those that have been suggested appear rather as the embodiment of aspirations and programmes transferred from other contexts, for which they were originally designed.

All this has happened while the need for educational services was erupting; and in the feverish desire to meet such requests insufficient attention was given to the necessary cultural and pedagogical requirements.

35 Society in these newly independent countries is characterized by a widespread religious atmosphere, which extends to every aspect of existence and is evident in both personal and public life. It appears as an attitude of esteem and openness to the religious world, mixed in with forms of fear and submission to unrecognized forces which have something in common with magic.

36 The christian faith, and the Catholic Church in particular, have spread rapidly in the brief space of a century of evangelization since its establishment in the country concerned.

The christian communities and ecclesiastical organization have moved progressively towards a policy

of consolidation and of indigenization. Slowly but surely the faith has become embodied in local culture. Vocations are plentiful and charismata abound.

But where evangelization is of too recent origin, a growing adherence to the Church has been accompanied by situations in which the faith is still superficial, and a facile syncretism has become part of life. As far as adherence to christianity is concerned, unity between faith and life is still weak and equivocal, especially in the fields of family morality, economy and politics. In many cases the key issue is a plan for a solid catechumenate.

Independent christian churches are numerous in Africa, as also are sects and movements based on a strong religious syncretism.

The proclamation of the Gospel still finds fertile soil, as is evident from the progress in evangelization in individual countries. It is accompanied on the part of christian communities by the seeking of their own characteristic expression of faith.

37 The great majority of the population are young people. But they live in a disturbing and radically precarious state which has a negative influence on growth, education, work, religious options and moral life. A determining factor is their strongly subordinate position with regard to adults: an African boy counts for next to nothing and a girl still less, while the salesian presence aims at boosting their worth and importance.

Other determining elements are the massive movement from the villages to the outskirts of the towns – an uncontrolled urbanization that has run riot, and the double mentality (traditional and modern) evident in society. There is a desire to shake off models of life of their own culture so as to take on others, and this change is looked on as cultural advancement.

38
**Exodus from
authoritarian
regimes**

Other communities are rebuilding or reshaping after long and difficult years in *societies firmly controlled by authoritarian regimes*. At the present time they are willing to go along with a rapid and unforeseen change towards a different system of social and political life. The situation is redolent with hope but is fluid and still evolving.

The new climate of freedom allows for political freedom and for cultural and religious expressions of many kinds. There is a commitment to the building up of society in this direction.

At the same time there is emerging a strong desire for economic wellbeing, for so long beyond the bounds of possibility, which hankers after a style of life typical of developed countries. Warnings have not been lacking against the risk of assuming the accompanying negative aspects at the same time.

39 The religious phenomenon does not appear in the same guise in every country. Various components enter into its definition: tradition, the role of the Church as the defender of human rights in the preceding period, the integration of christian practice with popular culture, the adherence to the faith by the majority of the population, the defence of christian values, and the continual persevering effort of the Church to educate in the faith.

Without prejudice to the fundamental religious sense found in the majority, it is quite clear that the long period of "official atheism" imposed through the scholastic system and cultural pressure, and propagated by every means of social communication and by political and social discrimination against believers, has left deep marks.

Respect for cultural heritage has been weakened to a great extent, and for this reason religious sects find fertile ground among the young who are looking for permanent values.

40 It is accepted nowadays that communities, signs and personalities linked with the religious world have been valid points of reference and support for the forces that have prompted and sustained the exodus from such a system.

In this way the christian faith has come to be seen as a historic force, able to stir up cohesion and resistance, and committed to the efficacious promotion of freedom and human dignity.

41 In all this the young have played an important part.

From their adolescent years they have been compelled to live within a framework of political power, expressed in a rigid style of education and in organizations of the regime. Many of them however have not only resisted various kinds of oppression, but have become real apostles among their companions. They have become leaders and have instigated social change, especially in universities and factories.

Today many cultural possibilities lie open to them, despite the limitations imposed by economic difficulties. Their research continues into what kind of options they should make at present and what direction their future aims should take. It is a research which is obligatory, especially in face of the vacuum of ideals and culture left behind by the collapse of the (marxist) ideological system, and which needs to be rapidly re-filled.

42
Indigenous
groups and
ethnic
minorities

A further context to which we draw attention as significant for the salesian presence among youth is that in which live certain confreres who work with *indigenous groups*, and to them may be linked the situation of some *ethnic minorities*. These groups belong to wider social and political contexts which, however, keep them on the margin if they do not exclude them entirely.

Their lives and social organization differ from the norm in the context to which they belong. Their tradi-

tional form of life is not generally considered of any importance, and they are merely tolerated by the majority. They are considered as a kind of 'archaeological reserve', of 'foreign presence': they are looked on as a reality on the way to extinction, as elements to be integrated into social life or expelled from it.

And yet they present notable qualities and have their own particular view of the world, which it is of interest at the present day to know and understand more deeply.

Among the characteristics of these groups there is found a great love for what they look upon as "mother earth", a vital living space which guarantees their identity as a group of humanity, a true people and authentic nation. The role of the family is to be a unit of work, the centre of communal values, and a defence against disruption and colonialism.

They are able to express profound human and social qualities in their lives, and have a marked religious sense. A contemplative attitude comes natural to them, in a simple style of life in which they are aesthetically sensitive to the beauties of nature.

Their group characteristics are best expressed when they form federations which are able to create a strong alliance for the defence of their rights.

43

The Church is present among them through numerous communities of men and women religious. In recent times, in fact, she has become a courageous 'sign and reality of salvation' against repeated attempts to despoil and destroy them.

The missionaries have become active promoters of their development; they help them to play a leading part in the making of their own history, to be aware of their own cultural identity and to preserve their roots.

Catechists and other ministries are a great help in the launching of a catechumenal pilgrimage that will lead them to faith without uprooting them from their culture.

Many young people, animated and supported by the presence of missionaries and volunteers, have organized themselves into cooperatives, able to make careful critical judgements and ready for insertion into the local context.

- 44 The younger generations have had the benefit of better instruction, and sometimes this has led to a tendency for them to abandon their groups of origin.

Some of them, attracted by greater possibilities of wellbeing, emigrate towards the towns; in this way they jeopardize their patrimony of humanity and faith, as well as running the risk of picking up the worst elements of the new environment.

2. THE YOUTH SITUATION

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one
(1 Jn 2,14)

- 45 The salesian community investigates different contexts because it is concerned to understand the circumstances in which young people live and how they react to them. It is not always easy to do this. Educational and pastoral ability seems to get lost in the face of the life of the young which varies so widely in its elements, but which at the same time has so many points of convergence. This variety of situations includes both *positive and negative aspects* which open up perspectives and also imply risks for education to the faith.

SOME FACTS OF THE YOUTH SITUATION

46 **Forms of** **poverty**

In every context are to be found various forms of poverty, which often take on alarming dimensions because of their extension or devastating effects.

For those who suffer them they represent a snare and, to some extent, an obstacle to development, while for others they can produce a new sensitivity as regards the forms lived in the adult world around them.

47 The reaction of the young to so many forms of poverty varies widely.

Some of them become hostile, and occasionally violent, towards those responsible for social organization. They strive by every means to emerge from their situation of need and organize forms of struggle. They are in permanent conflict with society, and have no time to open themselves to any beliefs other than their dominating ideology.

A considerable part of youth on the other hand wait passively for a solution to the problems, not finding in themselves sufficient will or energy to plan any different future. They are youngsters with no ideas for their tomorrow, concerned only about the present and their survival.

But there is also a growing number of young people who play the part of the critical conscience of civil and religious society, and do their utmost to spread the awareness of the real possibilities of change. They point out the more immediate problems of their society and are alert to world requirements in such dramatic matters as the economic gap between North and South, military spending, peaceful coexistence of peoples, and social discrimination. They are looking for new ways to liberation, seeking support from civil and ecclesial communities. They are generous, and united with their fellow men, to whose good they are deeply committed. Among them are born and develop

many vocations, and the Church finds them a source of pastoral workers, catechists, community animators, volunteers, etc.

48
**The desire
to build**

An interesting objective which involves to a large extent youth of every context is *the desire to build a valid human personality for the present day*.

Many of the traditional models are fading away; and when faced by the multiplicity of new models, the young find themselves alone in trying to make sense of the situation. An ever growing number of groups and places are offering proposals for formation, with the result that various influences and kinds of dependence are emerging which are difficult to handle.

Messages technically and psychologically tailored to youthful requirements serve only to fragment their interior world and produce individuals with a weak identity.

Many youngsters seem timorous and uncertain about their future and unable to make any clear and enduring decisions.

49
**The search
for new values**

There are many others nevertheless who refuse to throw up the sponge and abandon in this easy fashion their dream of building a new and different society. They appeal to *new values*, able to regenerate personal relationships and which offer a richer social structure.

Some emphatic points are emerging from the world of youth: the centrality of the individual as the beginning, subject and end of all social institutions; the rediscovery of the values of equal dignity and reciprocal relationship between man and woman; a new way of building rapport based on freedom and justice; a collection of values linked with diversity (e.g. tolerance, ecumenism, respect for what is different) and solidarity (the new vision of peace and development, the totality and universality of growth); renewed attention to cultural and religious realities, beyond

purely technical aspects; a marked sensitivity to the great problems of the world, fostered also by the notable possibilities young people now have of making contact with other realities and with different cultural and religious traditions; a significant rediscovery of the environment and the need to safeguard it.

50 Finally, there are two attitudes that strongly condition the building of "new identities". They are "conformism", understood as an irresponsible and non-critical adaptation made without giving thought to originality and novelty; and "pragmatism", which is over-concerned with the immediate present.

51
**A call for new
relationships**

Everywhere there is a strong *appeal for new relationships*. This is primarily a seeking for communication, to overcome isolation and establish contacts. It may also include the desire to satisfy immediate needs and requirements, in the hope of solving more easily the trials and problems of daily life. But frequently the tendency is towards interpersonal relationships that are stable and productive of practical commitments.

52 The linkage with the adult world, though not without its problems, is now marked by less tension and aggression, though these are sometimes replaced by various kinds of apathy and embarrassment. At any rate we are living through a period of greater tranquility.

With other young people the relationship is expressed spontaneously in ways in which there is intense co-involvement.

The "getting together" of boys and girls is a fact which at the present day is becoming ever more universal and takes place quite naturally. The sharing of experiences and of formation processes fosters a mutual complementarity which is enriching. But there are times when promiscuity trivializes the relationship. Even a strong affective bond can be broken when another relationship seems to respond better to one's expectations.

EDUCATIVE INSTITUTIONS

53 Worthy of special attention in the youth situation is the relationship established by young people with institutions known today as '*educative agencies*'.

A common factor to keep in mind is that youngsters feel themselves to be part of these, and at the same time to be outside them. They feel part of them, and despite all appearances the relationship is a consistent one. They try to use them to the maximum for their own personal growth. At the same time they are outside them, in the sense that these '*agencies*' exert only a relative influence on their life options, which are based on criteria other than those of the institutions.

54
The family

In the present-day crisis of institutions, the *family* can provide a firm anchorage for the young. It represents a calm and peaceful place of refuge, and a sincerely affective environment that normally ensures a positive relationship of mutual respect and autonomy between adults and young people. But its educative and religious value has fallen off considerably. The new ties a youngster makes outside the family, the cultural divide that separates youth and adults, the impossibility for parents to follow up on their children after adolescence, all tend to exclude the family from the growth process. As a place of affection and understanding, it is no longer experienced as a primary environment for cultural development.

55 At the present day many families in different contexts are passing through a grave crisis marked by a weakening of internal bonds and an exaggerated desire for autonomy.

Many young people are suffering the consequences of this kind of family breakdown, caused by infidelity, superficial relationships, divorce, distress, alcoholism and drugs.

A growing number of people are psychologically unprepared to be fathers or mothers, and are incapable of showing affection for their partner or their children.

Situations like these create in many young people serious consequences which appear as an enormous affective inadequacy, insecurity, maladjustment, and the risk of aberrancy.

56
The
scholastic
institution

In the *educational system* of our complex societies one notes a prevalence of instruction and scientific data over educational intentions and the overall formation of the individual. This is something which creates a separation between educational system and life, between teaching and the integral formation of the person, and makes difficult the development of a personal culture. The involvement also of numerous other 'educational agencies' reduces the influence of all of them and detracts from the value and content of proposals offered to the young.

57
Religious
institutions

Religious structures are today meeting with growing interest and renewed confidence, even though their influence on the decisions and life choices of the young is limited to certain areas of their life.

For ease of analysis we may reduce the complex and fretted religious world of the young to two basic categories.

58

A majority of young people find their seeking of a new way of life incompatible with the lack of flexibility of a religious institution, which does not in fact seem to favour the innovations continually called for by daily life. And so these youngsters are led to distance themselves from the institution and live the religious experience as something internal and private, without any significant influence on their practical life.

- 59 A minority, on the other hand, feel a strong communion with others who share the same feelings and cultural and religious traits. They are able to give strong and tenacious expression to a commitment consistent with their own religious faith. They manifest it publicly and strive to renew its gestures, symbolism and content to make it more expressive in a changing world.

OTHER SITUATIONS INFLUENCING YOUTH

- 60 **Work** *The place and kind of work* exert a considerable influence on the young and on their personal and social identity.

For many of them work is an indispensable condition for the survival of themselves and their families. It marks a new relationship with the adult world and secures a place for the youngster in social life. For others work means leaving the family, beginning the independent management of their own lives and the social confirmation of their own abilities.

In either case, work creates in the youngster a sense of greater self-security and new attitudes: at the workplace solidarity and friendships are born, experiences exchanged and influences met with.

In many cases entry into the world of work breaks the weak attachment to the christian community, and there is the risk that faith itself will exert a diminishing influence until it becomes totally extraneous to life. But on the other side of the picture there is a growing number of youngsters who at their place of work manage to translate their faith into practical social commitment.

There are two aspects that should not be overlooked. In some countries there are many young people who are condemned to long periods of unemployment or only casual work; they suffer from a sense of

personal failure or social ineffectiveness and remain in a state of economic and family dependence. For many boys on the other hand the work experience comes before they are ready for it, and you have the phenomenon of child labour, often in precarious conditions and situations of exploitation, without any guarantee of physical safety or the safeguarding of personal rights. These youngsters have no access to educative institutions or even a minimum of culture. They can quite easily take refuge therefore in escapism or even delinquency.

61
The
youth group

In the formation process particular importance attaches to the *youth group*. There is no doubt that this is a widespread reality with rich perspectives.

In contact with his peers the young person finds criteria and practical guidelines for life, looks at the facts of his experience and compares them with the past, and expresses himself with gratifying self-confidence.

For many youngsters the group represents the only means for bringing together the results of the scattered fragmentation that continually besets their lives; it makes it easier to overcome the loneliness which is an integral part of the process of self-development.

Sometimes adherence to the group ideals is only partial, and the group itself can then become more of a refuge or way of escape from the difficulties that life presents.

62
The "street"

The "street" is always there as a place of refuge for poor youngsters separated from their families or on the fringe of society, who are driven to use any means for survival. In contexts of poverty it is for many of them their only home, their only place of work, and their only school of life.

But at the present day the street has taken on a new dimension. The search for new relationships and

the desire for freedom leads youngsters to find places where they can meet together that are both simple and of easy access. Indications of this are the strong influence of the street and of places for meeting and recreation, where ideas are formed and multiply or cancel each other out.

In such places the young people seek the pleasure of meeting others and feeling happy together. Their purpose is not to do anything in particular but just to talk and share ideas, and most of all to amuse themselves. The force and incidence of free time on the formation of the personal identity of the young person grows to such an extent that it eventually outstrips the importance of the classical educative agencies.

The street and other places for getting together help to overcome the loneliness which is a characteristic feature of present-day society; they make up for the lack of family affection; they provide personal security and the possibility of meeting and friendship.

But when considering the street, or the other environments in which youngsters come together spontaneously, it is easy to be carried away by ideas that are ambiguous in their consequences, that encourage the seeking of immediate enjoyment, that lead to mob behaviour, or to escapism through the use of alcohol or drugs, and to other forms of deviant behaviour.

63

Social communication

Young people communicate quite easily through the new kinds of language (music, TV, videocassette), which are creating a new culture, often unknown and incomprehensible to adults, but within which they themselves get along quite naturally. These languages spread models of life⁴ and provide a continuous and copious flow of information on the world and its problems.

The young in general make great use of them. For some of them the mass media are positive occasions

⁴ Cf. C 43

of growth. By their intelligent use they can form a critical conscience and an open mentality. They lead to the making of better founded and committed options, and develop a sensitivity to the values of peace, justice and tolerance.

But there are other youngsters, and they are many, who approach the mass media in an uncritical fashion, leaving themselves open to the risk of ever greater dependence. For them they are a means of escapism, occasions for becoming conditioned, for the formation of false needs and mistaken life models.

3. YOUTH AND THE FAITH

Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path... other seed fell on rocky ground... other seed fell among thorns... and other seed fell into good soil...

(Mk 4, 3-8)

In the contexts and situations we have just described, how do young people see the faith? What do they expect from it? What do they ask of it?

Their hopes and expectations vary a great deal.

64 **Those far from the Church**

Young people not in touch with the Church at all form the largest category, but the reasons for their separation are varied and manifested in different ways.

Some have moved away because, although they live in families basically sensitive to religious values, under the influence of progressively more dechristianized environments they have little by little lost the faith, without ever having abandoned it in a conscious fashion. It is a kind of silent departure.

Others are at a distance simply because they were born into families and cultural contexts in which the sense of life, its criteria and the things that go with it are autonomous and totally unconnected with religious values.

Still others are far away because, lacking life's fundamental requirements through poverty and emargination, they are quite unaware of the existence of christian and religious values; or if they do know of them they do not see them as having any weight and significance for their own life experience, obsessed as they are by the need for daily survival.

65 To the category of those who are far away belong also those young people who simply exclude any religious reference from their lives. Faulty education may have led them to pass from an intense religious practice to its complete rejection.

The reasons for this vary considerably: sometimes it is through negative witness; or because the kind of religious approach was lacking in quality and gradual presentation, or was not assimilated at a personal level; or because religious observance has been replaced by adherence to ideas and political movements which do not recognize the humanizing effect of religious experience; or because in today's consumer society they have embarked on the acquiring of a condition of wellbeing, and faith has become for them something irrelevant and even an obstacle.

66 Finally there are young people who think they are far from God because they have given up religious practices and have abandoned ecclesial institutions and teaching, but not their ethical commitment. Their state is such that they are fairly open to dialogue.

67
**Youth open to
religious
discussion**

Then there are *young people who are open to a certain participation*. They feel a real need, even though only in a confused way, to find a meaning for

their lives, and values to underlie their choices and actions.

They are youngsters with good desires who are sensitive to religious incentives, but they can quite easily get bogged down in a light or superficial way characterized by bursts of emotion on coming into contact with exceptional persons or events; but they are not concerned about acquiring an organized knowledge of the christian mystery, nor of living coherently according to the Church's teaching.

But they are usually well disposed for discussion and the acquiring of deeper knowledge.

68
Young people
who "practise"
religion

Resembling the latter to some extent, though with different emphases, are youngsters who "practise religion" without motivation: they comply with regular religious observances, but without depth or fullness. For them these are more a matter of social custom than a conscious expression of seeking God and the coming of his Kingdom. They have not given themselves on their own initiative to Christ and their fellow men, nor are they disposed to do so, usually because their religious option is far from mature.

The result is that in them the faith does not realize all its potentiality, christian life is not accepted in its prophetic aspects of an original adventure, and charity does not become self-donation, witness, ecclesial service, and social and political commitment.

69
Committed
youngsters

"Committed youngsters" form the smallest group, but their presence is a real sign of hope. For them the faith is a gift; it is a discovery, a surprise, and always a joy. They continually reflect on the christian mystery; they strive always to be consistent, and the various forms of apostolic, social and political commitment and the various vocations, lived with generosity, give life to their deeply felt and openly manifested membership of the Church.

And among these youngsters there are some who have lived their lives in simple kindness and dedication to others, even to the point of attaining *sanctity*. They can be found in our own history: Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Ceferino Namuncura, and others.

Don Bosco made of them outstanding leaders in the evangelization of other young people. Our documents speak of them as the real objective of our work of evangelization.⁵

They have been taken by God and placed at the service of their own companions and the community. Their existence is a clear manifestation of the powerful action of the Holy Spirit, and is a stimulus for the salesian communities themselves.

Contact with *young people belonging to other christian denominations* is no longer something exceptional for us at the present day. The Congregation now has places in geographical areas traditionally linked with other denominations, and more and more boys and young men of other religions frequent our works.

In recent times, through the influence of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and the ecumenical movement that has followed it, a new climate is apparent almost everywhere: a spirit of religious tolerance and the widespread desire for unity characteristic of our present era.

These youngsters, by reason of their faith, live a life which as regards spiritual elements and moral demands has much in common with Catholicism. Many of them are open to dialogue on religious values and are willing to work with us for the Kingdom.

They come to us willingly, either from personal choice or because their families find the atmosphere in our establishments attractive, or for simple reasons of convenience. Mutual esteem and respect for the re-

⁵ Cf. GC21 27-28

72
Young people
of other
religions

ligious option enable diffidence and differences to be overcome. We grow in our appreciation for each other and are united in the realization of common projects.

This is not the case however with the fundamentalist sects found in various contexts.

Among the *youth of other religions* can be found examples of the characteristics already described for various groups, from those at a distance to those already committed. Many of them admire Jesus, but the majority do not embrace christianity.

There are many reasons for this: there is the fear that if they become christians they will have to abandon the culture and tradition of their own social group; there is a radical feeling that christianity is the depositary of a foreign faith imported from abroad; and in some countries the lack of religious freedom plays a part.

Of influence too is the fact that many christians are easygoing and do not provide credible witness, fighting among themselves while appealing to the same Christ.

All this weighs heavily upon and conditions the first movements towards the faith.

73

We may add too the interpretation given of the moral and religious crisis in traditionally christian countries as though this were the result of a colossal failure of christianity; young people from eastern parts have come to such countries in search of peace, harmony and enlightenment, and have found that christianity seemed to have little or nothing to offer beyond what could be found in their own religions.

Self-sufficiency, born of a partly true and partly debatable interpretation of these facts, presents a difficulty to dialogue and is an obstacle to the acceptance of the scandal of the Gospel with a humble heart.

74 But all things considered, these religions offer a good basis for comparison with christianity. It is a question of helping people to discover and increase their ability of opening themselves up to God and to the proposition of faith; of helping them to distinguish what is true and authentic from what is false and deceptive; of accompanying the young on their path to a meeting of communion with God, using the good elements that already exist in their faith and their desires.

4. THE MORE URGENT CHALLENGES

When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

(Mt 16, 2-3)

75 After examining the contexts, the youth situation, and the concrete attitude of the young as regards the faith, the Salesian Congregation feels itself challenged to take a stand and commit itself. But in what direction?

In the process of its discernment, the GC23 has singled out certain hurdles which, in its opinion, pose a stronger and more direct challenge to the communities because of their gravity, urgency and extension. They are matters which on the one hand seem to be provocations to our mission of educators to the faith; and on the other appear as real opportunities rich in possibilities. They are new occasions that call for creativity and courage.

They express in a clear and detailed fashion the two ideas on which the faith is required to shed new light and significance: the individual and society; personal identity and the universal solidarity with all men.

Five such hurdles are indicated:

- the challenge of those "far away or outside";
- the challenge of "poverty";
- the challenge of the "irrelevance of the faith in life and culture";
- the challenge of "other religions";
- the challenge of "life".

76
**Those far away
or outside**

The challenge of the young people who remain at a distance from the world of faith is the most universal fact emerging from the analyses that have been made. One meets it even in those who have passed through the first stages of christian initiation.

Many young people, with a freedom of choice before them, confine their lives within the framework of a secularist vision which is most attractive to them, but leads them to concentrate entirely on the present and lose all awareness of their destiny.

77

Young people far from the Church are numerous and present a big challenge to salesian communities, who are aware that the gap between them and the community is very often based on a difference of mentality and a lack of communication:

- How is the community to overcome the physical, psychological and cultural barriers and reach the world of the young from which we are separated?
- How can we make contact with those who are part of our environment but remain at a distance and have no interest in the faith?

The very manner of living and presenting the faith by the community receives a rude shock, and gives rise to the question:

- Does the community really live its faith as a dimen-

sion which gives savour and direction to life? If so, in what ways does the real value of this become apparent to today's young people and help them to follow the same path?

78
Poverty

The social condition of "*poverty*" is a challenge to every person of good will. The impossibility or great practical difficulty of self-realization as individuals, in the absence of the minimum requirements for adequate development, pose serious questions.

And they are questions which become still more distressing when one realizes that the impoverishment of many has a direct relationship with the enrichment of a few.

79

Those who, as disciples of Christ, see and understand these realities and ponder them in their heart, are called upon to show sympathy with those in such situations and be united with them in their sufferings. The prophetic character of religious life calls us to be the embodiment of the Church which desires to abandon itself to the radicalism of the Beatitudes and bear witness to her. This gift of the Spirit makes us more sensitive to the challenge of poverty.

He who is "rich in mercy"⁶ sends us to be the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves, to be poor with the poor, to take up their cause, to seek justice for those suffering from its lack, to collaborate in the transformation of a reality that is far from the Kingdom of God.

80

When we look at the social condition of poverty with the eyes of Don Bosco, and see how it destroys so many young people whose horizons do not extend beyond their immediate needs for survival or an ideal devoid of sense, we feel challenged to make our salesian presence among the poor more consistent and effective.

⁶ Eph 2,4

And we ask ourselves:

- How does the salesian community live the radical sense of the beatitude of poverty, and how does it bear witness to it? What sort of education and christian life do we present to youngsters who live in a world of poverty, injustice, distress and abandonment, so that it may be meaningful and liberating?
- Especially in those countries where the standard of life is high, how do we educate young people to become aware of the injustice created by our affluent world?

81 One of the aspects of the challenge is that emarginated and impoverished youth, to the extent that they are open to the Gospel, themselves become our own evangelizers: “we recognize the gospel values they stand for”, we are told by our Constitutions.⁷

82 Salesian communities are called to be a sign of hope for these young people. Once we decide to share with them our love as educators living by faith, we feel compelled to put an end to situations of lethargy and indifference.

Daily contact with these youngsters, enriched by signs of the presence of Christ, produces in the community new incentives for living the faith with greater truth; it helps towards the celebration of the Kingdom and salvation, a realistic search for new motives for conversion and solidarity, and to making the faith a saving reality in history.

83
**Irrelevance
of the faith**

The “irrelevance of the faith in life and culture” has become an axiom of “modern” society, as if it were proved and beyond question that being religious means being in opposition to the laws and movements which control men of today in the fields of economy, politics and the exercise of power.

⁷ C 29

In the welfare state, and correspondingly in other contexts, religious values have been moved to the margin of the components of the new society and of the aspects considered essential for social life.

For the young, and especially for those living in this kind of atmosphere, questions about God are of no importance, and religious terminology (salvation, sin, faith, future life) has lost all its significance. There is no point therefore in talking about the relationship between faith and life, or faith and culture. Religious concepts can no longer be expressed in an intelligible way in the field of culture. This is a dramatic aspect of the otherwise lawful process of secularization.

- 84** And youngsters who are believers? They too tend to live their faith "in private", without linking it with the real life that rejects it. These situations of isolation, of restriction to private practice, of being extra-neous, are met with more or less everywhere and especially in the mass media.

And very soon youngsters find themselves facing a choice between two alternatives:

– Should they enter the social scene and face adult life without following or being guided by religious criteria? Or should they stay faithful to their own ideals and horizons, those of faith, more especially in their private lives?

Salesians too have to ask themselves:

– How can the young be educated to build a new christian identity within the developmental processes of human values?

- 85** As a consequence of all this, the community itself runs the risk of being unable to make credible its own faith and to pass it on, unless it finds a suitable place, a sufficient length of time, and appropriate language for the education to the faith of those to whom it is sent.

The place cannot be other than its historical life

setting: the new social reality. The period of time is that of the various stages or ages of life. The language – such as can communicate within the new culture.

The challenge is great, and even enormous. It is not a matter of meeting questions with abstract replies; the whole dynamism of life and civilization is involved, the sense of the various initiatives of daily existence and, at the same time, of the premises for any educational project deemed possible. In the last analysis it is a matter of being able to keep on hoping.

"Contact with other religions" is a challenge met with in the various contexts described, in different ways and with different characteristics which nevertheless have something in common. How can Jesus Christ be made present, he "who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his heart"?⁸

After 2,000 years christianity is still seen, in these contexts, as a religion remote from or foreign to the prevailing cultural sensitivities, and at times is considered even dangerous by some religious groups of fundamentalist tendencies. A person who feels himself threatened becomes closed in on himself, and any attempt at mutual understanding, collaboration or exchange of views becomes impossible.

The most effective responses to the challenge of contact with young people of other religions are sincere and practical dialogue, a deep and careful inculturation of the christian faith and a courageous evangelization of culture,⁹ and the witness of a community enthusiastically committed in self-sacrificing service. How can the community bring about a sincere and open dialogue with these religions, emphasizing their positive values while recognizing their limitations? How can the salesian values of the preventive system,

⁸ RH 8

⁹ Cf. C 7

especially loving kindness, be lived as the first christian witness and the best way to present the Gospel?¹⁰

87
Life

The challenges referred to up to this point are disturbing though they give rise to real opportunities. But there is one challenge that is a synthesis of all the others and permeates them all: the challenge of "*life*".

88

It is experienced by many young people in its most distressing manifestations: in the hunger of those seeking food; in the oppression of those wanting freedom; in solitude seeking fellowship; in profanation seeking dignity; in bewilderment looking for security; in absurdities wanting to find sense; in violence craving for peace.

There are other youngsters who are happy in their studies, in their family and friends, in their living standard and spare time, and they finish up by feeling no need for faith and an afterlife.

And finally there are those who want to live a full life. This is a desire which at the present day takes on particular characteristics: the search for a new quality of life which, once the primary needs have been met, provides a response to other more personal, relational and religious needs; sensitivity to the dignity of the human person and his rights; the search for new motives for living in today's world as real men. These challenges find an echo in the entire existence of the salesian community; they impinge on every aspect of its identity and compel it to verify and evaluate what it is and what it does. Measuring itself against Jesus of Nazareth, it will have to verify that it is really at the service of life threatened and destroyed by so many forms of death. It will have to rethink its idea of "christian salvation", enlightened by art. 31 of the Constitutions: "We educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total wellbeing of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man".

¹⁰ Cf. R 2

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Constitution: "We educate and evangelize according
to a plan for the total wellbeing of man directed to
Christ the perfect Man."

THE FAITH JOURNEY

1. THE COMMUNITY FACED WITH THE CHALLENGES

*Two of them were going to a village...
Jesus himself drew near and went with
them...*

(Lk 24, 13.15)

89
**The community
is questioned**

The community feels itself *called upon to meet the challenges*. It accepts the task with humility and pastoral fervour. It is convinced that the matter is not just one of simple youth problems but of the signs of the times, by means of which the Lord makes himself known and indicates what he wants.

The community responds by examining its own life, the perspectives and projects which have so far guided it in its pastoral commitment, and is convinced that it can meet the requirements of the young. In salesian tradition, in fact, a happy coincidence is evident between what young people are looking for, and what our apostolic consecration prompts us to give them.

90
**rethinks
the mission
it has received**

Underlying this hope there are certain firm beliefs. The youth mission, in which every confrere and community feel the joy of giving their service, allows us to keep up with the times. We are collaborating in God's work, and to this end he gives us his light and grace. Through what they ask of us the young prevent us from getting bogged down in the past; they educate us and prompt us to find new and courageous responses.

The dawn of a “*new evangelization*”¹ is a call to us to take up the building of a more human society, and asks us above all to renew in fresh contexts our faith in the Good News brought to man by Jesus Christ, and even to make a qualitative leap in this regard.

91
and undertakes
to provide
a response

We are convinced that God is at work in history, that the Spirit of the risen Lord is present wherever good is being done and calls upon the community to confess Christ and reawaken its own faith.

We do not have precise replies of assured efficacy to all the challenges or to any of them in particular. They are not mere passing difficulties, but indications of a “change of epoch” that we must learn to assess in the light of faith.

92
drawing
inspiration
from
Don Bosco's
experience

We are brought to the same conviction by our *spiritual experience as Don Bosco's followers*.

The Spirit present in his heart attracted youngsters not just to his own person, but to God. Despite the complexity of situations and the precarious nature of his resources, he lived as one “seeing him who is invisible”.² With trust he sowed seeds of faith through kindly gestures, and formed others to do likewise.

This is the experience that we too at the present day want to pass on to youth: through this mysterious presence of the Spirit, life (even though it be lived in poverty) has within itself the force of redemption and the seed of happiness. This is the substance of what is meant by “*educating to the faith*”.

And so we intend to allow ourselves to be converted by their provocations and help them to bank on the faith. *We are confident that we can offer them a path* that will lead them from a desire for life to life's fullness, i.e. to develop a style of existence which reproduces that of Jesus of Nazareth as it was relived by

¹ CL 34

² Heb 11,27; cf. C 21

Don Bosco. This is the substance of “*salesian youth spirituality*”.

93
following
the example
of the Lord

All this we do in imitation of the Lord and following the way of charity of the Good Shepherd³ on the way to Emmaus.⁴ We reproduce his attitude: we take the first step in approaching the young and joining them; we travel with them along the same road, listening to them and sharing their hopes and anxieties; we patiently explain to them the demanding message of the Gospel; and we stay with them, to repeat the gesture of breaking the bread and stirring up in them the ardour of faith that will transform them into credible witnesses and proclaimers of God's word.

³ Cf. C 11

⁴ Cf. Lk 24, 13-36

2. IL CAMMINO DI EDUCAZIONE ALLA FEDE

Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man
(Lk 2,52)

MEETING GOD IN THE YOUNG

94
The work
of God

For the salesian, educating youth to the faith means "work and prayer". He is aware that by committing himself to the salvation of the young he is experiencing something of the fatherhood of God⁵ "who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them".⁶

Don Bosco has taught us to *recognize God's operative presence* in our work of education, and to experience it as life and love.

95
recognized

We believe that God loves the young. This is the conviction which is at the origin of our vocation, and which motivates our life and all our pastoral activity.

We believe that Jesus wants to share "his life" with young people: they are the hope of a new future, and in their expectations they bear the seeds of the Kingdom.

We believe that the Spirit is present in them and that through them he wants to build a more authentic and human christian community. He is already at work in individuals and groups. He has given them a prophetic task to carry out in the world which is also the world of all of us.

⁵ Cf. C 12

⁶ C 20

We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognizing their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life.

In this way our work of education becomes the preeminent context in which to meet him.

96
in every
youth situation

By virtue of this grace no youngster can be excluded from our hope and activity, especially if he be suffering the consequences of poverty, downfall or sin. We are also certain that in each young person God has placed the germ of his "new life".

This prompts us to make them aware of such a gift, and to take a lot of trouble with them so that they may develop this life in all its fullness. When our efforts do not seem to achieve the desired result, we nevertheless continue to believe that the God of hope and salvation has gone before us in our suffering.

THE DEPARTURE POINT

97
Go to
the young

Our obligation to educate youth to the faith often comes up against an obstacle: many youngsters are not reached by either our message or our witness. Between ourselves and the majority of them there is a gap which is often physical but more especially psychological and cultural.

And so the first thing we have to do is *remove this gap between us, approach them and get close to them*. In this too Don Bosco is our teacher. "Being away from you, my dear sons," he wrote from Rome in 1884, "and not being able to see or hear you, upsets me more than you can imagine".⁷

He went looking for youngsters: he walked the streets and squares; he went into backyards and

⁷ MB 17, 107

workplaces. He met them one by one and invited them to come to his Oratory.

This love and the gestures that accompanied it were not only part of an educational method, but the original expression of his faith in God and his desire to proclaim Christ to the young.

98
Meet them
where
they are
to be found

Going to *meet the young where they are to be found*, welcoming them into our environments with disinterested concern, attending to their requirements and aspirations, are for us fundamental steps that precede any other stage of education to the faith.

99
Building
on the good
they already
have

The journey of education to the faith begins by giving due value to the patrimony every youngster has in himself, and which a true educator can bring to light with patient intelligence. He will make opportune use of reason and of his pastoral sensitivity to discover God's design, which is sometimes hidden but not completely obliterated from the youngster's heart. He will stake his ability for understanding and affection in an effort to "make himself loved".

A kind reception also gives rise to the development of reciprocal friendship, esteem and responsibility, which eventually makes the young person aware that he has a value and significance as an individual that surpasses his wildest dreams. And this draws forth his best energies.

100
In an educative
environment

A welcoming reception has all the greater effect when the youngster is brought into contact not with an individual alone, but with a *whole setting that is full of life and presents so many opportunities*. The Oratory is the basic pattern and model for all our environments: "a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes, a school that prepares pupils for life, and a playground where friends can meet and enjoy themselves".⁸

⁸ C 40

The "oratorian" setting is not primarily a specific educational structure, but rather an atmosphere characteristic of all salesian work. Its principal elements are confidence and a family spirit, joy and festivity which accompany work and the doing of one's duty, the many free expressions of youthful leadership, and the friendly presence of educators able to make suggestions in line with the interests of the young and at the same time inculcate faith options and values.

Don Bosco refers nostalgically to this atmosphere in his letter of 1884 from Rome, when he asks for a return "to the days of affection and christian confidence" between boys and Salesians; "the days when hearts were open with simple candour; days of love and real joy...".⁹

Don Bosco was wonderful at creating environments based on education and faith, in which his boys became missionaries among their peers.

For this reason he was always demanding about the educative quality of such surroundings, and he did not hesitate to make even severe decisions in regard to youngsters and collaborators who in any way openly rejected or compromised the educational atmosphere.

In this way, in the close relationship between personal contact with every youngster on the part of the educator and the rich encouragement provided by the surroundings, there have matured in salesian history exemplary experiences of youthful sanctity.

THE PLAN FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE

- 101 A significant contact or a cordial reception in such an atmosphere becomes the starting point for a jour-

⁹ MB 17, 114

102
**A faith
proposal within
the educational
process**

ney "towards" faith or for further development "of" faith. This puts to the test the oratorian heart of the Salesian, his personal experience of faith in Jesus Christ and his educational ability.

In offering directions towards the faith, the salesian style operates in line with certain criteria.

The educational process, in which the objective is the development of the whole person, is the *best setting* for presenting the faith to the young. The direction taken at this stage is decisive for defining the characteristics and content of the journey to be made. It is a setting in which due importance is given not only to "religious" events, but also to everything relating to the growth of the individual to maturity.

103
**Youth and
Christ**

The journey must be planned keeping well in mind two points of reference: on the one hand, the difficulties and suffering the young must face in forming their personalities; and on the other the express reminder of Christ to build that personality according to the revelation manifested in Him. The life of the young is at one and the same time the obligatory point of departure for a journey of faith, a continual point of reference in its development, and the goal of the journey itself, once it has been transformed and set on the road to fullness in Jesus Christ.

The proclamation of Christ, continually renewed, is the basic aspect of the whole journey; it is not something extraneous to or merely bordering on the experience of youth. It becomes in it the way, the truth and the fullness of life.

We are dealing therefore with a true journey "towards" the faith and a precise journey "of" faith, which sets out from the recognition of the fact that Jesus Christ has been manifested as the true man, and only in him can man enter totally into life. The journey leads to the ensuring and consolidating of a definitive meeting with him, lived in the ecclesial community and an intense christian life.

104
An educational
journey

It must always be kept in mind that we are dealing with *an educational process*, which takes the young people in the situation in which it finds them, and sets about supporting and guiding them in travelling to the fullness of humanity that may be possible for them.

It can take place therefore even in circumstances in which the explicit proclamation of Christ may be difficult or impracticable, or where the minimum conditions for it being heard have still to be created. In a precarious situation of this kind reference to the Gospel provides inspiration, indicating genuine human values, and bolstering the silent and far from easy witness of the educators.

105
which gives
priority
to the poorest
and most lowly

As a result of all this, there are certain aspects which are central to the idea of the journey:

1. *The journey must be adapted to the condition of those setting out on it:* the salesian option of giving priority to the poor is a precondition for dialogue with all, including those who are less well informed about the christian "event".

Simple and easily understood language, a welcoming environment and a style of family relationships render the salvific mystery accessible, and make of it good news and an invitation for those who are at a distance. The option for the poor and lowly is something that determines not only the beginning of the journey but also every further stage until the conclusion is reached.

A person who has already travelled part of the journey cannot be expected to start again from the beginning, but he can always be invited to come back to the realities, to the simple and fundamental words and signs, so as to support by his witness those just starting.

106
which never
finishes

2. *The journey goes always ahead towards new goals.* It can go as far as those degrees of self-donation and holiness which the Spirit is able to reveal to the

young. The exemplary lives of Dominic Savio and Laura Vicuña provide a pattern for our own educative experiences and make us realize the extraordinary fruits the life of faith can produce in the young.

There will always be something lacking therefore in our educative and pastoral mission whenever we are unable to find in our environments this gift placed there by God, or when we are unprepared to sustain a generous response.

107
is adapted
to the pace
of every
youngster

3. As well as giving priority to the poorest, lowliest, and those farthest away, and having something to offer those who have already made considerable progress, the journey calls for a third sensitivity: *to be aware that every youngster has his own rate of progress*, which is not the same for everyone; the results at each stage are not the same for all either, and therefore the journey must be adapted to each individual. If the faith is a dialogue of love of God and with God; if it is a covenant with God made in the practical circumstances of daily life, there are no standard forms that are repeatable from one person to another.

Constituted as we are by the Holy Spirit as friends of God and of the young, we commit ourselves to anticipate, foster and follow up their words and indications.

108

Even educational failures can form part of the experience of every journey. We do not consider these as accidental facts or dimensions extraneous to the educative process. They form an integral part of it and should be accepted with understanding. In some cases they are a consequence of the grave conditions in which some youngsters are obliged to live.

109

From all this it is clear that the journey must be thought of as something *unique*, because unique is the objective to which it is directed, unique too the indications linking it with the nature of faith, and some

characteristics of the youth scene do not change.

But it is not difficult to understand that the journey must be *progressively defined or divided into particular stages* according to the capacities of the young travellers. These separate itineraries appear as more detailed specifications of experiences, content and goals, according to the young people involved and their particular circumstances.

110
and which
is realized
in community

And there is another aspect that must not be overlooked: it is the "*educative community*", including both adults and young people. It is the subject which makes the journey "of" faith and "towards" faith. No distinctions can be made of the kind: the young are those to whom the plan is directed, while the adults are only those who authoritatively look after its technical details. This kind of outlook would put the whole scheme into the category of professional services, completely detached from life. St Paul reminds us how we are generated in the faith.¹⁰

The journey is a single one, but it involves many people. Even though it may challenge each individual with regard to his or her specific responsibility before God, the project is sustained by all those who recognize in Christ the foundation and meaning of life.

111 In the educative and pastoral community all the members, whether they are involved in tasks of education and human development, or more explicitly in what concerns matters of faith, are "educators of the young to the faith".

Their greatest joy is to pass on the unfathomable riches of Christ.¹¹ All resources and activities must converge in the service of the same individual, helping him to grow towards life and contact with the risen Lord.

¹⁰ Cf. Gal 4,19

¹¹ Cf. C 34

DIMENSIONS OF THE JOURNEY

THE OVERALL OBJECTIVE

That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name

(Jn 20,31)

112
**The human
family
directed
to Christ**

We draw up our plan of any journey in keeping with the goal we want to reach. We have to be clear about the kind of person and believer we wish to develop, given the specific circumstances of life and society. We do this in the awareness that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is also at work, transforming the individual starting from the concept of a “new creation”.

113

We are given guidance in this direction by our Constitutions: “We educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total *wellbeing of man directed to Christ*, the perfect Man. Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form upright citizens and good christians”.¹²

In this text of the Constitutions the first reference focuses on substantial configuration to Christ, Son and Brother, who gives his life for all and is restored to life by the Father. The second reference, on the other hand (“upright citizens and good christians”), is to the historical realization of this kind of christian, called to live in the Church and society at a specific time and place.

¹² C 31

A different formula, one that is dense and expressive, is preferred in some contexts for saying all this: "*integration of faith and life*". This integration is the response to the dramatic and provocative challenge we have earlier pointed out: the irrelevance and separation of faith, life and culture manifested simultaneously at both social and personal levels.

The goal of the journey therefore, which is put before the young, is that of building their own personality with *Christ as the point of reference* as regards mentality and life. Such a reference, as it becomes more explicit and spontaneous, will help the youngster to see history through the eyes of Christ, to judge life as He judges it, to select and love as He does, to hope as He teaches us, to live in Him our communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Through the mysterious fruitfulness of this point of reference the individual grows in living unity: he accepts the responsibilities which are properly his and seeks out the ultimate meaning of his own life. Finding himself part of a people who are believers, he succeeds in living his faith freely and intensely, in proclaiming it and celebrating it with joy in daily life.

And so those human attitudes which lead him to be sincerely open to truth, to respect and love other people, to express his own freedom in self-donation and service, mature and become natural to him. All this is simply faith, hope and love in practical action.

Mentality, daily life, and presence in the community become the three fields where the authenticity of the "good christian" and "upright citizen" can be assessed.

The salesian phrase linking the two concepts emphasizes the communal social and political dimension of faith and charity, which leads to the assuming of specific responsibilities in the building of a renewed society.

THE DIMENSIONS

116 Four great aspects of christian maturing

The journey is intended to be a progressive growth towards this objective. We take up seriously therefore four important aspects of the christian maturing process which we shall call "dimensions".

We can indicate them schematically as follows:

- human growth towards a life to be lived as a "religious experience";
- a meeting with Jesus Christ, the perfect man, that will lead to the discovery in him of the meaning of individual and social human existence: the "Saviour of mankind";
- progressive insertion in the community of believers, accepted as the "sign and instrument" of humanity's salvation;
- commitment and vocation in what concerns the transformation of the world.

Within each of these dimensions, we have to:

- cultivate some attitudes that can be frequently assessed;
- single out some points, a knowledge of which is indispensable for an adequate understanding of christian life;
- choose experiences that can lead to such attitudes and knowledge.

117 which respond to the challenges

These four aspects correspond to the challenges posed to the faith of the young and to our mission as educators by the present cultural situation and youth scene. From them in fact emerge the question of life and the meaning of faith in the maturing of an individual's identity and in human history. There is a risk that faith may be considered irrelevant for either human existence or historical development.

The dimensions aim at covering whatever is considered of true value, and at sowing within them as a final development the seed of faith. In general they aim at presenting the Kingdom of God as being at the

heart of human history (the great world history or the smaller personal history of each individual), and true believers as having been called by God's love to commit themselves in the leavening of human history.

And so faith is not something disjoined from or merely closely associated with what is human, historical, temporal or secular, but is rather a germinating force within all these; it gives them enlightenment and new meaning and also transcends them, broadening our horizons beyond the confines of history.

118
to be well
understood
as regards
their
significance

The various dimensions are not and must not be considered, either in the person or in educative activity, as separate sectors. They are all present together and continually interact.

It would not be right to consider them in the first place solely from the standpoint of human growth and then from that of faith. Faith must be recognized as injecting a particular energy into an individual's whole human growth. Reference to Jesus Christ and the Church is something constant that affects every dimension, even though it may become explicit and concentrated only at particular moments. When the Word of God has filled the whole of life, human growth does not cease but rather continues and is manifested in different expressions.

We have to present the various contents in logical fashion, but that does not mean that we want them to be considered as succeeding one another in time.

119

But no progress at all is possible unless the plan be accepted by the subject. What we want to emphasize in each dimension are not "lessons" offered from outside, or material to be worked on. They are steps in maturity which take place in the individual in virtue of the options he has made. Hence great care is needed to make sure that each proposal becomes an internal personal conviction.

Education to the faith must be thought of, there-

fore, as including human formation, meaning of life, choice of values, and ecclesial and social commitment.

Towards human maturity

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things

(Phil 4,8)

120

**Life and
faith recall
each other**

Our first concern is for young people who are "poor". Their poverty may appear in many forms: poverty of living conditions, of significance, of perspective, of possibilities, of awareness, of resources. Their life itself is lacking in many of its main resources. No religious experience can emerge until life is discovered in its true sense. And on the other hand, every experience of true life sets off a religious reaction.

Taking as his starting point the wonderful harmony of nature and grace so strikingly manifested in the person of Don Bosco the educator, it is easy for the Salesian to understand that faith calls life to mind, and that when life is seen in its true light it feels in a certain sense the need of faith. Because of grace there is no break between creation and redemption but continuity.

121

The journey of faith begins with that "make yourself humble, steadfast and strong"¹³ under the motherly guidance of Mary and with the support of educators.

¹³ BM 1, 95

A first indication for sustaining the development of this element is careful attention given to the requirements of each stage of growth:

- the phase of infancy when the wonders of the surrounding world are first discovered;
- childhood, during which an openness develops to surrounding objects and positive relationships with other people;
- adolescence, with the desire to know and accept oneself, and to feel and explore one's own identity;
- the effort to find one's bearings in the world and reach a satisfactory synthesis, and the desire to share in the social life proper to the young and make contributions to it.

For this reason we cannot overlook but must consider the particular situation of need in which *many young* people are placed. Salesian practice aims at helping them to overcome the radical, economic and affective shortcomings which condition subsequent openness to values.

In this commitment our witness to charity is already a proclamation of faith. At the same time the individual shakes himself free of conditioning factors that weigh him down. This is the line followed by every initiative which proposes to offer to youth worthy living conditions and opportunities for recreation, or prepares them for entry to the world of work and acquire the necessary culture. In this way favourable conditions are created for young people to open up to a search for the truth and the taste for the genuine values which lead them to full human maturity and make them architects of their own lives.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cf. C 32

123
they look
for wisdom
and knowledge
in the
educator

For the better analysis of problems in this first dimension and for the preparation of appropriate responses, the educator to the faith makes use also of the educational sciences, using them with the discretion suggested by faith itself.

There is quite a complicated array of educative models available, and the educator to the faith will choose and organize his interventions with his eye on the person whose image he sees when he contemplates the mystery of God present in Jesus of Nazareth. A person is mature when he attends carefully to the questions arising from his personal life and from the world; a person who is aware of the mystery surrounding him and tries to fathom its meaning through effort and reflection.

This is the model passed on to us by solid salesian tradition, when it makes religion a point of reference for education. It is well emphasized in "Iuvenum Patris" where we read: "The term 'religion' indicates that Don Bosco's pedagogy is essentially transcendent".¹⁵

124
they lead to a
acceptance
of life

In this perspective we present some objectives to be attained, and some experiences to be suggested.

They lead to an acceptance of life

1. In the first place the young person must accept life. This means first of all that he must accept himself. For some youngsters this is something that happens spontaneously. Finding themselves in a world of people who love them, who talk with them easily and work to build their future, be it great or small, is a great help to them.

But for others this is the first great hurdle. They think – and it causes them much interior suffering – that their life is not worth living. The lack of fundamental requirements makes them let things go and

¹⁵ IP 11

throw up the sponge. The educator of the faith must then stay at their side with intelligence and heart until they recognize the inestimable value of life.

In this way they come to see its double character as both gift and duty. This is an indispensable step if they are to become "subjects" of their own history, and responsible for their own growth. If they are offered positive experiences, if they are helped to discern the structural, cultural, personal and collective conditioning effects which have so far marked their lives, they come to see that change is possible, that there is a future, that it is worthwhile to go on hoping.

Once this first "closure" on life has been overcome, it is possible to draw out other difficulties, to prompt other attitudes, and to set in action other reserves of energy.

125
to an
opening
up to others

A positive view of oneself leads progressively to an opening up of interpersonal relationships, and makes possible communication with others, a recognition of their value, a willing acceptance of their diversity as well as of their limitations. They also lead people to enter into a positive relationship with the environment, reality and the world in general.

Salesian pedagogy assigns the development of this dimension to the activities in which the young engage together in an atmosphere of joy and collaboration. In that context they meet adults capable of espousing the most noble causes and passing on their enthusiasm for them.

126
and to draw
out deep
aspirations

2. The welcome acceptance of life, its exploration, and the longing to savour it to the full, all reveal in an almost tangible manner *the depth of human aspirations and their limitations*. Here there is another step forward to be made and another set of experiences to suggest, in line with the meeting between life and faith. The adult is already able to express this idea for himself, while the adolescent and young person still

live it in a confused fashion and with a certain amount of personal suffering.

The educator's task is to stay at their side and help them to be aware of what is happening as they live through enriching experiences, of a kind that enable them to realize ideals they have thought of intensely in their imagination, such as self-donation, leadership, putting service of those in great need before their own convenience, the contemplation of nature or truth.

Experiences too of extreme situations of distress are able to contribute to growth and internal maturity, e.g. the lack of personal satisfaction, awareness of one's own poverty, human situations of sorrow and tribulation.

But how can a young person understand this kind of thing? It can be done by listening to the interior voice within him, and learning to interpret the phenomena of human social life. Under the guidance of the educator he opens his mind to the ethical principles involved and matures in two directions: he accepts the bearing on his own life of his actions and attitudes, and he comes to understand his responsibility towards others with whom he shares the good things of life. The separation of these two aspects or the subordination of either of them to the other give rise to individualism and strengthens its roots.

127
to discover
the meaning
of life

In this way the *question about the meaning of life* and the search for its ultimate significance, begin to take shape. This is not just an intellectual problem. Even though they may not be able to express the fact very clearly, many youngsters are looking for sense of this kind, especially when they are living through a period of deep (and sometimes radical) dissatisfaction and thinking about the future.

Their discontent may have various origins or reasons: frustration at their inability to reach a model of happiness they wanted, or the empty feeling that remained after seeing proposals that looked like solving their problems vanish into thin air.

In this maturing process the educators have an indispensable role to play. They have to help in the reflection that will make their own rich experience as adults accessible to the young.

There are some environments which, of their nature, prompt systematic reflection on human problems. Salesian practice is able to make available also less formal ways, such as the rapid (but not superficial) evaluation of events and situations, or spontaneous conversations during recreation or games, or suitably arranged personal discussions.

128
to yearn
for what is
transcendent

4. In the young the question and search for sense become an *invocation*, i.e. the desire for a response, for a perspective or outlook which will help to solve the question posed by life, about its beginning and end, about what the individual must do so that life may attain its fullness.

This should be the goal of every educational process. One goes through a mature human experience, which is also a "religious" experience, so that the individual may succeed in entering fully into God's plan.

129
Response
to the
challenges

This process tries to meet the challenges thrown up by the present culture. In opposition to the logic of self-sufficiency and secularism, it proposes in fact an alternative way of being a full human being.

In many contexts it is stated that the first step to be taken is that youth must recognize the emptiness of the idols that are a weight on their lives, and acknowledge that God manifests himself in creation and in the human person. Then will arise the desire to rebuild a personal identity, at a time when such a proposal seems often to be crushed or in crisis.

The salesian practice not only sustains ideally the fundamental value of the "religious experience" in the formation of personality, but gives priority in practice to certain ways for bringing it to maturity. They are: the giving of due value to youthful vitality and expres-

sions; participation in activities in which one can experience one's own worth and the joy of sharing; involvement in situations of need; and times for reflection.

When the youngster has attained deeper levels and chosen faith as the key to the interpretation of his own existence, he is followed up and prompted to formulate an integrated christian view of life and history.

Towards an authentic meeting with Jesus Christ

I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life

(Jn 8,12)

130 Fullness of life in Christ

Our service as educators to the faith certainly cannot stop at the level of human growth, even though it be inspired by christian principles.

Education to the faith requires us to go further towards the meeting and acceptance of a revealed event: *human life attains its fullness* only in Jesus Christ. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly":¹⁶ here is found the definitive response to the cry that goes up from existence in the form of "invocation".

131 The meeting with Him

But the *encounter with Jesus* is not just any kind of meeting. Education to the faith tries to prepare it, offer it, and deepen it so that it may be a personal meeting *in faith*.

Quite frequently, in fact, one comes across young people who are attracted to the person of Jesus. Many of his messages and images find their way into the mass media and many youngsters are still influenced

¹⁶ Jn 10,10

by some religious experience from their childhood, and they have external and generic impressions in regard to the christian community. Their contact with Christ is often just fleeting and superficial. On the other hand a systematic exposition of the faith would be for such youngsters no more than so much theory or the detailed ideology of a religious group; it would not be the "proclamation and promise" of salvation. What kind of path is needed to get youth into deep contact with Christ? Which aspects of his mystery should be emphasized?

132
through
witness

This dimension is strongly centred on the *witness of christians*. To instigate and sustain a faith-encounter with Jesus Christ there is need of the life lived by a believing community and its interpretation through the word of faith.

In the kind of structures in which we work we sometimes meet with failure because we tire ourselves out trying to put across formulas of faith in an impersonal way, while such formulas are quite unintelligible if disjoined from their efficacy for life.

Faith is desired and sought after when young people come in contact with a genuine evangelical experience.

133

Here then are *some targets* that must be progressively aimed at if the meeting with Jesus Christ is to be more than mere curiosity and be transformed into a faith encounter.

134
From signs

1. One target, that requires a corresponding nucleus of content and experiences, is the *recognition of the signs* of Christ the Saviour, his presence in the believing community and his effect on human history.

These signs can be found:

- in the persons who make up the community;
- in the attitudes produced in them by the memory of Christ;

– in christian devotion celebrated in a worthy manner.

This is a goal or target within the reach of all, even those who are less close to the christian event.

The signs can speak and transmit messages. Pedagogical skill is needed to choose, prepare and present them in such a way that they speak strongly to the sensitivity of youth.

But there are also signs and messages that are not directly intentional on our part. They stem from the educative and pastoral style of the institution, from the mutual relationships between people, from the good taste and religious sense evident in the signs of faith themselves: objects, places, gestures.

135
to witness

Recognition of the signs can be a predisposing factor for understanding the *witness of Christ's disciples*. The human and faith-revealing gestures of people close to the young constitute the first call to faith. It is not a question only of religious actions, but also of the willingness to talk with young people and the ability to get involved in the salvation of the poor.

This witness reveals to the young the universal value of faith, i.e. when they come to the knowledge of outstanding examples of charity or commitment that derive their inspiration and strength from the love for Christ.

136
From witness
to proclamation

Witness becomes explicit by the *proclamation of Jesus*, of the human and divine events of his life, and of his teachings. It is a proclamation which is a clear confession of faith on the part of the educators.

Circumstances will suggest the best way to go about this: personal conversation, catechesis, a relaxed inter-religious discussion. In any event the character of "good news" should be ensured. Jesus should be presented as the truth that enlightens the youngster's search; as the life that stimulates his energies for doing good; as the way leading to his own fulfilment.

In the same perspective the Word of God should be seen by each one as an opening to his own particular problems, a response to his questions, a widening of his values, and at the same time a satisfying of his own aspirations.

137
From
proclamation
to the discovery
of the Person
of Christ

3. Proclamation leads to the *discovery of the presence of Christ* in his life as the key to happiness and meaning. Thus begins the process of conversion and leads to the expression in the adult state of the form of Christ impressed in us by Baptism.

Adherence to the Person of Christ follows on this proclamation and discovery: from Christ who is proclaimed. the journey of faith leads to Christ who is loved, contemplated, and finally followed with the attitude of a disciple.

It is not a gradual process throughout. The Master may indicate new paths or shortcuts; he may call for a clear break in precise situations, departures from the past, and a relaunching in line with the strong demands of the Gospel.

This is the point in the journey where the first big dropout may occur among those who originally set out, not only because of the difficulties linked with faith, but because of mistakes or inadvertence on the part of educators more concerned with extraneous things than with a fraternal accompaniment of the dialogue between the youngster and God.

138
The
transformation
of life

4. *Perseverance in conversion and in following Christ* leads as a consequence to a revival of one's view of life, to live it in a new way, to break with alienating attachments to sin and to models of life that stem from it. It calls for a new understanding of reality and a sharing of the overwhelming preoccupation of Jesus for the Kingdom of God.

For those who continue the journey, catechesis must be followed by a confrontation of faith with the great cultural problems. These are felt intensely and are fundamental for a real maturing of a faith-

mentality that demands consistency between thought and life. Overlook this aspect and you are on the road to the cleavage between faith and culture, between personal religious practice and the social ethic, that is so much deprecated. We are therefore obliged to accompany and help those who are seriously comparing their own lives with what faith demands.

139
A faith
that is strong
and dynamic

5. Practising the faith implies, finally, the *laying down of roots in the matter of attitudes and behaviour*, sustained by corresponding convictions. Education to the faith gives the believer the ability to give an account of his own hope.¹⁷

The faith which recognizes the presence and love of the Father flourishes in a filial attitude towards him ("piety" in its literal sense). Prayer is the language given us by the Spirit to approach the Father, and must be developed in the various forms that christian tradition has unfolded.

In times past "piety" was expressed in forms pedagogically suited to the conditions of contemporary youth. Today there is an urgent need for a rethinking of the best times and forms of initiation to it, beginning from the family itself.

Towards an intensified membership of the Church

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers

(Acts 2,42)

140
The meeting
with Christ
in the Church

The Church is the best environment for *meeting Christ*. Moved by the living witness of the christian community or of some believer, the young person matures through a full sharing in the "people of God".

¹⁷ 1 Pet 3,15

Without the faith of the Church, our own faith and that of the young would be very poor. It would lack an indispensable point of reference for living as believers. If we do not take part in the Church's life, we are remaining at a distance from the place in which the gift of salvation is experienced in a special way.

The ultimate objective of this journey is to help the young to live the Church-experience, and so develop their sense of belonging to the christian community.

141
A membership
that
progressively
matures

The *membership* of young people in the Church does not immediately attain its full maturity. If this is not well understood by educators and pastors and is not wisely developed, it will not get beyond the stage of a general interest, external adherence, combined with the autonomous maintaining of a certain distance.

Today's youngsters are involved in a real but limited membership of many groups and organizations. Adherence to the Church can mature as union of mind and heart only if the Church is perceived as communion with God and fellow men in faith and charity, as a sign and instrument of the Kingdom. Institutions, in fact, be they civil or religious, receive only a partial and external adherence. It is taken for granted that the individual surpasses them in value and destiny. Only if the Church is seen as centred on persons – the person of Jesus Christ, of the believers, and of those to be saved – rather than on organization and legislation, can it give rise to decisions of faith.

142

From this aspect too there are *attitudes*, content and experiences, which define the journey. We can formulate them as follows, starting once again from those who are poorest as regards faith.

143
The need for
friendship
and
interpersonal
relationships

1. The first point to note is the need experienced by youth for *friendship and deep interpersonal relationships*, for sharing and solidarity; it brings out their sense of festivity and their taste for being together.

The educators accept these values, deepen them, share them by taking part in youthful manifestations of them, and try to give them still greater depth.

In accordance with salesian tradition, all this already bears an ecclesial significance, if it is realized in a widely welcoming environment where one can meet believers, ecclesial signs and christian communities.

144
The group
"craving"

2. Another batch of ecclesial attitudes and content develop expression in the *youth group*, where the youngster feels personally at home and worth something. He frequently experiences the joy of sharing, and becomes open to communication and responsibility in an atmosphere of mutual trust. In this way he also learns understanding and forgiveness.

145
The group
as the place
for discovering
the Church

3. When these groups are inserted in broad educative or christian communities, involved in a common project, they already constitute a practical experience of Church, and a greater awareness develops. Eventually comes the *discovery of the Church as a deeper communion* and universal service.

But this happens only when in the community there are living signs of the ecclesial reality: the effort at communion by individuals, the complementary presence of different vocations, gospel assessments of events that take place, and the celebration of faith.

Useful too are meetings with other believers, contact with other groups and communities with whom experiences can be exchanged, and common projects for social and apostolic involvement can be shared.

It is also a help to have a sufficient knowledge of Church history which reveals the presence and action of Jesus who continually raises up in his Church new forces of renewal and holiness.

146

The act of
faith in the
Church

4. An important phase in the development of an ecclesial sense is reached when it becomes an *act of faith in the Church*.

We accompany individuals and groups towards this goal, helping them to put the Word of God at the centre of their own existence. In his light everything takes on a new aspect, and one learns to share it and celebrate it with other believers.

One takes part in the overall pastoral work of the local Church, and proper value is given to the teachings of the Pope and the Bishops, in recognition of their mission of guidance and the preservation of unity.

147

Experience of
participation
in the
Christian
community

5. The positive experience of young people taking part in the life of the christian community increases the sense of belonging to the Church. When the christian communities welcome them and give value to their contribution of vitality, the young take on the responsibility which is theirs, assimilate the values and requirements of the community, and are incited to creativity and commitment.

148

The celebration
of salvation

6. A more intense sharing in the mystery of the Church is realized through *prayer, listening to the Word, and the celebration of salvation*. In faith one comes to understand that the Church plays the role of mediator in the meeting with God, and this mediation is lived with gratitude so as to conform to Christ in thought and life.

In accordance with the tradition that comes from Don Bosco, we give this meeting a setting especially, but not exclusively, in the sacraments of the *Eucharist* and *Reconciliation*. In these together with our young people we live a personal relationship with Christ who reconciles and pardons, who gives himself and creates communion, who calls and send us, prompting us to become architects of a new society.

The frequent use of these sacraments seems to

have come to a standstill. The key to overcoming this is to educate to those attitudes which are at the foundation of christian celebration: silence, a listening attitude, praise and adoration; the formation of a symbolic language, based in practice on the fundamental symbols of the sacraments; offering gradual experiences of well prepared celebrations; the accompanying of everything with a progressive sacramental catechesis which reveals the relationship between the celebration and the life of the young enlightened by faith in Christ.

In all this due attention must be given to the deep nature of the mystery, and to youth sensitivity. Both education to celebration and education in celebration are in fact equally necessary.

The catechesis of *Confirmation* acquires an important function as a special means for stirring up in the child or young person the sense of the presence of the Spirit and the will to commit himself for the Kingdom.

The catechesis of *Matrimony* is a preparation for living the life of mature persons for a generous opening to life, and for an expression of Church in one's own family.

Towards a commitment for the Kingdom

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good

(1 Cor 12,4,7)

149
Life as
vocation

In the salesian pedagogy of faith the *vocational option* is the mature and indispensable result of all human and christian growth. "We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a

daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel".¹⁸

Faith cannot be reduced to mere intellectual assent. The believer confesses the truth by committing his own life to the cause of God, the Saviour of mankind.

The christian vocation can be understood only with reference to the Kingdom, which is at one and the same time God's gift and the result of man's endeavour. God is the main agent. He wills the life and happiness of his children and realizes his will in many different ways. They in turn are invited to accept this gift in complete availability, even to the extent of putting their own lives on the line for the sake of God's plan.

The christian therefore lives his vocation recognizing God's dominion and love, and committing his own powers in radical fashion. He acknowledges that everything is God's gift and that we are "only servants". But he also recognizes the need for hard daily effort to overcome the power of death and consolidate life. He is therefore a true disciple and friend of Christ, because available to do with him the Father's will in serving man, even to the extent of the cross.

The vocational commitment will become in everyone a family, professional, social and political responsibility. For some it will bloom into a consecration of special significance: the priestly ministry, religious life, or secular commitment.

150
To the discovery
of one's own
place in
building
the Kingdom

The objective of this dimension is to help young people to *discover their own niche in the building of the Kingdom* and to will it with joy and determination.

To reach this objective we may think of some steps as being so many stages of a journey.

¹⁸ C 37

151
Draw out
whatever is
positive
in the
youngster

1. Every youngster has something good within him, and by working on it you can get great results.¹⁹ In the first place the *positive element has to be drawn out*, through a patient work of attention to himself, comparison with others, listening and reflection.

From this joyful discovery of his own resources, albeit with limitations and hurdles to be overcome, there arises the desire to bring to fruition the gifts he has received.

They are: in the first place life itself, the guiding principle of the entire journey of faith, which must be learned and managed; health; intelligence and feeling; the human and religious patrimony of the family; friendships; material goods; the difficulties that help in overcoming oneself, etc.

The youngster opens his eyes on himself and his surroundings, and discovers the bond of solidarity that links people with each other.

152
The joy of
communicating
one's own
gifts

2. It is not enough to have gifts and possibilities. With these gifts one has to attain true happiness. And this is where the first different experiences of sharing come in.. The youngster *trains himself to generosity and availability*. These are two attitudes that give rise to joy: to gain life you have to give it.

At the same time the foundations are laid for a solid christian experience as described in the two earlier dimensions, founded on the meeting with Christ that can become a "call and invitation", and on the perception of the Church as a "mission" in the world, carried out through many ways and means.

For any consideration of vocation all this is indispensable.

¹⁹ BM 5,237: "Even the most callous boys have a soft spot. The first duty of the educator is to locate that sensitive spot, that responsive chord in the boy's heart, and take advantage of it"

153
The explicit
vocational
suggestion

3. And so we come to the point of a *vocational suggestion*. Through catechesis young people can be led through listening to the word and contact with models, to reflection on their own vocation. This enables them to see what is the common vocation of everyone and what different forms there are for serving the Kingdom.

To this panorama the youngster listens with attention and responds: "What shall I do, Lord?".²⁰ He wonders along what paths will be realized the call to offer his own life. And this starts up an interior dialogue in which each one must listen and respond.

154 *Explicit suggestions* by the one following the youngster will help him to see new possibilities for his own existence. The call comes in fact for some from the presence of people whose lives are models of meaningfulness and richly endowed with gospel qualities. But there are others who declare that they would never have interpreted the call had they not been given an explicit invitation to commit themselves to a certain kind of life as lay christians, religious or priests.

Sometimes the suggestion comes from a community which, while getting on with its involvement and witness, is able to provide animation and talk about its own history. The presentation of the Founder and an affectionate link with the origins are often determining factors in the making of decisions. So too is a knowledge of the actual commitments of the community, especially those that are more difficult and meaningful.

155
Vocational
discernment

4. When vocational suggestions are listened to, they prompt a *process of discernment*. The young person assesses himself and the gifts he has received with relationship to the suggestions made to him and

²⁰ Acts 22,10

the services and ministries of which he has a basic knowledge. He does this not only through rational analysis. He lives the *call* with generosity as an invitation from the Lord, and tries to say "yes" from the depths of his conscience. He knows that the vocation will involve his whole person: his preferences, relationships, energies and dynamism. It is a delicate process.

His whole personal universe is in upheaval and is reorganizing around an option. This does not depend only on natural interests and aptitudes, but on his willingness to recognize the presence of God in his life and of the freedom he has to accept the invitation of grace.

All the elements of the spiritual life concur in the discernment to produce a favourable result, but to some must be given greater weight:

- prayer and meditation which enables one to pass from a superficial view of life to something deeper within it: the individual comes to grips with himself and feels more easily the call God is addressing to him;
- personal guidance or spiritual direction which can suggest motives, help the youngster to read the signs of his own life, provide light to see how the vocation fits into his life, help to verify his path for growth and to overcome his dependence on external stimuli and on the educator himself;
- the apostolic commitment which helps in the maturing of the love which becomes self-donation in the christian community and in society.

156
Vocational
choice

5. The discernment leads to a *first vocational option*.

Many factors concur in making the decision: from spontaneous inclinations to the image the community offers as a place for commitment. But the determining point is that the youngster comes to see all this as a personal call, and is ready to reply with Mary: "Here I am, Lord!".

157
The presence
of Mary
on the journey

Rather than focusing on a work to be done, be it religious or profane, he concentrates on the over-riding meaning he intends to give to his life: to make of it an acknowledgement of the absolute greatness of God and a response to his love.

The *motherly presence of Mary* provides deep inspiration throughout the whole journey and in every phase of it. In the case of every young person we can repeat: "She has done everything".²¹

Mary is the first among believers and the most perfect of Christ's disciples.²² The word of God became flesh and entered history in her soul and person before her womb. And so she is the living representative of the laborious but happy journey of every individual and of all humanity towards its fulfilment. In her the path of everyone meets that of God. She is therefore the key for interpretation, a model, a type and a journey.

Mary has been proclaimed "Blessed", a feeling she had already experienced within herself, happy in her poverty, happy because of God's gift, happy because of her ready availability.

Mary accompanied the Church in its infancy and today participates with all the riches of her motherly nature in the historical development of the christian community and its mission in the world.

²¹ Cf. Mgr. G. Costamagna, *Conferenze ai figli di Don Bosco*, Santiago (Chile) 1900, p.165

²² Cf. MC 35

3. SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do.

(Phil 4,9)

PRELIMINARY

158 **A "salesian"** **spirituality**

The journey of education reveals progressively to young people an original plan of christian life and helps them to understand its implications.

The youngster learns a new way of being a believer in the world, and arranges his life around certain perceptions of faith, choices of values and gospel attitudes: he lives a spirituality.

Research into "salesian youth spirituality", adapted to new times, reached historic depths in the SGC and GC21. The GC23 is now relaunching it in our communities and among youth. Research still goes on, but the reality has been there for a very long time.

It finds a first formulation in the dream at the age of nine years. "Make yourself humble, steadfast and strong".²³ In this way the young John Bosco received in Mary a mother and teacher who was to be at his side in his mission to the young.

Later in the Valdocco environment under Don Bosco's inspiration there flourished various expressions of holiness and life in the Spirit. The biographies of Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone describe the youthful sanctity of the first Oratory; it has been officially recognized by the Church and is offered to all young people through the canoni-

²³ BM 1, 95

zation of Dominic Savio and the beatification of Laura Vicuña. On the other hand, our tradition has always spoken of the Preventive System as a spirituality project. In the triptych of "reason, religion and loving kindness", fused by the "grace of unity" into a single living experience, are to be found the content and the method of spiritual accompaniment.

The "Companion of Youth" and the various "Regulations" written for pupils in salesian houses, carry in the simple context of daily life what is called for by salesian spirituality.

"Salesian" does not imply here the distinctive mark of a certain group; it indicates, rather, the charismatic source linked with the spiritual current of the humanism of St Francis de Sales, reinterpreted by Don Bosco in the experience of the Oratory.

At Valdocco there was ample opportunity for the young to exercise leadership among their companions in every sector of life, even to the extent that the youngsters were called by Don Bosco to be with him "founders" of a new Congregation.

On their side they helped him to begin, in the context of everyday experience, a new style of holiness tailored to the typical requirements of a boy's development. In this way they were to some extent both *disciples and teachers at the same time*.

In all salesian communities today, as happened yesterday in Don Bosco's Oratory, spiritual commitment is born of a meeting that breeds friendship. This leads on to a continuous point of reference and group situation in which the implications of the baptismal vocation can be more deeply understood and the journey begun to maturity of faith.

"I want to stay with Don Bosco"²⁴ expresses the

²⁴ BM 5, 345: "I don't want to leave Don Bosco; I want to stay with him always". Cf. also BM 6, 181.

160
and therefore
an "educative"
spirituality

choice of a particular way of growing in the life of the Spirit: experience of christian life precedes systematic reflection on it.

Putting the youngster, with all his lively energy, at the centre of the educator's attention as a practical criterion for the choice of a process to be pursued, manifests the fundamental characteristic of youth spirituality: it is an *educative spirituality*. It is addressed to all young people without distinction, and gives preference to the poorest of them.

Taking up the challenge of those who remain outside or at a distance and of those for whom faith is irrelevant to life, requires the educators to stay alongside the young and share their experiences. "Love what the youngsters love," Don Bosco repeats to the Salesians in the present-day situation, "so that they will come to love what you love."²⁵

To promote the growth of the young to the fullness of life *after the measure of Christ the perfect man*, is the goal of salesian work.

²⁵ Cf. MB 17, 111

161
**The basic
points**

To help communities get a rapid grasp of the proposals and encourage them to examine them more deeply, we provide the following description of the main nuclei of salesian youth spirituality.

1. SPIRITUALITY OF ORDINARY DAILY LIFE.

Daily life inspired by Jesus of Nazareth (cf. C 12) is the setting in which the youngster recognizes the presence of God who is at work, and lives out his personal realization of the fact.

2. SPIRITUALITY OF JOY AND OPTIMISM.

Daily life is lived in joy and optimism, without prejudice to commitment and responsibility (cf. C 17.18).

3. SPIRITUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS.

Daily life is re-created by the Risen Christ (cf. C 34) who gives reasons for hope and leads to a life that finds its fullest sense in Him.

4. SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH.

Daily life is experienced in the Church (cf. C 13.35), as the natural setting for growth in faith through the sacraments. In the Church we find Mary (cf. C 20.34) who goes in front, accompanies and inspires.

5. SPIRITUALITY OF RESPONSIBLE SERVICE.

Daily life is presented to the young as a setting for service (cf. C 32), both ordinary and extraordinary.

1. SPIRITUALITY OF DAILY LIFE

162
It is a
synthesis
of faith
and life

The *fundamental challenge* for a believer and a community is to transform experience of life into gospel experience, by force of faith.

It is easy to declare oneself a christian in a general way. It is much more difficult to live as a christian, overcoming the problems that make life difficult and opening up to the practical requirements of the beatitudes. Internal harmony in a youngster and the joy of life need the "grace of unity".

In our salesian experience we have an intuition which is both joyful and fundamental, i.e that *there is no need to detach oneself from normal life* in order to seek the Lord.

The first pages of the "Companion of Youth" proclaim this requirement of youth: "I want you to be happy".²⁶ When the Salesians, prolonging in the world the presence of the Don Bosco of Valdocco, live pastoral charity and produce a family setting in which "the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced",²⁷ they facilitate the production of this harmony and raise up in young people the desire for happiness.

163
a rediscovery
of the
Incarnation

At the foundation of the positive evaluation of daily life lies the continual rediscovery of the event of the Incarnation. The human condition of Jesus reveals the fact that God is present in life, and that God affirms life's transcendence. Jesus as Man is the sacrament of the Father, the great and definitive mediation that makes God present and close to us.

He teaches us that the place to meet God is in human reality: our own and that of others, daily and throughout history. "As you did it to one of the least

²⁶ Cf. BM 3, 8: "I should like to teach you how to lead a life which will make you happy and contented".

²⁷ C 16

of these my brethren, you did it to me".²⁸ It is *human life that inserts us in the event of the Incarnation*.

Life therefore is primarily a gift offered to all – a mysterious gift because of the expectations to which it gives rise. It is like a scroll, unfolding undreamt of meanings and horizons.

164
love
for life

To take up in consistent fashion the ordinary aspect of existence; to accept the challenges, questions and tensions of growth; to try to gather its fragments into the unity realized by the Spirit in Baptism; to work to overcome the ambiguities present in daily experience; to leaven every option with love: all this is part of the process necessary for *discovering and loving daily life as a new reality* in which God works as a father.

In the loving kindness of the Salesian who, with "kindness, respect and patience",²⁹ follows the building of their personality; in the unconditional welcome of the community which expresses its predilection for them,³⁰ the young discover a sign of God who loves them and anticipates them. Notwithstanding the negative experiences of fatherliness or family relationships through which they may have lived, the *new heart they are building* helps them to look at the world in a different way.

This approach will make it clear that at the origin of our life, however it may now be with its impulses and aspirations, there is a call of God.

"To love life, not as something fragmented but planned as a vocation, means accepting the appeal to become involved in the building of humanity, of justice and peace [...]; to love it in a far-reaching way, open to culture and ideals, to sharing and solidarity, able to dream courageously as Don Bosco did of new worlds and new men".³¹

²⁸ Cf. Mt 25,40

²⁹ C 15

³⁰ Cf. C 14

³¹ RM at Appraisal DB'88

2. SPIRITUALITY OF JOY AND OPTIMISM

165
The joy of
kindness

Clearly evident at Valdocco were joy, optimism and hope.

Don Bosco is the saint of the joy of living. His boys learned the lesson so well from him that they could say, in typically 'oratorian' language, that "holiness consists in being very happy".³²

To the emarginated youngsters of his time, Don Bosco put the possibility of *living life as a feast, and faith as happiness*. Music, the theatre, outings, sport, the joyful daily rough and tumble of a playground, have always been valued in salesian pedagogy as educative elements of primary importance. They give rise to a lot of energy for doing good, which will be channelled in due course into a commitment of service and charity.

A salesian feast is never the manifestation of an internal emptiness seeking relief; nor is it an occasion for getting away from what are frequently hard realities. It is rather a means for building friendship, for developing whatever is positive in young people.

This style of holiness could prove surprising to some experts in spirituality and pedagogy, concerned that it could lead to a playing down of gospel demands and educational obligations. But for Don Bosco the source of joy is the life of grace which obliges the youngster to undertake a difficult apprenticeship in asceticism and kindness.

166
and
commitment
to growth

All his life Don Bosco set young people on the road to a simple, serene and happy form of holiness, bringing together in a single vital experience the playground, serious study, and a constant sense of duty.

He offers today, as a faithful response to the gratuitous love of God, an invaluable rereading of the Gospel in the spirit of the beatitudes. They manifest in

³² BM 5, 228

the first place who God is for us, and what must be our commitment as believers for the construction of the Kingdom. Then, by inciting us to live in the unity of joy and duty, they teach us to *take up the cross and follow Christ* as the paschal dimension of the evangelical option, and so of the development of humanity according to the stature of Christ who died and rose again.

Outside a seriously undertaken journey of faith, growth becomes ever more difficult. The Salesian will frequently remind young people of this when they may get the idea that rebuilding their own lives in the light of the Gospel requires detachment from good things they cannot give up. Freedom, justice, solidarity, materiality, often bring a believing youngster to a crossroads: either to stay with the Lord Jesus and accept the hardships associated with faith, or to choose to live his life outside Christ's influence. This is a crucial moment; a difficult but necessary decision has to be made in order to reach the integration in which one experiences the good fortune of living with the Lord of life and history.

John Paul II, with happy intuition, has labelled the place of Don Bosco's childhood and adolescence the *HILL OF THE YOUTHFUL BEATITUDES*: because from there goes forth a message of joy and responsibility for all young people who look to Don Bosco as a father and teacher.

3. SPIRITUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS

167
Meeting
with the
Risen Christ

To live the spirit of the Beatitudes in the Valdocco style is to form bonds of close friendship between Jesus and the young person. The latter is no longer satisfied with a first encounter and an attraction to the Lord. He wants to *deepen his adherence to his Person and his cause*. He tries to make a concrete response

to his love, with commitment and generosity. When the young reach this degree of relationship with Christ the Lord, they open up to the radicalism of the Gospel.

The experience of the Oratory with the personal stories of Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone in its history, tells us that all youngsters can follow the way of this friendship with Christ.

Friend, Teacher and Saviour are the terms that describe the centrality of the person of Jesus in the spiritual experience of the young people who live the salesian style of life. The personal dimension of the relationship – “Jesus is my friend and companion”³³ said Francis Besucco – is a spur to a knowledge of the totality of the mystery of Christ, who died and rose again.

168
for a
new heart

Don Bosco's constant concern was to educate to the faith, walking “side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord”, so that they might grow “into new men”.³⁴

Don Bosco liked to repeat that “education is a matter of the heart”.³⁵ Also *the journey of spirituality requires a new heart*. Unless you reach this central point of human life, you will never bring about any deep and enduring conversion.

In contact with the Risen Lord youngsters acquire a more intense love for life. In friendship with him they develop an ‘oratorian’ heart that beats with the restless sensitivity of the young and the silent but efficacious force of the Holy Spirit.

³³ Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin 1864, p. 158, in G. BOSCO, *Opere edite*, vol. XV, (400)

³⁴ Cf. C 34

³⁵ MB 16, 447

4. SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH

169

The desire
to be
together

Sustained by a spirituality born of the relationship between persons who find in Christ a common friend, the young people in salesian environments feel a great need to be together. As friends they share and celebrate the joy of living, so as to help each other. In this way they feel themselves to be the leaven in the midst of other children and young people.

As is natural also, they organize and to some extent institutionalize their friendship by *creating groups* linked to the most varied interests of their lives: from games to culture to religious commitment. Since the groups often share the same ideals and values, a *bond often develops* among them, and in this way they tend to become a *youth movement* drawing its inspiration from the spiritual characteristics of Don Bosco.

170

for a
communion
in
responsibility

The personal relationship with the risen Christ and the group experience lead automatically to a filial relationship with the Church. Don Bosco was a man of communion. He taught the youngsters to live the mystery of the Church which enshrines, despite its human weakness, the invisible grace of the presence of God. His personal daily witness and the family environment he created at the Oratory, produced *in the youngsters the sense of collaboration and shared responsibility*.

Today too, the diversity of interests, gifts and values lived together in the educative community, testify to the presence of the Lord who unites all in one heart and one soul. This *family spirit* is an efficacious sign of the Church which all want to build together for a fraternal service to those in greater need.

171

towards the
particular
Church

The history of the young people at the Oratory, during Don Bosco's lifetime, abounds in *concrete expressions of love for the Church*. In fact communion

is something that seeks continually to associate itself with all the forces working for salvation and the building of the Kingdom of God.

This communion is expressed in esteem for the Pastors, and in practical cooperation with them and with all who work for the common good, and for the young in particular. It seeks for understanding and dialogue with those responsible for pastoral work in the vicinity, following a mature vision of faith, and capable of understanding and accepting the human aspects of the Church, with its limitations and shortcomings. It is open finally to the problems of men and of youth which arise in the various contexts.

Spirituality grows and can be measured by reference to the history of the individuals concerned.

172
towards the
universal
Church

To feel the great interests of the universal Church as one's own, intervening in a manner proportionate to one's ability, is a constant commitment in salesian history. The savour of a "great religious adventure" attaches to the preparation of the Congregation's first missionary expedition. The entire Oratory became involved, in fact, and everyone felt he was playing an active part. It was an experience that developed among the youngsters a lively *sensitivity towards the worldwide aspect of the apostolic commitment*.

The components of a salesian youth spirituality include an *explicit love of the Pope and a convinced adherence to his teaching*. The person of the Supreme Pontiff is a visible sign of unity for the whole Church. He is a providential presence through the service he provides in the name of Christ the Lord for the benefit of all humanity.

173
Christ met
in the
sacraments

The meeting and relationship with the risen Christ are lived in a special way in the celebration of the sacraments. Salesian tradition recognizes and asserts *their importance in the christian growth of young people*. Today also, in line with the conciliar renewal,

the communities are giving new value to the sacraments of initiation.

Baptism, for instance, the beginning of the journey of education to the faith, involves the youngsters in a renewed catechesis and a life witness consistent with configuration to Christ the Lord. *Confirmation* too, the sacrament that leads to the realization of maturity of faith through the gifts of the Spirit, takes on particular importance for youth. But in Don Bosco's pedagogy of holiness emphasis is placed primarily on the *educative influence of Reconciliation and the Eucharist*.

The sacrament of Reconciliation, which celebrates the love of God which is greater than sin, was presented to the young by Don Bosco as *one of the main pillars of the educative edifice*. And so at Valdocco it was frequently celebrated and given particular attention.

In the first place particular care was given to its preparation by means of a welcoming environment rich in friendship and fellowship; this helped the youngsters to overcome a natural reluctance to make known the secrets of their heart.

And then it was *directed to life*: i.e. it should improve interpersonal relationships; create conditions for a more manifest commitment to the fulfilment of one's duties; sustain conversion and renewal of heart, so that the youngster could "give himself to God" with a more efficacious intention. And finally *it was prolonged in spiritual direction*, to strengthen adherence to the Lord, *and in a fraternal meeting* with the educator through a joyful sharing of life.

The *educational results* of the sacrament of Reconciliation are many. When youngsters are sustained by a love which is understanding and forgiving, they find the strength to recognize their own sinfulness and weakness, and the need they have for support and guidance. They learn to resist the temptation to self-

sufficiency, and offer pardon in exchange for the reconciliation they have received. They become educated to a respect for other persons, and form a right and consistent conscience.

Regular recourse to the sacrament of Reconciliation makes efficacious the process of conversion and renewal.

175
in the
sacrament
of the
Eucharist

The celebration of the Eucharist, prepared in an atmosphere of solidarity and friendship, is lived as a festive encounter, full of youth symbolism and expressions. It is a joyful celebration of life, and thus becomes for the young a *significant moment of spiritual growth*.

It is called the *second pillar of the educational edifice* of the salesian system. From the Eucharist, in fact, the youngster learns to *reorganize his life* in the light of Christ who gives himself through love. In the first place he learns to submit his life to the requirements of communion, overcoming selfishness and introversion.

He is then led to aim at the generous donation of himself, opening himself to the needs of his companions and committing himself in apostolic activities, suited to his age and christian maturity. In this way the Eucharist becomes for him the source of new energy for growth in grace. "Education to true love passes necessarily through the Eucharist".³⁶

Salesian tradition recalls another typical expression of the personal relationship with the Lord Jesus: the visit and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Don Bosco frequently referred to the visit as a means of thanking God for the gift of one's own existence.

176
in prayer

Prayer made in a salesian fashion has some particular characteristics. It is the prayer of the good christian, of a simple and popular kind: it has its roots in life. It likes the festive atmosphere of contact with

³⁶ E. VIGANÒ, AGC 327, p.14

the young, but can also find time for personal dialogue with the Lord. It is expressed in brief and spontaneous expressions drawn from the Word of God and the liturgy.

Every generation has to find its own style of prayer in *fidelity to tradition* and a *courageous relationship with culture* and related problems. For this reason, salesian prayer is able to accept new styles which help youngsters to meet the Lord in daily life, i.e. it is flexible and creative, and attentive to the Church's guidelines for renewal.

Don Bosco used to speak more frequently of "piety" (devotion) than of "prayer". "Piety" expresses the awareness of being immersed in the "fatherhood of God" and is less concerned with words than with the loving gestures of one who wants to please the Lord in everything.

177
Mary, Mother
and Helper
of the Church

Salesian youth spirituality reserves a special place for the person of Mary. From the beginning of his vocation in his dream at the age of nine, Don Bosco received her as his guide and support.³⁷ With her motherly help he carried out God's design for his life. At the end of his labours he could declare with truth: "Mary has done everything".³⁸

In contact with the salesian community young people learn to look to Mary as *the one who "infuses hope"*,³⁹ and suggests to them some typically gospel attitudes: listening, fidelity, purity, self-donation, service.

All youngsters live through certain difficult periods of transformation, but also periods of enthusiasm for the new elements that lie ahead of them and which they are very keen to attain. Mary, invoked and honoured under the title of "Helper" is for them a "sign of certain hope and comfort".⁴⁰ Once they have acquired

³⁷ Cf. C 8

³⁸ Cf. note 21

³⁹ Cf. C 34

⁴⁰ LG 68

a well motivated Marian devotion, the young who live in salesian settings discover the horizons that Mary Help of Christians opens before them: a burning apostolic zeal in the struggle against sin and against a view of the world and mankind opposed to the Beatitudes and the “new commandment”.

5. SPIRITUALITY OF RESPONSIBLE SERVICE

178
Becoming
upright
citizens
and good
christians

The young believer, prompted by the Spirit, is at the service of mankind, like the Church – an expert in humanity. *Service is a yardstick for the journey of spirituality.*

Don Bosco, the father and teacher of youth, called on his boys to become “upright citizens and good christians”. The synthesis of the two elements is the mature fruit of youth spirituality. The simplicity of the formula conceals a difficult task to accomplish, and a commitment never fully realized.

To be an upright citizen *implies at the present day* for a young person the promotion of personal dignity and the rights that go with it, in every context; living generously in the family and preparing himself to form it on the basis of reciprocal donation; fostering solidarity, especially among the poor; development of one’s own work with honesty and professional competence; promoting justice, peace and the common good in the political arena; respecting creation; fostering culture.⁴¹

179
with the
creativity
of love

The history of youth at the Oratory during Don Bosco’s own lifetime is rich in this apprenticeship to the christian life: to be always of service to others, and this even in an extraordinary manner at times.

⁴¹ CL 37. 44

At the present day new fields of service are becoming open to youth. There is the *educational and cultural animation of the locality*, to overcome emargination and spread a culture of sharing; there is also *civil and missionary volunteer work*, for collaborating with other organisms for human advancement and evangelization.

Love for life, in the sign of the Spirit and Don Bosco's style, can find adequate ways for employing the best energies of the world of youth.

180
to the extent
of committing
the whole of
life with
Don Bosco
in the way he
committed
his own

Many youngsters are rich in spiritual resources; they show signs of an apostolic vocation and manage to develop their first contact and liking for Don Bosco into a desire to give themselves for the continuation of his mission. A knowledge of the daily problems lived by their companions provokes in many young people a first response of an educative kind.

Many vocations are born in fact from a happy experience of service in some field: in a poor area, in catechesis in an oratory, in visiting the sick, in voluntary work or educational initiatives. The young people ask themselves: "What social or ecclesial field shall I enter, so as to express my love for life and the Lord of life?"

For many of them the call is undoubtedly to a profession and the raising of a family, lived as a responsible service to the Church and mankind. For others a still more evident choice is for the priesthood or religious life. In any case all of them, under the guidance of the Spirit and animated by the values of salesian spirituality, welcome and live out their own existence as a vocation.

4. SOME KEY ISSUES IN EDUCATION TO THE FAITH

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another.

(Gal 5,13)

181

The journey of faith and salesian youth spirituality take up seriously the difficult task of the young who try to build an identity by bringing together the urgings of their internal energies, the numerous and varied messages that come from the local context, and the horizons which they see emerging at the present day. Faith in Christ finds a central place in this task as the source of understanding, the hope of future life, God's gift, and the transforming energy of history.

The incidence of faith on life, or its practical irrelevance, is clear today in some aspects of the existence of individuals or of culture, which therefore become its acid test. It is not a matter of particular points, but rather of areas where the significance, strength and contrasts of faith can be found.

We shall concentrate our attention on three of them.

FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE

182

**A lively
sense of
freedom**

A glance at the modern world at once reveals some criteria of behaviour, which are for us an occasion or a difficulty for committing ourselves to the education of youth to the faith.

In the first place there is an acute sense of individual *freedom*. In the political as well as the religious

field, everyone's freedom is considered inviolable as regards both mentality and style of life. They are ready to give up many things, but not their autonomy in making choices.

Any norm which is not interiorly accepted not only loses all meaning within the framework of personal values, but will be formally ignored. And it is possible to reach such standards of relativism that objective moral truth ceases to have any meaning.

183
Repercussions
on youth

The young feel the effects of this general situation, while being already under the influence of other characteristic elements of their age which render more difficult their efforts to form their conscience. The strong emotive drive, linked with personal development and frailty of will, places them in a state of weakness in the face of norms of conscience: they are aware of its promptings but only feebly; they catch a glimpse of the line they should take, but never with the necessary clarity.

They frequently run the risk of adopting ambiguous attitudes, under the influence of the cajolery of the mass-media and the effect of what is commonly called "modern style". The possibilities of access and choice, offered them from all sides, are excessive and an obstacle to the selection of a coherent and harmonized set of values. These are in fact more like a piling one on top of the other of criteria and references from a variety of forces than the elaboration of a coherent code of life.

184 But over and above these limitations the conscience of young people spontaneously accepts the "new humanism"⁴² and its values: the sense of freedom, the absolute dignity of the individual, the sense of one's personal life-plan, the need for authenticity and autonomy. These are elements which open on to the Gospel.

⁴² GS 55

Is it possible in a situation like this to form a moral conscience?

The educator must be aware that *the journey of education to the faith finds in the formation of conscience an obligatory stage that must be reached*. He knows that conscience is the place of personal encounter between man and God. It is God's sanctuary, where man feels in his inviolable interior the word and call of God, and responds to them.

A distorted conscience is at the same time the cause and effect of a falsified vision of God, his Word and his Salvation. Hence it rules out any faith project based on God as Father, on Christ as Saviour, on the building of his Kingdom, on spirituality.

From an overall standpoint one must educate to a *faith mentality* which is not afraid of confronting values but directs them into contexts regulated by human laws and by the Gospel. For success in this task certain indications must be kept in mind.

The first is that the young person must be helped to acquire a sufficient capacity of judgement and *ethical discernment*. He must be able to discern good from bad, sin and its structures, the action of God in his person and in history. Concentrating on discernment of this kind as the focal point of the formation of conscience means also making clear the purpose of all moral formation: to become able to exercise one's own autonomy and responsibility in the field of morals.

But it should be remembered that a christian conscience is formed only when the youngster is helped to measure his own life against the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. In the educational process, openness to objective truth is a precondition for acceptance of the Word of God. This is a challenge which commits the educator to be faithful in the integral presentation of moral principles, while understanding the practical situation of the young.

Necessary too is a *serious critical formation* concerning cultural models and certain norms of social life that are in contrast with fundamental values. In this regard one must be able to take a stand, based on one's own conscience inspired by Christ and his Gospel. This is a defence against ambiguities arising from false rationalizations, current ideologies, or superficial judgements of events whose deeper nature remains hidden.

Many abandonments of religious commitment are caused by faith not being inserted in culture, or by a progress in technology not adequately accompanied by cultural growth in the religious field.

On the other hand, to be able to express judgements on current cultural movements and on the values continually emerging in history, it is indispensable to be able to read them from a gospel standpoint. The Word of the Lord contains within itself indispensable criteria for the expression of a judgement on human actions.

The Gospel, with its proclamation of the Good News, must enter the life of the individual and provide him with a vision of the reality which places at the centre the relationship with God the Father and his Son the Saviour. And so for an educative intervention it is not sufficient to express a swift condemnation on anything that is new or does not correspond to previous practice.

In the matter of education to or of the faith it is indispensable to place oneself positively in the significant areas of modern daily life, and face them with competence.

It is not always an easy matter, especially for young people, to pass from gospel principles to the concrete circumstances of daily life. A particular *catechesis* is needed to evaluate the morality of gestures and behaviour, to motivate the conscience, which is the ultimate personal criterion for action, and to grasp

the relationship between faith and norms, faith and culture. The *environment and witness* are its determining elements.

190
Sense of
mystery,
of sin,
of limitation

There is finally a further important aspect that must be recalled; the *sense of mystery* which surrounds the life of every human being. Alongside the luminous mystery which binds us to the Lord and is realized in the Incarnation of the Son of God and the gift of the Spirit who dwells in our hearts, there is also another mystery that we all feel at work in us – the *mystery of sin and iniquity*. No victory can conceal from us the weakness we carry within us from our earliest years, and which through gestures, words, intentions, and hardness of heart we find always rooted within us; it makes us blind to good, and renders our steps hesitant on the road to holiness.

We are creatures, and so we are finite and limited. This is the basis on which our personal identity and moral nature is built. We are sinners, and therefore in need of light and strength. To educate to the mystery of being human is to educate to a sense of one's own worth and of one's real possibilities.

191
The need for
comparison
with a norm

From this situation arises the need to *compare ourselves with a norm*, whose function it is to enlighten and sustain the development of experience.

There is first of all a human norm to be kept in mind in personal guidelines and options.

There is also the experience of the Church which gathers the fundamental guidelines for a christian existence from the lives of believers enlightened by God's word, from intelligent attention to the signs of the times, and from the history of hidden and manifest holiness.

The journey is not an easy one. It requires daily contact with the life of the young, wide availability to meet them in dialogue and spiritual direction, and a great esteem for the sacrament of Reconciliation and living experience in its use.

192
The
situation

Today's social and cultural context stimulates and facilitates communication and affective exchanges.

Young people, not lacking in enterprise and challenging cultural prejudice and censure, stimulated by their age and wanting to overcome affective shortcomings in the family, are sensitive to the values of meeting and exchange as an expression of self-donation and fidelity, and gamble on love.

They want to "live" this gift but very often, through a process of internal and external conditioning, they manage to make of it only a "throw-away" element.

Love is certainly a fundamental dimension of the person. It is the spring that sets off life. It gives meaning to existence, opening it to understanding and obliteration.

It is lived by the young with exclusiveness and totality, to such a point that they give it precedence over every other value and commitment. But their radical donation does not correspond to the duration of their offering. They live it as a fleeting experience. And even if an encounter tends to take on a desire for authenticity, the force of sentiment is frequently overwhelmed by the sexual drive.

Finally, the seeking of a person to love leads necessarily to isolation from others and from the group, which one soon leaves.

193
Repercussions
on the
journey
of faith

All this has *repercussions on the plan for the building of personality* and on the more specific plan for maturing in christian life.

When love is lived in a context of conflict, and the sexual content occupies the main part, it puts a brake on overall growth. Realized selfishly the gesture of love is not open to the future, because it concentrates only on present feelings and tends to prescind from the evolution of persons. Similar effects are produced

in some contexts by the situation of many young people who put the blame on the absence of a father figure, or the lack of parents. They have no experience of a balanced relationship with parents and siblings. They have gaps in their make-up which are not easy to fill and are defenceless before the provocations of society. In their process of development they substitute tastes for values because they confuse happiness with pleasure. They have no plan for defining the sense of their own personal realization. The environment too created by people who live experiences of this kind creates a kind of generalized culture which, far from correcting such tendencies, sanctions and strengthens them

194 In situations like this, a christian cannot acquire an authentic understanding of love except against the background of God. God it is who has willed the reciprocal relationship between men and women, calling them to a deep communion able to signify the very reality of God himself.

195
**Educative
action**

The Salesian who is diligent about his educational activity in fostering the maturing process of young people, feels today a *special commitment to educating them to love*. He is convinced that the mystery of Christ and the events of his life provide the full and normative revelation of true love.

The typical experience of Don Bosco and the educative and spiritual content of the preventive system guide him towards some simple but efficacious methods.

196 In the first place it is fundamental to create around the youngsters in every environment an *educative atmosphere rich in opportunities for communicational and affective exchanges*. To feel that one is accepted, recognized, esteemed and loved is the best lesson on love itself. When such signs and gestures are lacking in the family, the youngsters easily leave it, not only

materially but also and more especially affectively.

197 *Integral education of the person* and the sustaining power of grace bring boys and girls to appreciate the authentic values of purity (respect for themselves and others, the dignity of the individual, transparency in relationships, etc.) as a proclamation of the Kingdom and the denunciation of every form of exploitation and slavery.

198 *Encounters between boys and girls*, when lived as moments of mutual enrichment, are an opening to dialogue and attention to each other. They lead to the discovery of the richness of the reciprocal relationship which exists at levels of feeling and intelligence, thought and action. In this way each comes to discover the other, accepted as they are and respected in their dignity as persons.

199 *An adequate education*, therefore, leads to the acceptance of sexuality as a value which matures the person and as a gift to be exchanged in a specific, exclusive and total relationship, open to responsible procreation.

200 *Comparison with persons who live this kind of love* has the force of witness. Certain attitudes linked with gratuitous self-donation become strongly and intuitively understood and assimilated. The joy of a vocation lived with conviction reverberates strongly in young people, and facilitates in them the opening to a serious and serene love able to accept the demands that go with it.

201 *The witness of the Salesian who lives in a clear and happy manner the donation of himself in chastity* leads the young to see the possibility of living a similar experience of love. The youngster living at his side will begin to wonder about the Lord of life, who can fill the heart of a creature so completely.

He will become aware that *love* becomes in its own right a *plan of life* which can be expressed in a thousand and one different forms. Fraternal service too to the poor and the "little ones", and guided and gradual contact with situations of suffering, will lead to gratuitous love.

- 202** *Careful catechesis* will lead young people to understand the reality and dimensions of this love; it will lead them to the acceptance of the plan of God, who is Love and the source of all love; and it will prepare them for its realization in christian marriage.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CHARITY

- 203**
The situation The General Chapter has "lived" the world sense of the salesian vocation. And what strikes the mind and heart most strongly is the living daily story of thousands of Salesians who are disturbed each day by the tragedy of the poor; they compare themselves with them and give their very lives for them. The challenge is a continuous one, both because material poverty seems to be increasing without limit in many countries, and because within the context of economic wellbeing are hatched and explode new and tragic forms of poverty: delinquency, emargination, exploitation of persons, and drugs.
- 204**
As essential component of the Christian ethic But poverty is only an indication of social imbalance at a moment of global transformation. Other motives for concern loom menacingly on the horizon, even though they be accompanied by evident signs of hope. New problems are emerging which require the active participation of individuals: peace, the environment and the use of goods, the moral question in every single country, international relationships, the rights of the defenceless.

The challenge therefore extends far beyond poverty. It is a question of preparing a generation capable of building a more human social order for everyone. The social dimension of charity appears therefore as the "manifestation of a credible faith".⁴³ It is in fact a "constituent dimension" of the preaching of the Gospel.⁴⁴ In other words, it is a fundamental aspect of the activity of the Church for the redemption of the human race and liberation from any form of oppression.⁴⁵ It follows that the social dimension of charity is an *essential component of the christian ethic*.

205
The need
to form a
mentality

It is a matter therefore of demolishing a kind of widespread indifference, of swimming against the stream, of educating to the value of solidarity against the practice of aggravated competition and individual profit. There is a strong temptation for young people to take refuge in a private view of life based on consumerism. Generally they seem to have no confidence that any valid and enduring improvement can be brought about. And to this must be added the diffidence that stems from the grave cleavage between ethics and politics, which recurrently becomes manifest in news of corruption, punctually recounted and magnified by the means of social communication as only the mass media can do.

206

The challenge touches all educators of youth, and especially of those who live in situations of poverty and underdevelopment. Here hope is further thwarted every day by the awareness of the existence of perverse mechanisms of exploitation. Corruption at all levels is generating new and tragic situations of poverty. Some young people would like change and

⁴³ John Paul II

⁴⁴ Synod 1971, "De iustitia in mundo", in *Enchiridium Vaticanum*, vol. 4, p. 803

⁴⁵ Cf. EN 25-39

transformation, but the typical impatience of youth and the impossibility of trying out changes lead them to attitudes of violence and permanently frustrated states of mind.

And yet many of these same young people feel a sense of responsibility for the future of their country. How can they be helped to transform into practical projects their noble sentiments, without falling a prey to temptations to violence, utopianism, and religious intimism which the sects offer in abundance at bargain prices? How especially can it be ensured that they themselves do not give way to temptations to consumerism and the exploitation of their fellows?

207
The
historical
response of
Don Bosco

To respond to this challenge we have the *example and experience of Don Bosco*.

Although social and political situations have changed since his time, the reality that struck the young Don Bosco in his first contact with the Turin of immigration and the era of youth exploitation, was from certain aspects similar to that of today. To meet it he chose the way of integral education to meet the needs of the youngsters of the day. His school of holiness became a plan of life immersed in concrete commitments: a spirituality that was not something private but involved in activity.

208

The salesian community is aware therefore that the struggle against poverty, injustice and underdevelopment, forms part of its mission.⁴⁶ And so it feels itself deeply involved in it, in line with Don Bosco's style and its own charisma: with intelligence and realism, and always with charity.⁴⁷

In the conviction then that an efficacious education to the social dimension of charity constitutes a verification of its ability to communicate the faith, the

⁴⁶ Cf. C 33

⁴⁷ Cf. SGC 72

salesian community tries in the first place to bear witness to justice and peace before the youngsters and to promote them everywhere. And so it lives in deep harmony with the world's great problems and is attentive to the sufferings of those in the setting in which it is placed.

In contexts of economic wellbeing it will be able to steer youngsters into taking up critical positions with regard to society, and help them especially to discover the hidden but no less tragic world of the new poverty and its structural causes.

But the challenge applies with particular intensity to those communities that work in contexts of poverty. Here it is up to the Salesians to motivate the young and the ordinary people through education to become leaders in the process of their own liberation.

209
Educate
to the value
of the
person

At this point it becomes urgent to *single out attitudes* and plan initiatives which will help today's youth to express in their lives the true social dimension of charity. The more general indication is to work in the journey of faith to emphasize the *absolute value of the individual* and his inviolability; he stands above material goods and any organization. This is the critical key for the evaluation of ethically abnormal situations (corruption, privilege, irresponsibility, exploitation, deception), and for making personal options in the face of complicated manipulation mechanisms.

When this "personalization" is mature, it will be possible to pledge one's life in the social field. This must be fostered by giving proper value to the originality of the young person and his interpersonal dimension. He must understand in practical terms that his destiny in life will be fulfilled in association with other people and in his ability to give himself to them. When this perspective is absorbed interiorly with deep christian motivations, it becomes a criterion of relationships with others and a source of tenacious historical commitment.

1. Attention must be given first of all to helping young people to acquire an *adequate knowledge of the complex social and political reality*. We speak of serious, systematic and documented study, and this at two levels. The first is the level of one's own locality, town and country: the situations of need, the institutions, the manner of handling political and economic power, and cultural models that influence the common good.

At the same time eyes must be turned to the world, its problems and dramas, and the perverse mechanisms that in so many countries make worse the situations of suffering and injustice. The serious nature of this approach should help young people to make a critical and unbiased evaluation of the various systems and multiple facets of the social and political field.

Information alone is obviously insufficient. All partial pieces of knowledge must be united in a practical synthesis, in a deeply felt faith that animates efficacious activity, in truth and peace, for the building of a "civilization of love". The social teaching of the Church therefore appears as the key to understanding reality, and as an indication of the ideal objectives to be sought.

2. One can and should go further than this. To stop at an analysis of the reality is not of any great help. Communities operating in contexts of poverty and distress will work to lead *youth and people in general to become responsible for their own development*, by shaking off their passivity with a lively awareness of their own dignity, and by taking on responsibility not only for their own problems but also for those of their neighbours.

For communities working in contexts of economic wellbeing on the other hand, it will be a matter of *physically introducing young people into the world of those men and women who are asking for solidarity and help*. This is a moment of greater delicacy. Con-

212
Respond
with
practical
solidarity
projects

tact with this world must be purified from false curiosity and emotion. It is not just a question of gaining experience of a particular context, or situation, or a part of the world with particular problems. The objective is to meet persons, to share their human drama. This will lead to the overcoming of a certain mentality disposed to serve the poor but not to share their life.

The spiritual attitude is defined therefore by the esteem and search for values that are present in everyone, even those in situations of personal decay. This is the phase of listening, of conversion and sharing.

3. The personal impact of world problems and appeals requires that from the time of youth one learns to devise precise and practical *solidarity projects*, and to develop *forms of social intervention*. There is no place for ingenuity in social and political intervention; attention is needed to some fundamental points:

- the overcoming in the young of superficial attitudes, that lack the social conscience on which the teaching of the Church insists so much;
- a proper relationship between “works of charity” and “obligations of justice”;⁴⁸
- patient analysis for transforming existing structures which continue to weigh heavily on certain situations;
- the making of plans drawn up not only for the poor, but with them, so that by following them they will be able to manage their own lives.

Always and everywhere, following the example of Don Bosco who strongly defended the social significance of his work, it is necessary to educate young people to get their leaders involved at social, political and religious levels. Only in this way can the projects serve as examples, and eventually be imitated and multiplied.

⁴⁸ Cf. AA 8

213
A solidarity
founded
on the Gospel
and on faith

Each of the above-mentioned phases requires that we help the young to strengthen their motivations of faith. Education to solidarity means making it understood that *charity must be an expression of one's own encounter with Christ*. Hence the importance of listening and adhering deeply to God's Word and of prayer, through which the young learn first to build themselves before improving others, and avoid the danger of activism and excessive concern about efficiency. The deeply rooted social teaching of the Church will enlighten them so that they can direct their activity towards objectives and models inspired by christian love.

214
even in the
requirements
of taking
part in
public life

The initiatives fostering these sensitivities and formation of the young may refer to different sectors: to the locality where they live, to developing countries where they may be able to spend time and energy, or to the animation of youth environments.

But there is one aspect from which we Salesians are called to work with particular conviction: that of setting young people on the road to *commitment and participation in public life*, or in other words "in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good".⁴⁹ This is a sector we have somewhat overlooked or disowned. Perhaps we have been afraid of getting involved in forms of collateralism or of falling into the complicated machinery of electoral campaigns, or of being unfaithful to the manner which is properly ours for taking part in the Church's commitment to justice and peace.⁵⁰ But this is a challenge we have to accept, and a risk we have to take.

⁴⁹ CL 42

⁵⁰ Cf. C 3

The more active youth communities will be able to ask this kind of service from their better members, in the name of the social dimension of charity. At the beginning it will be a limited commitment, restricted to their own locality and town. But other roads will open in due course, and this objective will serve also to foster in young people a positive attitude towards the political reality, and open them to the trust that at this level too can change things and situations.

In this way evangelical charity, once it has become expressed in a concrete project, will continue to trace out in history the new path of justice.

The more active youth communities will be able to ask this kind of service from their better teachers in the name of the social dimension of charity. At the beginning it will be a limited commitment, restricted to their own locality and town. But other roads will open in due course, and the objective will serve also to foster in young people a positive attitude towards the political reality, and open them to the trust that at this level too can change things and situations.

For this way of logical charity, once it has become expressed in a concrete project, will continue to mark out in history the new path of justice.

PRACTICAL COMMITMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY

You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

(Mt 5,13-14.16)

215
The
community

The task of educating the young to the faith in the context of the new evangelization leads the community to rethink and renew itself in the light of the Gospel and of our Rule of life.

The preceding General Chapter had already suggested some stimulating reflections on the salesian community, evangelized and evangelizing. Now, rather than repeat a doctrinal synthesis, it is opportune to deal with some themes which are closely linked with the task of education to the faith.

216
a sign
of faith

The community is conscious of being constituted by vocation as a “*sign of faith*”. It rejoices at the fact and is grateful for it to the Lord, while recognizing its own weakness. It endeavours to give transparent and evangelical authenticity to its life, in the conviction that you cannot communicate the faith unless you live it as the great resource of your existence.

It reminds itself that “for the necessary discernment and renewal historians are not sufficient, nor theologians, nor politicians, nor organizers; we need so-called “spiritual” men, men of faith, sensitive to the things of God and ready to work with courageous obedience as our Founder did”.¹

¹ SGC 18

In this way it finds again the practical way to strengthen its witness in prayer, with which it daily "deepens its awareness of its intimate and living relationship with God, and of its saving mission",² and in fraternal communion, by which "the confreres lead a life of self-giving and sharing by welcoming others and offering them hospitality".³

It becomes an efficacious sign when it welcomes and values the generosity and dynamism of young confreres, the original contribution of the various charisms, the suffering of confreres who are sick, and the calm and fatherly presence of the elderly.

It gives transparency to the following of Christ, convinced that "in a world tempted by atheism and the idolatry of pleasure, possessions and power, our way of life bears witness, especially to the young, that God exists and that his love can fill a life completely".⁴

217
a school
of faith

But the community, precisely because it is a "sign" and salesian as well, is called to be a "*school*" of faith for the young. Above all it is "missionary", i.e. its mission is the reason for its existence and work. This calls for its attention and discernment so as to confront the faith with the surrounding reality. The continual evolution of the world and society involves youth, and is in consequence a challenge to educators. Spiritual and pastoral renewal are two aspects which are mutually compenetrated and interdependent. This calls for attitudes of confidence, encounter, understanding and dialogue with the world; a pastoral creativity through which challenges are met with an 'oratorian criterion'; discernment and fidelity in salesian pedagogical style which becomes a concrete educational plan, thought out and realized in shared responsibility.

² C 85

³ C 56

⁴ C 62

The community is not only a sign and school of faith but, by virtue of its consecrated life, it becomes a "centre of communion and participation, capable of gathering together and stimulating those whom the Spirit calls to work with youth. "It works in communion with the particular Church",⁵ from which it receives guidance and support and to which it makes its own charismatic contribution.⁶

From this vision of the community as a sign, school, and centre of communion and participation, and from a consideration of the challenges, the journey of faith and salesian youth spirituality, *some deliberations considered as the most urgent take their rise, together with some practical guidelines, for the education of the young to the faith.*

⁵ C 57

⁶ Cf. C 48

1. CHAPTER DELIBERATIONS

1.1 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THE WITNESS OF A COMMUNITY IN CONTINUAL RENEWAL.

219
Witness

Witness is the only language able to convince young people that "God exists and his love can fill a life completely".⁷ It is indispensable therefore that the community live and make transparently evident its faith in Jesus Christ, to whom it wants to lead the young.

For us Salesians, called by the Lord to be "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor"⁸ it is necessary to concentrate our attention and enthusiasm on three great aspects that give strength to our witness.

The first is the unity of the community, which is the evangelical sign that Jesus asks of his disciples sent by him into the world to proclaim the Good News. The second is the proclamation of the message which, at the beginning, may be only the gift of a welcome or a manifestation of trust, as happened in the case of Bartholomew Garelli. The third is the commitment of service to the world, and in particular to the young, especially the poorest of them.

220
**Ongoing
formation**

These three aspects require a deepening of our religious life and an updating of our expertise. If the newness of Christ is to be inserted into history, then culture (which is in constant evolution) must be continually renewed. One cannot speak therefore of

⁷ C 62

⁸ C 2

education to the faith without involving the life of the salesian, who is by profession "sent to the young" and is by profession an educator.

He must give the best of his time and resources to God and young people. Religious and professional formation, though differing from one another, are brought together in the grace of unity. *Ongoing formation* therefore, which qualifies the Salesian for his mission as educator and pastor, must become an unalterable constant in his life. And the setting in which it takes place is the local and provincial community.

THEREFORE:

- 221** In the next six years the Congregation will have as its *primary obligation the continuing formation and qualification of the confreres*. It will give particular attention to the internal apostolic conviction which is both pastoral charity and pedagogical ability.

Because of this:

- 222** Every *local community*, animated by its Rector, will have an annual programme of ongoing formation, preferably on a weekly ("community day") or fortnightly basis. The confreres should take part in the community meetings, which are "opportunities for renewing the religious and pastoral meaning of his life, and of learning to carry out his work with greater competence".⁹

- 223** Every *province* will draw up an organic plan for the ongoing formation of the confreres with a view to their spiritual renewal, their pastoral qualification, and their educational and professional ability.

⁹ C 119

It will prepare confreres especially for the work of education to the faith, the animation of pastoral communities, and the formation of lay people.

It will make provision for special initiatives for the formation of Rectors in the field of both personal and community spiritual direction.

224

The Rector Major with his Council will foster and follow up the provincial plans with opportune indications. They will evaluate them on the occasion of the "Team visits" that take place during the six years.

1.2 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THAT THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY BE PART OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT AND YOUTH SCENE WITH A FRESH PASTORAL APPROACH

225

**A more
active
insertion
in the
youth scene**

The distance of young people from the faith, and frequently also their distance from us, calls on us to have the courage to insert ourselves more actively in their world and in the social context in which they live. Every single Salesian therefore is called upon to accompany the young on their journey.

This implies a direct experience of their world, listening to their questions and aspirations, acquiring their culture and language, and willingness to share experiences and projects worked out not only for them, but also and more especially with them.

A truly qualitative leap is needed, a return amongst youth with renewed pastoral sensitivity and a more marked educational ability.

226

**Significance
in the
locality
and in the
Church**

This is an enterprise that concerns not only the individual Salesian. It involves the community and, in a quite specific way, also its educative and pastoral plan. It must acquire the habit of continually revising and replanning the youth significance of its work, and its ability to dialogue with the local reality, with social and educational institutions of the neighbourhood and

town; the ability to express its educational ardour with plans that meet the expectations of the young, and to interact continuously with the surrounding reality in which it is vitally inserted.

In so far as it is a living experience of Church, the salesian community must be clearly inserted in the plans and projects of the local Church for pastoral work in the youth sector. It must learn to receive incentives from it, but also to communicate experiences and suggest plans for the education of all young people to the faith, and especially those who are poor or farthest away.

227
Responsibility
of the
Province

But the need to create a living relationship between salesian work, the locality and the Church is not the responsibility of the local community alone. It belongs to the provincial community to continually revise and replan the individual works of the province in line with their ecclesial and social significance. Such continued reflection will also imply the obligation of making some difficult but important decisions. Sometimes courage may be needed to relocate a work in social and ecclesial contexts that better correspond to the salesian mission, and to start up new works to meet new and urgent requirements and new fronts of salesian commitment.

In making decisions of this kind the Provincial with his council will find guidance and support in the General Council.

THEREFORE:

228

The Congregation commits itself in the next six years, to *better characterize its works from the point of view of education to the faith* and, if necessary, to relocate them to ensure a greater contact with the young, and especially the poorest among them.

Because of this:

229 The *local community* will look for practical ways to revitalize its own presence among youth, and will exploit every form of communication and solidarity with its own district, through collaboration and linkage with institutions that foster the education and culture of the people.

Once a year by means of a “scrutinium” for the purpose, it will check up on the effect of its evangelizing action; as a result of this it will reshape its activities and reformulate the duties and commitments of the individual confreres so as to concentrate resources on the objectives of education to the faith.

230 Not later than the next Provincial Chapter, *every Province* will revise its Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan (“PEPS”, in Italian). In it:

- it will pay particular attention to the active presence of the individual works in the local Church and district;
- it will review the educative quality of the same works and their significance from the youth point of view, starting up (if necessary) an investigation into their possible relocation;
- it will single out new and urgent frontiers for our commitment, principally among youngsters in greater difficulty, and starting up for them some work which will be a “sign” of our intention to go after those youngsters we have not yet reached;
- it will translate the journey of faith proposed by the GC23 into a practical process suited to those we are working for and the contexts in which we operate.

231 *The Rector Major with his Council* will study the particular situation of each province; they will offer guidance for its reflections and for making the decisions needed to adapt its pastoral commitments to the new circumstances.

1.3 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THAT THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY BECOME THE ANIMATOR OF THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY AND OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY.

232 The educative community

Wherever we work, we set up the educative and pastoral community. "It involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us".¹⁰ Though this is certainly an arrangement that will improve educational organization and make better use of the various abilities of the laity, it is above all else an experience of communion and shared responsibility.

The setting up of the educative and pastoral community means that all the members are directly involved and are made to share responsibility for the educational experience and christian formation.

It is not an easy thing to do. A change of mentality is needed in all its components, and in the first place in the Salesians themselves.

233 Shared responsibility of the laity

A change of this sort is concerned especially with giving the laity their proper value. Numerically they form the major part of the educative and pastoral community. Mature relationships of shared responsibility must be established with them. There is need especially of a process of formation. Experiences realized so far guarantee satisfactory results, even with some difficulties. On the other hand we are spurred relentlessly on in this direction by the guidelines of the Church, recently expressed in "Christifideles laici".

234 The Salesian Family

We have particular duties of animation in respect of the Salesian Family. They live the same spirituality that we do and take part in the same mission to the

¹⁰ C 47

young; they collaborate and share responsibility in our own work, or working in Don Bosco's style in widely different fields of activity. Their presence in the locality is a far from indifferent factor in the education of the young. It is our intention therefore to extend and strengthen it. We feel the responsibility for their spiritual, educational and pastoral formation, and we support them in their initiatives in favour of youth or the environment.

THEREFORE:

- 235** The Congregation commits itself in the next six years to the *setting up of the educative and pastoral community wherever we work*. In it will be fostered in particular the qualification of lay people (and especially members of the Salesian Family) from a christian, pedagogical and salesian standpoint.

Because of this:

- 236** Not later than the next Provincial Chapter *each local community* will set up the educative and pastoral community in its work, and get it functioning as well as possible. It will translate into practical local initiatives the provincial plan for the formation of the laity referred to in the following paragraph, giving particular care to the formation of the members of the Salesian Family, who should always be involved and committed in programmes for education to the faith.

At the time of the provincial visitation, the Provincial will check up on what has been done by the community in this field.

- 237** *The province* will draw up a programme of formation for the lay people; this programme will foster their professional approach, educational ability, and witness as regards education to the faith. It will offer initiatives for liaison, lay down criteria for the sharing of responsibility and participation in all the works,

and try out particular forms of management of the work with the collaboration of the laity.

- 238** *The Rector Major, through the Departments concerned, will offer elements and lines of thought for a “lay project” in the Congregation.*

1.4 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THAT THE COMMUNITY DEVELOP AN ORGANIC PASTORAL PROGRAMME.

- 239**
Communion
in action Ecclesial communion has its source in the Holy Spirit. It is expressed in faith, hope and charity, and manifested in an eminent manner by communion in activity. The Church, as it develops varied activities through its members, tends towards a single objective, the salvation of mankind in Christ. The different services and ministries serve this unity and in this way contribute to the development and qualification of pastoral activity.

- 240**
Structures
of unity In the Congregation too there are services and structures of pastoral animation. The SGC asked for structures of unity and guidance, rather than division and mere organization of initiatives in the sector. The structures must foster the integration of faith in life; they must lead to a better understanding and expression of the complementary nature of all values in Christ.¹¹

To overcome the scattered nature of many pastoral initiatives unconnected with each other, and to create a practical communion about our major aims and in our own style of doing things, interventions and persons must be made to converge on certain specific targets.

¹¹ SGC 712

241 This convergence is required by the subject of education, the young person, to whom are directed the various proposals, which must be harmonized with each other and adapted to all their other requirements.

This convergence is required also by the active subject, i.e. the educative and pastoral community. If in fact the members did not agree about the goal to be achieved and the way to reach it, the journey of faith of the young would be seriously compromised.

A further need is to make possible the circulation of experiences and pastoral models at regional, continental and world level, following the present usage of the Church.

THEREFORE:

242 In harmony with the pastoral activity of the Church and the sensitivity of the GC23, the Salesian Congregation, through its means of animation at world, provincial and local levels, *will foster communication and liaison*, and will coordinate practical steps and interventions of different kinds.

Because of this:

243 *In every local community* and in other forms of salesian presence, roles will be established so that education to the faith becomes a shared commitment for which all the confreres are responsible, while particular tasks of animation (catechesis, liturgy, spiritual direction, apostolic obligations) will be entrusted to each one in accordance with the norms of the provincial directory.

244 *The Provincial with his council* is responsible for the pastoral work of the province. He will appoint a delegate for the youth pastoral sector, who will coordinate the work of a team which will ensure the convergence of all activities on the objective of education

to the faith, and render possible practical communication between the provinces.

245 *National or regional pastoral centres* will be followed up by the provincials responsible, and will be reorganized in line with the central position of education to the faith; they will be staffed by personnel who are well prepared and sufficient in number, and supplied with adequate means and equipment.

246 Services, activities, initiatives and works which are concerned with the education of youth to the faith, will find their unifying point of reference in the Department for Youth Pastoral Work.

1.5 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THAT THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY GIVE PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THEIR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE.

247 Vocational guidance constitutes the vertex and
Qualifying “crown of all our educational and pastoral activity”.¹²
dimension But this is not the terminus of the faith-journey; it is an element always present, and one that must characterize every stage and every area of intervention.

248 For us who are Salesians this is truer still, because the care of apostolic vocations is a characteristic of our mission, and is indeed one of the purposes of our Congregation.¹³ Don Bosco’s example is enlightening in this field too. At a period of great social transformation and grave crisis for the Church, he was able to trace out new paths in developing vocations for the Church and for his recently born Congregation.¹⁴

¹² C 37

¹³ Cf. C 6

¹⁴ BM 5, ch. 33, p. 251-268

249
New
experience

In recent years our Congregation has carried out a long reflection, so as to face the new situation characterized on the one hand by the prolonging of the age of youth, with the consequent delay in making decisions, and on the other by the phenomenon of secularization, which has so invaded educative institutions and the family in particular.

The falling off in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life has been a further stimulus to the Congregation to review the quality of its own religious life and the vitality of its educative project.

As well as renewing the traditional forms of vocational guidance and follow-up, it has been able to launch new and varied experiences, such as vocational reference groups, communities for encouraging those who are already aspirants to some extent, houses for prayer and retreats, school camps and vocational weeks. Above all it has found group experience to be a promising setting for vocational guidance. Finally, new missionary enthusiasm has opened up new vocational horizons to many young people.

250

The Congregation's reflection has been concentrated especially on the local community as the decisive setting for any serious plan of pastoral work for vocations.

It is in a salesian house, in fact, that the young come in contact with the salesian vocation. It is the local community that can identify the signs of a call, provide serious guidance, eventually perhaps make an explicit vocational proposal, and follow up the young person through a process of the discernment of God's will towards a decision.

THEREFORE:

- 251 Vocational guidance, proposal and follow-up will become a *characteristic part of journeys of faith* at all their stages.

For this reason:

- 252 Every local community will express in its own educative and pastoral plan the manner in which it will provide guidance for all youngsters in discovering their vocation in the Church, and accompany those who show signs of a vocation to a special consecration.

It will offer concrete experiences of commitment and gratuitous service among the very poor as volunteers. It will create group experiences with a clear vocational purpose.

The Rector will take up again his role as guide of the youngsters through individual and group contact with them; he will invite those who seem more disposed, to share the more significant moments of our life, and involve them in our apostolic activity.

Every community will make known and loved the history and life of the Congregation.

- 253 *The Provincial* must see whether the vocational dimension is given the importance that is its due in the plan of every salesian work and every youth group; he will foster the preparation of the confreres as regards both vocational guidance and spiritual direction.

To the provincial team for youth pastoral work he will appoint an animator, who will coordinate the vocational dimension and maintain the necessary liaison with the pastoral work of the local Church.

1.6 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS FROM THE COMMUNITY A NEW FORM OF COMMUNICATION.

254 The importance of communication

The ability to communicate and enter into accord with persons and events characterizes the development of the human person, and especially the growth of the young. Communication, in fact, often becomes a determining factor for survival and development. It touches on every area of social life and every dimension of the life of the individual.

It not only passes on information, but communicates ideas, creates easy agreements and puts forward models of life and behaviour.

255 for the young person

The young live in today's society of communication and relationships. They are open to receive every message and form of communication, and are themselves capable of producing and passing on new messages.

They learn to keep themselves informed, and feel the need to be able to control, select and evaluate the messages they receive. They are not satisfied with verbal and cultural information: they want also the kind that is symbolical or passed on through 'body-language'. In the face of the bombardment of the mass-media they find themselves committed to resist the media's power for standardizing and making everything fit into a pattern.

256 A challenge to educators

All this is a challenge to educators: on one side, in their ability to speak in a world that habitually uses so many kinds of language; and on the other, because the use of the means of social communication has become a sine qua non even for the proclamation of the Word of salvation.

The Congregation feels itself involved in this dimension, and this all the more because one of its purposes is to be "educators of the faith for the work-

ing classes, particularly by means of social communication".¹⁵

Don Bosco had an intuitive grasp of its importance and accepted the challenge. For this reason "he initiated apostolic undertakings to defend and sustain the faith of the people".¹⁶

THEREFORE:

257 In the next six years *the Congregation commits itself to an adequate use of social communication* for transmitting the christian message and educating youth to the faith.

For this reason:

258 *The local community* will foster its own capacity for communication:

- by helping each Salesian to be a good communicator, able to use a kind of language adapted to the young and to people in general, especially in the liturgy and catechesis;
- by exploiting all the means (relationships, aspect of the house, theatre, video, music, meeting rooms, etc.) through which messages can be given to predispose people to the faith and spread the message of salvation;
- and in particular by seeing that young people are educated to the different forms of communication, and a critical reading of the messages they convey.

259 *The Provincial* will appoint someone to be responsible for social communication in the province. This person will:

- assist the individual communities in promoting various communicational realities;

¹⁵ C 6

¹⁶ C 43

- offer his services to the various sectors of activity and will maintain relations with local ecclesiastical and civil organizations.

In everything concerning the education of the young, he will work with the team for youth pastoral work.

260 *The Councillor General for social communication will:*

- encourage the formation of the Salesian as a communicator;
- assist the community in the use of the various means of communication;
- guide (especially in the emerging societies) the launching of practical projects responding to the needs of various countries in the field of social communication (publishing houses, centres for the production of videos and audiovisuals for education to the faith, radio transmissions for the people, etc.).

2. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR PARTICULAR SITUATIONS

261 The journey “towards the faith” and “of faith”, translated into adequate stages, will be taken into consideration by communities and individual Salesians who work in *particular situations and guide specific youth experiences*.

Referring back ideally to the GC21 and other documents of the Congregation, the GC23 limits itself to some fundamental indications, closely linked with the proposal expressed in this document. We are aware that this proposal must be inserted in a wider educative project, but our concern at the moment, in the various initiatives, is to highlight the particular kind of relationship to be established with young people and the possibilities offered by this same relationship for education to the faith.

2.1 ENVIRONMENTS PROVIDING A WIDE WELCOME

262 *Environments offering a wide welcome* – oratories, youth centres and other kinds too – carry out a progressive action of education and growth in the faith. They serve either a large area or the territory of a parish. They have the aspect of a frontier work between the civil and religious sectors, or between the secular and ecclesial domains: in this situation lies their originality and also their risk.

That they may lose their educative and pastoral quality is a danger that is not just imaginary. The welcome extended to everyone, the diversity of young people who find their way in, the atmosphere of freedom that surrounds the activities, and the scarcity of personnel, can compromise the programme of education to the faith, which of necessity must take on many different forms.

Consequently, in the next six years a *particular effort is called for*:

263 — *To make the environment suitable.* Welcoming everyone means that these settings must be characterized by gospel principles and methods, manifested in general objectives, organization, personal relationships, personal behaviour, and a family atmosphere;

264 — In emphasizing that *the soul of the oratory or youth centre is evangelization.* Hence attention must be given to the catechesis and religious formation of the youngsters, avoiding every form of improvisation. The desire for liveliness and company will be fostered by encounters with all the young people together, as well as in groups and in personal contacts;

265 — In *assigning time and resources* for putting the above indications into practice. Over and above its educative and pastoral aspect, every single oratory or youth centre must prepare initiatives (with precise details as regards times and personnel):

- for meeting the young people,
- for proclaiming the faith,
- for catechesis,
- for the formation of those disposed to undertake a mature journey of faith, and seek out their own particular vocation;

266 — *In fostering in a quite special way the pedagogical, cultural and religious formation of the animators.* These are the most successful expression of oratory work, and one of its aims most carefully pursued.

2.2 ENVIRONMENTS OF SYSTEMATIC EDUCATION

267 Meeting young people in *settings predisposed for a systematic programme of education* (schools, training

centres for trades, boarding establishments, hostels for students and workers, and the like) can provide the possibility for systematic education to the faith. This becomes part in fact of a vision of life and the world that the youngster builds up through learning the various matters associated with the planning of his own future.

268 In settings of this kind the demands of cultural programmes are greater.

The time young people stay with us for recreational, formative and cultural activities has been markedly diminished. One notices also a kind of break between the institution and life. The teaching does not reach the youngster's vital problems. There is also a form of detachment between the institution and education, and another between education and education to the faith.

At the root of this there lies not only the cultural programme with little time available for contacts, but also an idea that supports the separation of the two aspects, if not indeed their total equalization.

269 There are confreres and lay collaborators who work and expend a great deal of energy in these structures for the educational and cultural growth of the young. They must *direct their interventions in a more organic manner along the following lines:*

270 — *Rethink*, in view of education to the faith, both the overall sense of culture and work, and the teaching of the individual disciplines, in which they should point out the religious dimension as a deep aspect of reality.

271 — *Consider the teaching of religion* as an important part of cultural formation and of proclaiming the faith. To this end there must be guaranteed the proper arrangement of the content, the necessary space in the time-table, the updating of the teachers, and all

the elements useful for the successful carrying out of such teaching.

In the whole process of formation to the faith, there must be kept in mind the diversity of young people in their approach to the faith itself.

It will be the duty of provincial organisms to promote initiatives for qualifying Salesians and lay collaborators for this task. The same organisms must also assess the programmes and their quality.

272 — See that the time-table provides for *faith celebrations* for the entire scholastic community and/or particular groups. In this way concrete experiences will be offered of what has been communicated by word.

273 — *Follow up personally or in groups* all the youngsters, but more especially those who give evidence of greater sensitivity to cultural proposals and those of faith. The Salesians must dedicate themselves directly to these youngsters, sharing with the lay collaborators organizational and administrative aspects.

2.3 THE YOUTH GROUP

274 *Group experience* is a fundamental element in salesian pedagogical tradition.

The youth group is a part of wider organizations (associations, educational settings, parishes); it is the subject of particular apostolic initiatives (volunteer work, expressive activities, tourism, sport, etc.). In these various aspects we have in mind not their particular organization nor their immediate objectives, but their ultimate purpose of the formation to the faith of the young people taking part in them.

The group is the setting where educative and religious proposals become personalized; it is the place for expression and responsibility; it is the place for

interpersonal communication and the planning of initiatives. Frequently it is the only structural element that offers the young the occasion for access to human values and education to the faith.

Our own environments give life and welcome to a great variety of groups, so as to provide an adequate response to every interest of youth.

275 Youth groups and associations which, while maintaining their organizational autonomy, share the same salesian spirituality and pedagogical principles, form explicitly or implicitly the *Salesian Youth Movement* (SYM).

This is an original gift of the Spirit to the community of believers, and one of the riches of the Church and youth. In the Don Bosco centenary year it showed itself to be full of life and growing in self-awareness.

276 In the SYM all the groups live the values of Salesian Youth Spirituality (SYS) at different levels.

The SYM is an open reality, in the form of concentric circles, which unites many young people: from those farthest away, for whom the spirituality is something only dimly perceived through an environment in which they feel welcome, to those who consciously and explicitly make their own the salesian ethic. These latter constitute the animating nucleus of the whole movement, which is therefore an original educative movement.

277 The circulation of messages and values in the SYM has no need of a rigid and centralized organization. It is based on free communication between the groups, and needs only a minimum structure for the coordination of common initiatives. On this basis those meetings are preferred which become meaningful occasions for dialogue, comparison, christian formation, and youthful expression.

The groups work and are linked with each other in the local educative community, in which they interact for their mutual enrichment and to create a cultural climate which is lively and committed in a christian manner.

This first locale will have a wider setting at provincial or interprovincial level, for the purpose of exchange of views and communication between groups for an evaluation of their effectiveness in the area concerned and their insertion and contribution in the local Church.

278 With regard to education to the faith, the groups are not always successful in the efficacious promoting of the christian principles present in their plans. Prevalent attention to the immediate interests of the youngsters; animators who frequently have little motivation as regards the faith proposal; greater concern about organization than formation; all these are factors that can cause a falling off of the commitment to education to the faith.

Hence, animators of individual groups, those responsible for associations, Rectors and local councils, Provincials and provincial delegates, are asked:

279 — to *promote group activities in our works*, not least as one of the best means of reaching those at a distance and fostering the process of an authentic education to the faith;

280 — to *make explicit*, for every group or collection of groups, *the plan for a journey "to the faith" or "of faith"*, inspired by the fundamental elements of the SYS, starting from the immediate interests of the young people;

281 — to *draw up an annual programme* for a process of pedagogical and salesian formation for the group animators, and to provide for its verification;

282 — to *foster communication between groups*, by creating points of reference and coordination in respect of their organizational autonomy;

283 — to make a continually deeper study of the SYS, making the most also of the places associated with salesian origins.

2.4 PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE YOUNG PERSON

284 Education to the faith finds a particularly efficacious setting in *personal dialogue*, of which Don Bosco was a master without parallel. Its principal expressions concern the individual in his own environment, the educational conversation, spiritual direction, and the sacramental encounter.

In recent times *its necessity* has been felt more keenly because of the complexity of the problems young people now face, and the personal attention they require. But the new demands have not always found Salesians ready to meet them. And on the other hand, those who have taken up this task are wondering how to carry it out in a salesian manner and with the greatest profit.

Starting from the undeniable validity of personal dialogue, we want to encourage the confreres to make themselves available for it, by offering *some indications*:

285 — *A deeper study must be made in the provinces* of the typically salesian style of personal follow-up: a group of converging elements that sustain the christian maturing process, such as atmosphere, encouraging company, shared activities, the personal word, brief exhortations to groups, and celebrations.

286 — *The confreres must be encouraged and prepare themselves to offer to young people in personal dialogue the testimony of their own faith and the guidance of which the youngsters stand in need.*

287 — *The Rector must take to heart the personal encounter with the young people, and especially with those who are approaching a point of decisive importance in their lives.*

288 — *In retreat houses for the young, and at times of particular importance, (e.g. retreats), the young people must know that this form of guidance is available for them in complete freedom.*

289 — *A special moment of personal contact with the youngster is lived in the sacrament of Reconciliation. The Provincial will foster the preparation of confreres for this ministry, which is so important in salesian pedagogy.*

2.5 COMMUNITIES FOR YOUNGSTERS IN DIFFICULTIES

290 In recent years *reception communities for boys and young persons in difficulties* have come into being and taken root. They bear witness to the courage that is never extinguished in the Congregation, and to the value of the preventive system. They are points of reference and of promotion of solidarity: they meet with general approval, succeed in obtaining collaboration of many kinds, create a mentality of solidarity among the people, and win the support of society.

Education to the faith in these communities has its own typical and particular aspects. We indicate *some practical guidelines*

291 Fundamental is *the sign of being close to these youngsters and to their world.*

In this way the Salesian relives in Don Bosco's style the meeting with Bartholomew Garelli. The latter, driven out by society, found in Don Bosco a heart that welcomed him, a face that smiled on him, a hand that helped him – a person able to share his sorrows and hopes, to sustain his will to begin, or begin again. Before such a reception the barriers of diffidence begin to crumble, and maybe also those of hostility and prejudice that have kept these youngsters away from the Church and from God. This is the first step.

292 For boys like this daily contact with “new” people, able to stir up wonderment and reawaken in them the good that lies there dormant and their intensely human resources which coincide with gospel values, becomes a truly original experience.

Attentive friendship, a family atmosphere, simplicity and kindness, and the fostering of personal dignity, all provide a form of witness that makes the youngster wonder: “Who are you? Why do you act like this?”

The response, given in many ways and at different times, according to the needs of each individual, becomes an announcement of Christ as his companion on his journey through life, and of the love of the Father, of his plan for salvation and happiness; it is an offering of liberation from slavery and of fullness of life.

293 The *journey of education to the faith* thus begun is a delicate and difficult process, often meeting with failure. This is where our faith in education becomes manifest, our conviction of the power of prayer, of grace, and of Christ's patience. We remember with admiration how Don Bosco dealt with Michael Magone.

294 The educator concentrates enthusiastically on the positive qualities present in the youngster. The latter

is encouraged by *the whole community*; they are ready to understand him, forgive him, pick him up again after a fall, begin again and try once more with him, so that his hopes may never be extinguished.

Sustained and supported in this way, the youngster opens up not only to a more mature appreciation of the system, but also to a deep revision of his own life, to a self-examination which in the sacrament of Reconciliation will become the grace of forgiveness and the strength to begin again.

The sense of joy and solidarity in the community, the desire to overcome one's own self-centredness and give oneself to one's fellow men will grow to the point of becoming an experience of eucharistic communion.

In this way we shall educate by evangelizing and evangelize by educating.

2.6 LARGE SCALE GATHERINGS OF YOUTH

295

At the present time, big youth gatherings are on the increase. They respond to the need felt by the young to express themselves collectively on a human and religious level. The idea often begins from a committed group, but goes on to involve other groups who may be interested and willing to take part. The "Youth Day" instituted by John Paul II is a response to this felt need, and has had repercussions even in the most restricted environments. In the space of a year, many provinces live days which intensify the dialogue between all the youthful component groups.

The pilgrimage too is a cultural form found among many peoples, a sign of the pilgrim Church. It unites the people in sentiment, gesture and memory, at places significant for their popular religious appeal or because of the memory of saints connected with such places. The young live such an experience with the

desire to grow, and sometimes as a faith-offering in the sacrifice of a long journey. They look for settings for reflection and people who welcome them.

- 296 As far as maturing in faith is concerned, however, the result cannot be taken for granted. The festive atmosphere, with its undeniable values, is the immediate significance perceived by all. The educator of the faith must help by not putting too much emphasis on this atmosphere to the detriment of the content.

The gathering must have the overall effect of a true proclamation.

THEREFORE:

- 297 — The realization, in its various moments and expressions, must provide for a *careful convergence of the contents* on what concerns the faith, and for communication of good quality: prayer and celebration, music, entertainment, games, experience of living together, scenic activities, meeting with witnesses, discussions, etc.

- 298 — *A suitable period of preparation* is necessary; and *afterwards a follow-up assessment should be arranged*. Both of these require the participation of a *proportionate number of animators*, especially young people.

- 299 — *The assessment* must consider two items which define the sense of the gathering: the young people who begin as casual participants and decide to begin a journey of faith; and those who develop social or apostolic commitments of a concrete nature in their own environment.

CONCLUSION

300 In our thoughts
we have accompanied our young people
in a journey towards the faith.
We have done so in the light of the Holy Spirit
who has helped us to listen to and understand
his voice in the young.
The toil of the journey has been compensated
by the joy of discovery.

If after reading these pages,
anyone should say that, by and large,
they contain nothing new,
from certain points of view he would be correct.
They tell, in fact, of our mission as Salesians,
committed in the education of youth to the faith:
of our mission, therefore, of yesterday,
today and always,
as long as there will be children and young people.
They are the essential points
that have to be continually rethought,
kept in the heart
and, above all, put into practice.

And if on reading these pages
anyone should feel himself a "man of little faith",
frightened by the task asked of him,
let him know that we too
have felt ourselves to be men of little faith
small as a grain of sand.
It is the mustard seed
entrusted to the earth by God
so that it may grow.
It is a seed

that the strain of days of work cannot consume,
nor the wind blow away,
because charity can never fail
as long as the Triune God is love.

We entrust ourselves, therefore,
to the pastoral charity,
gift and strength of the Father's love,
shown us by Christ
and poured out in us by the Holy Spirit.
The love and sole strength that nothing can resist.
To encourage us, Don Bosco says:
"If we cannot manage the whole alphabet,
but can get as far as ABCD,
why should we neglect this little with the excuse
that we cannot go as far as Z?"¹

Finally,
if on reading these pages
some of us should have heard again
Don Bosco's voice,
and felt joy and relish
at this vitality of the Holy Spirit
which, through the intervention of Mary
Help of Christians,
is spreading in the Church;
and if, after some experience of fatigue,
they take up again the mission journey,
then let us all rejoice
that the Lord has made himself present among us:
"Did not our hearts burn within us
while he talked to us on the road?"²

¹ BM 12, 151

² Lk 24,32

that the strain of love of work cannot be
 nor the wind blow away
 because Christ is never far
 as long as the Father God is love
 We must ourselves therefore
 to the paternal charity
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 The love and the strength that nothing can resist
 To encourage us Don Bosco says
 If we know more the whole world
 but cannot do as we should
 who should we neglect the love with the Father
 that we cannot do as we should

Finally
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 some of us should have heard again
 Don Bosco's voice
 and his joy and faith
 at this coming of the Holy Spirit
 which through the inner voice of Mary
 help of Christians
 is spreading in the Church
 and it gives some experience of it
 they take us again the mission journey
 then let us all rejoice
 that the Lord has made himself present among us
 Did not our hearts beat within us
 while he came to us on the road

**DELIBERATIONS AND GUIDELINES
CONCERNING THE CONSTITUTIONS
AND REGULATIONS**

DELIBERATIONS AND GUIDELINES
CONCERNING THE CONSTITUTIONS
AND REGULATIONS

The GC23 made a careful study of the proposals made by the provincial chapters and confreres concerning some points of our proper law and of the operative structures of the Congregation. It approved some modifications or additions to the legislative texts, and also certain deliberations or guidelines for the practical interpretation of the texts themselves or for the animation of the structures of the Congregation.

1. MODIFICATIONS OR ADDITIONS TO THE TEXT OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

- 301** The GC23, with a majority of more than 2/3 of those present, in accordance with C 152, decided on the following *modifications or additions to the text of the Constitutions* of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

The modifications and additions were approved by the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life on 25 May 1990 (Prot. N. T. 9-1/90), and therefore become part of the constitutional text.

The following are the small modification and additions; they are of a practical character and make some juridical points more precise.

1.1 Suppression of n. 14 of §1 of art. 132 of the Constitutions.

- 302** With reference to §1 of art.132 of the Constitutions, which lists the cases in which the Rector Major must have the consent of his Council, it was decided that n. 14, which says: "*all other cases provided for in the universal law*", be suppressed.

The *motivations* for this suppression are mainly the following:

- n. 14 of the article quoted is superfluous: it is clear in fact that the Rector Major must have the consent of his Council in the cases prescribed by common law;
- in addition, the fact that n. 14 comes at the end of §1 of art. 132 represents a generalized limitation (not specifically limited) of the power of the Council to express its consent even in those cases when the total number of Councillors is not strictly required. By avoiding the specification of this general norm in the text of the Constitutions, the indications given in the Code of canon law itself will be followed.

1.2 Modification of §2 of art.132 of the Constitutions.

303 With reference to *art. 132 of the Constitutions*, it was decided to *modify §2 as follows*: "The Rector Major must have the consent of those councillors present at the Generalate, who must be not less than *three* in number, in the following cases:

1. dispensation from temporary religious profession;
2. the appointment of provincial councillors (C 167);
3. the granting of authorization for the financial operations referred to in art. 188 of the Constitutions, except for what is provided for in art. 132, §1,12.

Explanation and motives:

With this modification the minimum number is reduced from five to three of the Councillors needed to give their consent in matters of particular urgency (which cannot therefore await the next plenary session of the Council).

In this way the General Chapter accepts and approves a modification to the constitutional text which the General Council had already obtained from the Apos-

tolic See as an exception to the Constitutions, and which the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes had granted (16 March 1985) "until the next General Chapter".

The change was needed for practical reasons: because of the fact that the Regional Councillors, on account of their duty to provide liaison between the provinces of the Region, must be away from the centre for a considerable time, and that the other Councillors too must devote certain periods to the animation of the provinces, no small difficulty has been experienced in the past in having at least five Councillors at headquarters (in addition to the Rector Major or the Vicar General) to handle urgent matters. Hence the decision to reduce from five to three the minimum number of Councillors necessary for dealing with the above-mentioned questions without a long delay.

1.3 Modification of art. 151,8 of the Constitutions.

304 *With reference to art. 151 of the Constitutions, which lists those who take part in the General Chapter of the Society, it was decided to make additions to n. 8 in the following sense:*

"8. the delegates of the juridical circumscriptions referred to in art. 156 of the Constitutions, all perpetually professed, elected in accordance with art. 171,5 of the Constitutions and the General Regulations".

Explanation:

It is not difficult to see that this is a matter of juridical precision:

- art. 156 of the Constitutions is recalled, in which are described the "juridical circumscriptions" into which the Society is divided, and which send delegates to the General Chapter;
- explicit mention is also made of art. 171,5 of the

Constitutions, where it is stated that the delegates (one or two) to the General Chapter and their substitutes are elected by the provincial chapter. The manner of doing this are further specified in the General Regulations.

2. MODIFICATION TO THE GENERAL REGULATIONS

Modification to art. 76,4 of the General Regulations

305 It was decided that n. 4 of art. 76 of the Regulations should be *modified as follows*:

“4. – for deceased benefactors and members of the Salesian Family, a Mass will be celebrated in each community on *November 5*”.

The *reason* for this modification is linked with the fact that to 13 November, which the Regulations indicated for the suffrage for benefactors and deceased members of the Salesian Family, has now been assigned in our proper Missal the annual memorial of the Blessed Martyrs Versiglia and Caravario. For this reason the above-mentioned suffrage has now been transferred to the first liturgically free day in November, which is the 5th.

3. PRACTICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF TEXTS OF THE CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS

In accordance with C 192 the GC23 decided on the following “practical interpretations” to meet requirements that had arisen in connection with certain concrete problems, especially on the occasion of elections to the provincial chapter or the General Chapter.

3.1 Practical interpretation of C 151, 7 and 8:

- 306** "The GC23 declares that the Provincial or the Superior of a Vice-province who presides at the provincial chapter, but whose term of office will expire before the celebration of the General Chapter, will have passive voice in the election of the Delegate to the General Chapter".

Motivation: This decision was made to remove a doubt and endorse the full right to active and passive voice, in the election of the Delegate to the GC, of the Provincial (or Superior of a Vice-province), who is still in office at the time of the election, but whose term will expire before the celebration of the General Chapter.

3.2 With reference to art. 164 of the General Regulations:

- 307** "The GC23 declares that, in case of necessity, both the telephone and telefax are to be considered as equivalent to the letter referred to in R 164, provided that the indications transmitted are received by the scrutineers, who are obliged to secrecy".

4. DELIBERATIONS CONCERNING GROUPS OF PROVINCES

Concerning the grouping of provinces, the GC23 has approved two deliberations: one to decide to which group the provinces of Czechoslovakia and that of Hungary shall belong; and the other to prolong for a further six years the special Delegation for the provinces of Poland.

The text of the deliberations is as follows:

- 308** 4.1 "The GC23 has decided that the provinces of Czechoslovakia and Hungary shall belong to the Region of North Europe and Central Africa".

- 309** 4.2 "The GC23, while hoping for a progressive movement towards a fuller integration of the provinces of Poland into Salesian Europe, nevertheless considers still sufficiently valid the motivations adopted by the SGC (1971) and still in force to the present day, and has decided to entrust for a period of six years the provinces of Poland to a personal Delegate of the Rector Major".

5. PRACTICAL GUIDELINE FOR THE SALESIAN PRESENCE IN AFRICA

- 310** In the process of the evaluation of the salesian presence in Africa, and with reference to structures of liaison for greater efficacy of animation, the GC23 approved the following practical guideline:

"The GC23 entrusts to the Rector Major with his Council the task of exercising, in the ways considered most suitable, a special role of coordination, so as to help the confreres working in Africa to get to know African culture, and thus provide efficaciously for the growth of the salesian presence, pastoral activity and particularly the formation process".

APPENDICES

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**Message of His Holiness JOHN PAUL II
for the beginning of the 23rd General Chapter**

To my beloved son Fr EGIDIO VIGANÒ
Rector Major
of the Society of St Francis de Sales

311 I send my greetings and good wishes to you and to all your confreres who are taking part in the 23rd General Chapter of your Congregation.

For every religious Institute the General Chapter marks a milestone, from which to set out for a new and deeper understanding of its particular charisma. The one therefore that you are about to begin must be for you a special occasion not only for a further examination of the mission entrusted to you by St John Bosco, but also to improve ever more the quality of the pastoral activity carried out by Salesians in so many particular Churches, with special attention to the young.

In effect, the commitment of your institute is especially to the education of youth, on whose response depends the future of the faith. The hope of a better world is, in fact, reborn with every new generation, provided that it be given the benefit of an adequate education drawing its inspiration from the Gospel. And so even today it is necessary to bring to maturity in young people a convinced personal synthesis between faith and life, so that they can become in society courageous and credible witnesses of the great mystery of Christ: the principle and coronation of all christian hope.

312 I am sure that, following the well tried pedagogical tradition of your Congregation, you will not fail to draw up for this purpose practical and relevant plans. St John Bosco, in fact, invites you not only to dedicate yourselves to youth, but to 'educate according to a

plan'. As I said at the closure of the centenary of the death of your founder, he has left you "a vital synthesis between pedagogical wisdom and educational practice, and you must study how to apply it in the development of a theme providing "a unifying synthesis of the complex elements destined to promote the overall development of the boy and young person".

In this perspective I would like to remind you who are members of the Chapter of two aspects that call for your careful study: "youth spirituality" and the "social dimension" of charity. These are two of the Church's great pastoral concerns.

- 313** In the first place, in the education of the young it is not sufficient to rely on the simple rationality of a human ethic, nor will suffice a religious instruction which is only academic. We must stir up deep personal convictions which will lead to a life commitment inspired by the perennial values of the Gospel. We have to aim at forming saints. "In the Church and in the world," as I wrote in the letter *Iuvenum patris*, "the integral educative vision that we see incarnated in John Bosco is a realistic pedagogy of holiness. We need to get back to the true concept of 'holiness' as a component of the life of every believer. The originality and boldness of the plan for a 'youthful holiness' is intrinsic to the educational art of this great Saint, who can be rightly called the 'master of youth spirituality' (n. 16)."

- 314** Secondly there must emerge from your educational and pastoral activity the '*social dimension of charity*'. To this in fact the signs of the times are giving new importance in the light of a renewed awareness of the common good. Opening up at the present day before the charity of Christians with ever wider horizons, are the many sectors of civic and political life. St John Bosco has taught you to form responsible citizens through the maturing of concrete convictions of faith to be translated into practical activity to meet the needs that gradually emerge. You have the task of singling out the objectives to which priority must be given at the present day, and towards which must converge the commitment of the youth entrusted to you.

May Mary Help of Christians give you her motherly guidance. A sincere and filial devotion to her will prompt you to face up with generosity to the many difficulties you may find in your way, and to overcome them successfully.

In wishing you a happy conclusion to the work of the General Chapter, I invoke upon you and on the Chapter members an outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as a pledge of which I impart to all of you the desired Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to all your Congregation and to the entire Salesian Family.

From the Vatican, 22 February 1990, the feast of the chair of the Apostle St Peter.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II

**Address of Cardinal Jean-Jérôme Hamer
Prefect of the Congregation
for the Institutes of consecrated life
and for the Societies of apostolic life**

315 I am here to bring you my greetings as Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated life and the Societies of apostolic life, and I want to tell you of the importance of a meeting like this one, of the confidence we have in you, and to encourage you to face with courage and clarity the task that lies ahead of you.

You are a General Chapter; you represent the entire Salesian Society of St John Bosco, and are the sign of its unity in diversity.

You are here for the purpose of making a communal and fraternal reflection that must lead you to a greater fidelity to the Gospel and to the charisma of your holy Founder in your concern to respond to the needs of the present time and various places.

Together as a body you are going to let yourselves be guided by the Lord's Spirit as you seek the will of God for a better service to the Church and the world of today.

But you are not just a group of brothers and friends who have come together for an interesting and possibly also fruitful exchange of views, but without any personal commitment. Not at all. Your reflections will indeed be communal and purposeful: you have to make decisions.

Because you are a General Chapter you have supreme authority in the Salesian Society, and you will exercise it in accordance with your Constitutions.

You are gathered in an assembly that is one of government. What are expected of you are deep considerations and deliberations that must give rise to precise guidelines and the taking up of clear and unambiguous positions.

Among the decisions you have to make in due course is the election of the Rector Major and the members of the General Council. It is also your duty to lay down laws for the whole Society

and to deal in a responsible manner with the more important matters of business.

316 But all of this must be done from a very specific standpoint; that of fidelity to your spiritual heritage and the particular service the Church expects of you.

You are religious, you are apostles, you are at the service of youth, and all of this inseparably in an indivisible unity of life.

Your Constitutions express this very clearly: "We, the Salesians of Don Bosco, 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. By carrying out this mission we find our own way to holiness" (C 2).

You have been well prepared for your capitular task. I know that a Precapitular Commission has done a great deal of preparatory work, the results of which are available to you. The working document is totally concerned with "Educating young people to the faith" and concentrates on practical aspects, without leaving aside analysis and study.

It is not my place to go into details in this connection; that is your role as capitulars. But I have noted with satisfaction that your Precapitular Commission has been concerned from the outset to respect the balance that must characterize every General Chapter as an organ of pastoral government.

Your mission in the Church is one of service. Try to be prepared and qualified from both a human and spiritual point of view to make your contribution to the evangelization of those who are poorest and most deprived. In this way you will make yourselves available to those who bear the responsibility for evangelization in their role of successors of the apostles in the various dioceses.

Your Constitutions have a happy way of expressing this: "The community lives and expresses its apostolic commitment within the particular Church. We become part of its pastoral action which has the Bishop at its head and the directives of the Bishops Conference as a springboard for action on a wider scale. We offer the particular Church the contribution of our work and salesian pedagogy, and we receive from it direction and support" (C 48).

And commenting on this last phrase, one may say: "The first point emphasizes the special values we are to bring to the particular Church: the kind of pastoral activity which is typical of Don Bosco

and his preventive system.

"The second, on the other hand, urges us to accept the guidance of the Bishops, to enable us to play a consistent part in the combined pastoral work and to have the whole particular Church behind us in our own work" (*Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*, Rome 1986, p. 439).

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In this address of greetings which I make to you before the formal opening of your Chapter, allow me to emphasize a further point: a General Chapter is an act of ecclesial communion.

Certainly a Chapter is an assembly that resembles all other assemblies in the sense that to it apply specific laws of social psychology. There are the rules of organized discussion. You have simultaneous translation and probably, behind the scenes, you have computers and a well equipped secretariat. All those things are useful and even indispensable, and they are all found in modern assemblies of a certain size, especially if they are international in character.

A Chapter, nevertheless, has a specific note. It is an act of ecclesial communion. It is not an act of civil society with the organization of the temporal order as its objective. It is an action of the Church. We are in the spiritual order. Religious life has no other purpose than that of the Church itself: the salvation of mankind.

And so our sources will be spiritual: the Gospel, because if you ignore the Gospel you ignore Christ, the spiritual tradition of the Church, its magisterium, the tradition of your Institute from the time of the Founder, canon law, and all the riches that your Constitutions must bring to you at the present day.

Hence we have frequent recourse to prayer. Your Chapter has been preceded by a Retreat. This is an excellent initiative. And you will not fail to give to the celebration of the Eucharist and to prayer ample space in the carrying out of the Chapter's work. Here we can draw inspiration from the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican. That Council was a celebration, and I would find no difficulty in speaking of the "celebration" of a General Chapter. What is important above all else is an atmosphere of prayer and recollection, which sets reflection and discussion on their proper level.

In General Chapters of the present day there is often said that beautiful prayer to the Holy Spirit: "Adsumus", which was recited by the Fathers of Vatican II at the beginning of every session throughout the four years of the Council. Allow me to remind you of its opening phrases, because they have much to teach you:

"Adsumus, Domine Sancte Spiritus, adsumus, peccati quidem immanitate detenti, sed in Nomine Tuo specialiter congregati. Veni ad nos, et esto nobiscum". In English: "Here we are, Lord, Holy Spirit, here we are in your presence, weighed down by the weight of our sins, but united in a special way in your name. Come to us and stay with us".

No one can take part in a Chapter with the certainty and presumption of the pharisee. No one can assume the responsibility of others in virtue of his own power. It is with the humility of the publican that we must approach our capitular duty. But we do so without hesitation or want of courage but with fearless determination, because we have been brought together by the Holy Spirit and because we trust that He will realize his work in us, in our persons and in our actions.

The prayer "Adsumus" is nothing else but a paraphrase of the words of Christ: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst". May Jesus be in the midst of you. May his Spirit assist you. This is my prayer for you here today, united as you are in the 23rd General Chapter of the Salesian Society.

9 March 1990.

fr. Jerome Cardinal Hamer O.P

**Address of the Rector Major
Fr Egidio Vigano
at the opening of the GC23**

Your Eminence Cardinal Hamer,
Your Eminences,
Mothers, Sisters and Brothers responsible
for the Groups of the Salesian Family,
Dear confreres, members of the Chapter:

318 We offer our grateful greetings to His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated life, and to their Eminences the other Cardinals who by their presence emphasize the ecclesial sense of our General Chapter.

Cordial thanks too to the Mother General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to the Presidents of the Cooperators and Past-Pupils, to the Major Superior of the Don Bosco Volunteers and to the Superior General of the Salesian Oblates, who are a sign of the adherence, prayer and hope of so many brothers and sisters of our Salesian Family in the world.

A warm welcome also to all the Chapter members gathered here from 85 juridical circumscriptions of our Society.

1. THE 23rd GENERAL CHAPTER

Today marks the official opening of the 23rd General Chapter of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

When Don Bosco convoked the first Chapter in 1877, the capitulars numbered 23 and the Chapter lasted for 13 full days.

When nearly a century later in 1971 we held the GC20, the number of capitulars had risen to 202 and the Chapter lasted 6 months and 26 days; but that was a "special" or exceptional Chapter.

The 21st and 22nd Chapters that followed had something of a "special" quality about each of them, and lasted about 4 months each.

Today in the GC23 the members are 207 – one who should have been the 208th recently became a bishop. We are wondering how long this particular Chapter will go on.

I think it may be useful if I begin by suggesting a general plan in this regard. In our General Council, while we thinking over the fact that this is an “ordinary” Chapter, we thought we might suggest to the assembly – or in other words to you, dear capitulars – to make a decision from the outset to limit it to two months; and it seemed reasonable to suggest as a closing date May 12.

2. AN “ORDINARY” GENERAL CHAPTER

In what sense do we consider this Chapter an “ordinary” one? “Ordinary” is in reality a qualification inherent in the very nature of a normal General Chapter: it therefore finds its explanation in the Constitutions themselves. What would need some explanation would be rather the qualification of “special” or “extraordinary”.

It is to our purpose however to insist on emphasizing the “ordinary” nature of the present Chapter, so as to indicate that we have finished the vast, delicate and indispensable work of the overall revision of the documents defining our identity in the Church.

We have therefore completed the “special” task assigned to us by Vatican II, and we are now in the “ordinary” necessity of confronting some vital aspects, in the study of which we shall consider how to put into practice the major decisions of the previous Chapters.

In the Rule we find indicated the tasks we have to carry out. We know them; but now we have to reconsider them, starting from the new situation in which each of us is placed in virtue of being a “capitular”, i.e. a member of an assembly representative of the whole Institute which, according to law, wields in collegial fashion “supreme authority in the Society” (C 147). This aspect of capitular consciousness will rouse the personal awareness of the serious responsibility borne by each one.

What then are the principal duties that lie ahead of us?

2.1 In the first place there is the task of *fostering and animating a charisma raised up by the Spirit for the Church.*

320 This is an obligation that follows from art. 6 of the Constitutions: "The salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission"; this is further specified by art.146 which states that the work of a General Chapter must be directed to the discernment "of God's will for the purpose of rendering the Church better service."

Today we are beginning an event which, as we have seen, has a strictly ecclesial dimension. The supreme authority of the capitular assembly applies only within the Congregation; there are other and higher authorities to which we must make constant reference. "The Salesian Society," declare the Constitutions, "has as its highest superior the Supreme Pontiff. Even by reason of the vow of obedience, the members are filially submissive to his authority and available for the good of the universal Church. They welcome his magisterium with docility and help the faithful, especially the young, to accept his teachings" (C 125).

Canon Law stipulates that "it belongs to a General Chapter to protect the patrimony of the Institute and to foster appropriate renewal in accord with that patrimony" (c. 631), or in other words we are invested with authority for the faithful preservation of the intentions and plans of the Founder "concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the Institute and its sound traditions" (c. 578).

2.2 Another task is the fostering of unity of life in the Congregation.

321 Our assembly must be the "principal sign" of this (C 146). Though in a whole variety of circumstances and cultures, we are called to bear witness to and strengthen here the bonds of full communion in the same spirit and mission. in a convinced living adherence to the same religious Profession.

The dynamics of a Chapter do not draw their inspiration from the democratic practice of a parliament but rather from the originality of the mystery of the Church; for this reason we dedicate ourselves to strengthen, in fraternal sincerity, our motives for communion, so as to attain unanimity in the assembly: there is in fact only one charism, one only is the Founder, one only the Rule of life.

In the 1st General Chapter this aspect was more easily

perceivable: "We are still a fledgling Congregation," said Don Bosco, "as yet relatively few in number. To date the Oratory has been the one and only centre for all of us... But with time, if we do not heartily exert ourselves to strengthen these ties, a different spirit will seep in so that there will no longer be absolute unity among us. We must do our utmost to become one in spirit" (BM 13, 213).

In this sense the General Chapter becomes a kind of advanced and specialized "course of ongoing formation" on the values of unity in the salesian spirit, organized for competent people who will pass it on as a service to all the provinces.

2.3 Another task is *a communal commitment to render the charism practical and vigorous.*

322 The General Regulations state that in convoking the Chapter the Rector Major will "indicate the principal purpose" (R 111). The theme for our present Assembly is that of the education of youth to the faith. We want to give practical force to the "pastoral quality" of our works. We must therefore direct our work towards growth in dynamic fidelity to Don Bosco in two senses: that of a more genuine adherence to the mission of evangelization, and that of a greater sensitivity and pedagogical ability to respond to the challenges of times and places (cf. C 146).

The suggestions of provincial chapters and the working document contained in the "Precapitular Schemes" provide a launching pad for the drawing up of practical guidelines.

We are all already convinced that our apostolic activity is carried out through education, but the priority is to clarify how to ensure in practice by what means and steps education should be permeated and guided by a pastoral slant or inspiration.

This discernment is of particular urgency for ensuring the salesian identity in practice.

2.4 It is also a task of the General Chapter *to consider proposals for the modification of some internal laws.*

323 Our assembly has the power to "lay down laws for the whole Society" (C 147). The last three General Chapters have revised the text of our laws (1984). In line, however, with the proposals that have been sent in on the basis of experience, this Chapter will have to reexamine some of the articles; they will be indicated by the Moderator at the proper time.

3. THE DELICATE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ELECTIONS

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And then a task with a great effect on the life of the Congregation is that of electing the Rector Major and the members of the General Council (cf. C 147). It will be worth our while to reflect on this for a moment.

I would like to point out in the first place that the qualification "supreme" emphasizes, for our caputular conscience, a responsibility that is truly great and extraordinary, even though it does not have in the Church, as we have said already, an absolute and unlimited sense.

It is interesting to note that the General Chapters of the various Institutes of consecrated life do not all have the same powers: one comes across significant differences; the physiognomy of each one depends on the nature of its particular charisma and the dispositions of its proper law.

The authority of our own Assembly is "supreme" in the sense that it is the source of all authority in the Congregation. "It must be remembered," declared the SGC, "that amongst us the authority of the different superiors does not immediately derive from the designation by the members, but has its origin in the act of the canonical erection of the Society. Therefore there exists in the whole Congregation only one nucleus, only one centre of authority. And this authority received from the Church, comes through the elective will of the General Chapter to find its centre, according to the Constitutions, in the office of the Rector Major and the General Council" (SGC 721).

Experience teaches us that this ministry is a most vital one. If it is true that the authority of the General Chapter is "supreme" in so far as it has the legislative power and faculty of giving authentic directives and universal guidelines for animation and government, it does not have of itself normal judiciary or executive power. The General Chapter is not a permanent organ of government. It is something discontinuous that takes place every six years. Even while it is in progress the Rector Major with the General Council continue to carry out the more urgently necessary functions for the good running of the life of the Congregation, as also do the provincials for their own circumscriptions. In the text of the Constitutions drawn up by Don Bosco, in the part dealing with the internal government of the Society, there is in fact no reference to the supreme authority of the General Chapter.

I say all this to emphasize the surpassing importance of the elections.

The roles of the Rector Major and members of the General Council have constitutionally and in fact a decisive, permanent, practical and immediate incidence on the whole life of the Institute. Each one must therefore prepare himself to take part in the elections with conscientious attention matured in prayer, and in an objective discernment of the possible candidates, directed entirely to the vitalization of the charism of Don Bosco, without placing emphasis on non-essential motives that could prove harmful.

At this time, and I speak also for the members of the present General Council, at the end of the six-year mandate we received in obedience from the GC22 I can say that we have tried to work intensely and with loyalty for the Congregation. For my own part it is certainly my duty to apologize for my own shortcomings in this service.

In the General Council with its many tasks, one acquires a knowledge, sensitivity, overall view of matters, sense of Church, criteria for priorities, and balanced identity that one cannot get in any other roles in salesian life. One may say that the General Council constitutes a true advanced school of specialization for the service of the Congregation. But in it the years go by and the members get older, and it behoves us to think of new and younger members well fitted for such duties.

The matter of the elections is one of the most delicate responsibilities also because of the vital incidence of the role of the Rector Major and Councillors on the whole Salesian Family.

4. THE THEME

325 In the letter convoking the GC23 (AGC 327), while explaining the “ordinary” character of this Chapter, I said that in it “the intention is to concentrate the attention of the confreres on a specific argument of a practical nature, considered to be of particular urgency for the Congregation but to a certain extent sectorial in nature, in the sense that it does not refer to the whole of salesian life.”

The expression “to a certain extent sectorial in nature” is true in so far as it affects only the pastoral aspect of our activities, taking for granted their great spiritual and doctrinal foundations. But if “sectorial” were to be interpreted as something merely secondary and not involving primarily the whole of our renewal, it would be a mistaken interpretation.

In fact the commitment to the education of the young to the

faith puts at the centre of our Chapter work Don Bosco's preventive system, as the orthopraxy (Cf. ASC 290) of salesian life in every local community; or in other words, as the place for verification and the yardstick of fidelity.

I do not mean that the Chapter must study the preventive system, but that it must keep always in mind its true purpose, its charismatic nature and its original methodology.

5. THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM, AS THE FRUIT AND SOURCE OF SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY

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It is significant that the Constitutions speak of the preventive system in two different but complementary ways: one, in art.20 dealing with salesian spirit (where it appears as one of the components); and the other in arts.38-39, in relation to our educative and pastoral service.

I think it fundamental that this Assembly should look at the preventive system from the standpoint of the salesian spirit. In this sense it is described as "a way of living and handing on the gospel message, and of working with and through the young for their salvation. It permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved" (C 20).

It is possible to speak of the preventive system simply as a method of education based on kindness, reason and cultural advancement, all of which is true. But if we think of the distinction (which unfortunately is often also separation) between "educating" (a human cultural action) and "educating to the faith" (an ecclesial action of evangelization), and if at the same time for Don Bosco the values of the two aspects had to be mutually intertwined, so that in salesian practice the ideas of 'man' and 'christian' were never separated ("upright citizens – because good christians"), we must conclude that in this system "education to the faith" must permeate all the work of "education".

And so the great challenge put to us by the Chapter's theme is that of the "evangelizing and missionary spirituality" in our communities. We are educators because we are shepherds in Christ's Church. Its pastoral quality is the soul of our pedagogical competence, just as "da mihi animas" is the secret that enlivens our spirit from within.

The modern requirement for pastoral renewal implies for us that the so-called "new evangelization" must be translated into a

“new education”. And that requires a certain spiritual density.

Among the various novel aspects that accompany education in line with the social and cultural challenges of modern situations, we must be able to bring out the intrinsic inseparability of “evangelizing by educating”; we are called to requalify ourselves as educators so that we can be “missionaries of the young”.

“For St John Bosco,” said the Pope to us in his letter, “one may say that the peculiar trait of his brilliance is linked with the educational method which he himself called the ‘preventive system’. In a certain sense this represents the quintessence of his pedagogical wisdom and constitutes the prophetic message which he has left to his followers and to the Church” (IP 8). And later on, when exhorting us to rediscover in his legacy the premises for responding at the present day to the difficulties and expectations of the young, the Pope reminds us that the first secret of success for this pedagogy is found in the very heart of Don Bosco the educator: in his intense pastoral charity, or in other words in educating by virtue of an “interior vitality which united in him in an inseparable manner love of God and love of his neighbour. In this way he was able to establish a synthesis between evangelizing activity and educational work. His concern for the evangelization of his boys formed an integral part therefore of the process of human formation, not losing sight of defects but at the same time optimistic about progressive maturing, so that faith would become the unifying and enlightening element of their personality” (IP 15).

For this reason, the Pope added, the fundamental criterion for the educator is to “be clearly conscious of the ultimate objective, because in the art of education the ends aimed at play a decisive part. If they are not completely clear, or are mistaken or even forgotten, a unilateral approach or deviations will result, as well as being a sign of incompetence” (IP 16). And so, the salesian spirit requires in every active confrere that a clear awareness and perception of the pastoral objective be constantly kept in mind when drawing up and carrying out projects and programmes.

6. A GOOD OMEN

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The preparation of our Chapter has been taken very seriously in both the provinces and the precapitular commission. Evidence of this is the hefty volume (505 pages!) which we have in our hands: the “Precapitular Schemes”. But the value of the work of this Assembly will not be judged by the number of pages it produces,

but by the quality and practical nature of the directives and guidelines it comes up with.

I would like to emphasize two aspects suggested by the "working document". The first is the need to perfect the educative and pastoral project with salesian criteria for the programmes specifically adapted to different groups of young people; and the second is that of "youth spirituality". It may be enlightening to say a brief word on this second point.

I think it opportune in this connection to begin by recalling a stimulating statement of the martyr St Ignatius in his letter to the Romans: "Ask nothing for me but interior and exterior *strength*, so that I may be a christian not only in words but in heart too; not just in name, but that *I may be truly so in fact*. Because when the hostility and opposition of the world increases, the christian faith is no longer the fruit of simple persuasion, but a work of *power* and sharing in the power of God, in so far as the Holy Spirit pours into the heart a spirituality which is a vital force."

I am convinced, as I have already said in my commentary on this year's Strenna, that the organic synthesis between faith and life that we have to bring to maturity today in young people in a world so alien and unfavourable, will be achieved only through the strength of a concrete spirituality. Witness to this is Don Bosco himself who has made of the art of education a true "pedagogy of holiness".

Spirituality is an interior force, born of conviction and gospel enthusiasm, endowed with a unifying power that brings about a harmonious growth in the young person of the different aspects of human and christian maturing.

Our educative practice must be the result of a living spirituality – that of the community – to raise up around it a dynamic and contagious youth spirituality; it should therefore promote and foster group activity, not to deprive our works of their educative and pastoral quality but rather to leaven them with the personal activity of the youngsters themselves, who become agents of a vital synthesis between the Gospel and culture. This aspect, so dear to Don Bosco, must be relaunched by all possible means, especially in a pluralist society which easily tends to relativism and indifference.

It is from this need for spiritual power that arises the great challenge for our communities: youth spirituality has as its environmental source and pedagogical starting point the spirituality of the confreres. This is the measure of their true fatherliness: from the faith of the educators to the faith of the young!

We recall what the Constitutions say: "This Society had its

beginning in a simple catechism lesson'... Like Don Bosco we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity... We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord and so discover in him and in his Gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new men."

7. OUR TRUST IN MARY'S HELP

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And in conclusion let us turn our thoughts to our Blessed Lady. We know that Mary is "She who has believed", and so is the model for everyone with the fullness of faith; on the day of Pentecost, together with the Apostles, she was invested by the power of the Holy Spirit, which perfected in her heart a strong spirituality, manifested in the victorious gratitude of the "Magnificat".

"Under the guidance of Mary his teacher," say the Constitutions, "Don Bosco lived with the boys of the first Oratory a spiritual and educational experience which he called the 'Preventive System', i.e. a spontaneous expression of love inspired by the love of a God who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them. Don Bosco passes this on to us as a way of living and handing on the Gospel message" (C 20).

This is why the faithful application of the preventive system, the orthopraxy of our religious consecration, becomes the theological setting of our apostolic spirituality.

May Mary Help of Christians enlighten and guide us too as we move towards the third millennium, so that we may be, like Don Bosco, rooted in the power of the Spirit and so become valid educators of the young to the faith.

May Mary, the "star of evangelization" give strength to our spirituality.

Thank you.

**Address of homage to the Holy Father,
of the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò
during the visit of the Pope to the General Chapter**

Most Holy Father,

329 We are full of astonishment and gratitude for your fatherly gesture in coming to visit us and speak to us in our General Chapter.

Gathered here are more than 200 members from all five continents: priests and lay confreres. The only ones missing are those from Vietnam, prevented from coming by political difficulties.

At present we are concluding our work on the theme of the education of youth to the faith. We have reviewed many widely differing youth scenes, and have examined the main challenges they present for the Church; we have sought in dialogue valid criteria, inspired by the educational practice of Don Bosco, and practical prescriptions for the guidance of our communities in the arduous work of the new evangelization.

We feel the pressing demands of a time of epoch-making changes. We are asked for a more intense prophetic ability, rooted in a faithful and enlightened rereading of the charism of our Founder and stretching out towards the third millennium with a careful and pastoral discernment of the signs of the times.

We have been encouraged in this inviting work by the recent pastoral journey of Your Holiness to Czechoslovakia; in it we have admired your love for the truth that sets people free, your clear and courageous pedagogy in proclaiming it, your nobility of feeling in presenting its social horizons and implications, the historical relevance accompanying the increased pace of events, your witness of kindness rising above all party considerations for promoting communion among different peoples, so that one may speak of a "miracle", no less, even in the secular field.

We believe that the new evangelization needs, in fact, a

"miraculous" atmosphere, so to speak, in the sense of a greater harmony with the Holy Spirit that will move pastoral workers to be fully convinced of his power, in mystical union with the Risen Christ – the living and active Supreme Shepherd –, and in entrustment to Mary, Mother of the Church and its permanent Helper. The "miraculous" innovations will thus be the fruit of the Spirit who kindles in hearts the bold ardour of authentic faith.

This atmosphere of pastoral vigour must be sustained by that apostolic internal conviction which Your Holiness highlighted on Sunday last by the beatification of Fr Philip Rinaldi, who has become for us in this Chapter our model and intercessor. With him and like him we feel that evangelizing activity requires intense interior strength; the support of a particular spirituality.

We ask Your Holiness to bless our deliberations and to obtain for us for this purpose the abundant gifts of the Lord's Spirit.

We shall endeavour to repay you for the exquisite kindness and extraordinary delicacy of this visit by our renewed adherence to the See of Peter and by a tireless commitment to be in the Church, as Your Holiness has frequently told us, solicitous "Missionaries of the young".

Thank you.

**Address of His Holiness JOHN PAUL II
to the members of the General Chapter
during his visit of 1 May 1990**

My dear members of the General Chapter of the Salesians of St John Bosco!

- 330** 1. It gives me great pleasure to be able to meet you in such significant circumstances, against the festive background of the raising to the honours of the altars of your confrere Fr Philip Rinaldi, whom I had the joy of proclaiming Blessed the day before yesterday.

I greet you affectionately and thank each and every one of you, who represent the whole Salesian Family, for your cordial welcome. My thoughts go in particular to Fr Egidio Vigano, who has been confirmed in office once again as your Rector Major, and through him I greet your whole religious institute. To the confidence you have shown in him by entrusting him anew with the guidance of your Congregation, I heartily unite my own best wishes that, in collaboration with the new General Council, also elected by this capitular assembly, he may be able to continue efficaciously the very valuable work he has already carried out in the past.

- 331** 2. I wanted in particular to meet you here in your own house to express to you in concrete terms my personal encouragement and the warm gratitude of the Church, to whom you give such active service.

Everyone in fact is aware of the many kinds of salesian activity carried out all over the world. A whole variety of works with modern structures support your apostolate; but the spirit that underlies them is always the same, that particular charism which is your distinguishing mark and which you received as a legacy from Don John Bosco, the Saint of Youth.

Your attention therefore must always be centred on the young, the hope of the Church and the world, towards whom everyone looks with faith and trepidation. In the richer countries, as in the poorer ones, you must be always at their service, with special attention to those who are weaker and on the fringe of society. Take to each of them the hope of the Gospel, so as to help them to face life courageously, resisting temptations to selfishness and discouragement. To them you must be fathers and brothers, as Don Bosco has taught you.

Take care that the whole process of education be directed towards its ultimate purpose, religious salvation. This "realistic pedagogy of holiness", so characteristic of your Founder – "Master of youth spirituality", implies a constant commitment to helping the youngsters entrusted to your care to open their hearts to absolute values and interpret life and history "in accordance with the depth and riches of the Mystery" (Iuvenum Patris, n. 15).

Vast is the mission indeed and arduous your task, but the Church looks to your Institute with confidence and encourages you to continue on the same path. Be educators of the faith and, trusting in God's help, examine with care the signs of the times in this particular period of history through which we are living.

- 332** 3. I rejoice at the fact, for which I thank the good Lord, that it is precisely on these complex and delicate matters that you have been reflecting in your General Chapter, seeking opportune criteria for enlightenment and the necessary practical guidelines. You have chosen well: the education of the young is one of the key issues of the new evangelization, and it is right that at the present day you should look for suitable ways and appropriate language, in complete fidelity to your charisma and all the Church's teaching.

I take advantage of this welcome meeting with you to highlight some fundamental values that I consider particularly relevant for anyone who, like yourselves, takes part in the educative mission of the Church towards youth.

First of all I want to emphasize as a fundamental point the strength of a unifying synthesis that stems from pastoral charity. It is the fruit of the power of the Holy Spirit which ensures the vital inseparability between union with God and dedication to one's neighbour, between depth of interior evangelical meditation and apostolic activity, between a praying heart and busy hands. Those two great Saints, Francis de Sales and John Bosco, have borne

witness to this wonderful “grace of unity” and brought to fruition in the Church. Any deterioration on this point opens up a dangerous path to activism or intimism, both of which are insidious temptations for Institutes of Apostolic Life. On the other hand the hidden riches accompanying this “grace of unity” provide clear confirmation, as amply demonstrated by the lives of these two Saints, that union with God is the true source of the practical love of one’s neighbour; the more a Salesian reflects on the mystery of the Father, who is infinitely merciful, of the Son who so generously became our brother, and of the Holy Spirit, who powerfully renews the world by his presence, so much the more does he feel impelled by this unfathomable mystery to dedicate himself to the young for their maturing as human beings and for their salvation.

- 333** 4. Another important aspect is the singular pedagogical option of your Founder which consists in evangelizing youth through education. In this sense he was indeed a “genius of the heart”. In fact this ability to concentrate initiatives of pastoral charity in the cultural area of education is no simple matter: it implies attitudes and aptitudes with their own specific characteristics and practical requirements even at a professional pedagogical level.

It is a case of an attractive and even fascinating mission which needs continual revision and comparison with Christ, the New Man, through a deep and limpid faith, nourished daily by the Eucharist and manifested in the simplicity and sacrifice of daily life.

- 334** 5. And at once there emerges another priceless value to which we have already referred: the development among youth of an authentic “spirituality”.

Spirituality means a living participation in the power of the Holy Spirit received in the Sacrament of Baptism and fully developed in that of Confirmation. The young must be aware of the new life given to them in these Sacraments and know that from it proceeds that strength of personal synthesis between faith and life that is possible to those who foster in themselves the gift of the Spirit.

What a great need there is in the Church at the present day for young people to be educated to friendship with Christ and Mary, to enthusiasm for life, to generous commitment, to the service of others or, in other words, to a practical “spirituality” which makes of them leaders in the work of evangelization and architects of social renewal!

335 6. Dear Salesians of Don Bosco, keep your eyes always on your holy Founder, and on the evangelical brilliance of his educational method, and relaunch this precious legacy among youth! His method "needs to be studied at still greater depth, to be adapted and renewed with intelligence and courage, precisely because of changed social, cultural, ecclesial and pastoral contexts" (Iuvenum Patris, n. 13).

On all of you I invoke the continual protection of Mary Help of Christians, Mother of the Church. May she be for you, as she was for Don Bosco, both Teacher and Guide, the Star of the new evangelization.

To you, to your confreres and to all the members of the great Salesian Family I impart from my heart the Apostolic Benediction.

**Greetings to the members
of the 19th General Chapter of the Institute
of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians**

To the Very Reverend Mother Marinella CASTAGNO,
and the Reverend FMA Capitulars
of the 19th General Chapter of the Institute

336 As we close our 23rd General Chapter we want to address ourselves as Capitulars to you, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who will soon be beginning the same capitular work in the service of the Institute and the Church.

For two months we have studied the problem of educating young people to the faith and have become aware of the vast challenges facing youth and awaiting a response from the initiatives and ability of all of us who are educators formed at the school of Don Bosco. In the course of such reflection we have often noted the need to grow in our family unity in the service of our common mission. This need was also emphasized by you, V. Rev. Mother Marinella, when on two occasions during our General Chapter you addressed to us a fraternal invitation to be faithful to the charismatic patrimony inherited from the Founder, which it is our duty to preserve, develop and pass on to others in its entirety.

The recent glorification of Fr Philip Rinaldi, a real gift from the Father's kindness, has moved us to similar sentiments; we have seen and lived it as a new sign and stimulus to communion and reciprocal collaboration in the relaunching of salesian spirituality.

We are conscious of living in an era of the Holy Spirit. At the threshold of the third millennium and in the face of the desperate appeals of the young and the poor and the challenges of the "new evangelization", our vocation as "missionaries of the young" must be renewed, enlightened and extended with energetic resourcefulness.

We would like to pass on and share with you the enthusiasm which the Lord has awakened in our hearts in these days of grace. It is our earnest hope that you too may be able to experience the light and strength of the Risen Lord and the presence among you of the transforming power of the Spirit, who makes all things new.

With you we call upon Mary Help of Christians, the Inspirer and Mother of our vocation, and ask her to make us feel ever more deeply that we are truly brothers and sisters, heirs of a wealth of grace and spirituality for the salvation of the young, and especially those who are poorest and most in need.

Be assured of our prayer and our affectionate remembrance. May Blessed Fr Philip Rinaldi look upon you with predilection and help you, especially for the success of your General Chapter.

May St John Bosco and St Mary Mazzarello guide your work from heaven, and intercede for all our Family.

The salesian members of the 23rd General Chapter.

Rome, 5 May 1990.

The 23rd General Chapter to Salesian Cooperators

337 1. Don Bosco, speaking to the Cooperators at Turin on 16 May 1878 said: "What then is the main purpose of the Salesian Cooperators, their main concern? Do you want to do a good deed? Educate the young. Do you want to do something holy? Educate the young. Do you want to do divine work? Educate the young. Indeed, *among all divine works this is the most divine*" (BM 13, 490).

2. The members of the 23rd Salesian General Chapter have made a lengthy study of the theme of the education of young people to the faith, and now – as the Chapter ends – *they invite all of you who are Cooperators* to respond willingly, with generosity and enthusiasm, to the insistent voice of Don Bosco who exhorts you at the present day, in this run-up to the third millennium, to commit yourselves to apostolic activity. May this appeal be heard especially by the younger ones among you; may they joyfully take up the task of becoming missionaries among their peers.

It is Don Bosco himself who speaks to you again through this General Chapter and encourages all of you to collaborate in his work of education, and especially of the education of the young to and in the faith, thus becoming for them a living Gospel (cf. RAL 13).

3. The Gospel is as indispensable as are such things as water, fire and love. Without it society becomes dehumanized. History makes this evident to everyone. There is an urgent need therefore to promote the growth of gospel values in the young, who represent the future of society and of the Church. *"Good christians and upright citizens" must be prepared for the third millennium*, which is already at the doors. The transforming presence of the christian faith must be ensured in every environment, in the mechanics of history-making, at the strategic nerve-centres of every system, in social, economic and cultural structures, evangelizing the signs of the times: this what is implied by the "new evangelization", to which Pope John Paul II calls us.

4. Faith is dead unless it be embodied in activities and cultures which lead to human growth; it is dead unless it serves humanity by providing a basis for hope and by kindling love. This is why "a mending of the christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world" (CL 34). *This "embodiment" is the specific characteristic of the "secular" vocation:* by virtue of your sharing in the prophetic office of Christ you are fully involved in this task of the Church (cf. CL 34). It is well expressed in the second chapter of your Regulations of Apostolic Life, which offers you a wide choice for your commitment in the Church and in the world.

5. And since it was Don Bosco's wish that your secular characteristic should be grafted on to the religious vocation of the SDBs and FMAs, you are not alone in this immense task: we are all in communion with one another, *we are the Salesian Family*, apostolically mobilized in the Holy Spirit and in the Church to sow seeds of Heaven in the soil of our Earth.

We are well aware that *we Salesians* have still some way to go to meet effectively the demands of our obligations and our responsibility for animation and for contributing to your formation and the development of your lay mission. Your presence must be considered at this complementary apostolic level, and not just from the aspect of efficient organization: you who are Cooperators share with the specific elements of your ministry in the realization of the one salesian mission; you are part of us.

6. And so you will understand why this Chapter, strengthened by the teaching of Pope Paul on the laity (cf. the Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici") and convinced of the salesian identity (cf. the SDB Constitutions and the Letter of the Rector Major on the Cooperators), in fidelity to our common Founder, *appeals to all our SDB confreres to grow in this direction:* this is one of our primary commitments for the coming six years.

7. It is once again Don Bosco, therefore, who sends us out shoulder to shoulder, brothers and sisters united in his spiritual Family, "willing to help their neighbour not with promises but with action and personal sacrifice" (BM 13, 192) and especially the young who are "poor, abandoned and in danger"; he sends us to make a positive contribution, through the genial characteristics of our particular charisma, in the various forms of social involvement of the Church by bringing the boundless love of the Heavenly Father to the young and to all those we meet on our way.

We turn our gaze to the newly beatified Fr Philip Rinaldi who "teaches us to face with salesian authenticity the needs arising from temporal progress" (Fr E. Vigano, in AGC 332, p. 65).

May Mary Help of Christians, Mother of the Church and Star of the new evangelization, bring about in us an interior apostolic growth and be with us always in our wonderful and urgent mission.

The members of the 23rd General Chapter.

Rome, 5 May 1990

The GC23 to the Don Bosco Past-pupils

- 339** 1. We send you, dear Past-Pupils of Don Bosco, our greetings and our gratitude for the message you sent us.

During the two months of our discussions, we the members of the 23rd General Chapter, coming from every continent, have become very much aware that, following Don Bosco, we have been called to respond to the great challenges arising from the world of youth, and from the many social and cultural contexts in which they live. This is a vast and urgent undertaking that involves the whole Salesian Family.

And so we appeal also to you, salesian past-pupils: we see your activity in our works and at every level of society as competent collaborators committed to live with Don Bosco his attractive but difficult mission for the education of youth.

We renew our confidence in you and we offer you some guidelines for a common educative experience.

- 340** 2. In the first place we are well aware that the work of education at the present day makes great demands upon us if we are to rediscover our original "passion" for the young. This is something that involves all of us in one way or another.

In youth resides the hope for a new future. Their expectations mean that they have within them seeds of good and seeds of the Kingdom. With them it is possible to build up a more authentic human community.

This conviction leads us to look always at the young with Don Bosco's eyes, to love them as he loved them, to remain close to them, as the past-pupils of the Oratory themselves indicated in the dream in the letter from Rome (1884).

We know that God educates his people through a pedagogy adaptable to their many different circumstances and state of

development. And so we work with enthusiasm with all young people, whatever may be their social, cultural and religious condition, to help them to build their lives in solidarity, commitment and joy.

But we are equally convinced – and the point has received special emphasis during the Chapter – that the goal of this process of education is only fully attained when these same young people arrive at a living synthesis of the values expressed in that phrase so dear to Don Bosco: “upright citizens and good christians”.

The renewed Statute of your Confederation, which we received during the Chapter, bears witness to your commitment in this respect.

- 341** 3. The Don Bosco Past-Pupils, by virtue of the education they have received, are called upon to become in society witnesses and bearers of a mission to youth.

In addition, those among you who have the gift of christian faith share also in the educational activity of the Church. This, in fact, is a responsibility common to every member of the faithful because of his or her baptismal dignity.

The practical presence of your Federation can be extended to cover a whole variety of forms and activities, and can be carried out in both ecclesial structures and civil and social environments (where it often happens that little attention is given to the problems of youth), as well as in the characteristic works of our Family.

In salesian institutions in particular, we recognize the importance of realizing a genuine educative community, i.e. a community including the young, their parents, the salesians and all their collaborators, together with the past-pupils. An “educative” community which is an experience of “communication and shared responsibility” before being an example of good organization and efficiency.

This will certainly require a scheme for the involvement of each group, according to its capacity, in an atmosphere of joint accountability.

From you in particular we look forward to the contribution of your experience as lay people imbued with the spirit and magnanimity of Don Bosco, with further emphasis on the change in outlook needed at the present day.

- 342** 4. Society, with its continual profound changes, is a challenge to us; we urgently need to rediscover the commitments called for by the responsibility of Don Bosco's Family, and live them in a professional manner, be they cultural, pedagogical or spiritual in nature. We are called therefore to realize in a serious and practical way a systematic process of updating and growth in our educational potential.

We Salesians are conscious of the obligation the Congregation imposes on us of following and helping you in this process of human, spiritual and salesian formation. All of us need to improve: the young want us to be mature and competent in carrying out our specific service.

- 343** 5. Dear Past-Pupils, we are living through a historic period which is also one of grace. We commemorated Don Bosco on the centenary of his death, and now during our Chapter we have taken part in the beatification of Fr Philip Rinaldi, inheritor of the Founder's fatherliness and pedagogical wisdom, and first organizer of the Past-Pupils. These are prophetic signs which give rise in us to encouragement and hope.

May the motherly solicitude of Mary Help of Christians and the intercession of the Saints of our Family obtain for us the grace to love the young and be able to educate them, as we journey at their side, until we finally bring them to meet Him who is the fullness of life.

With cordial good wishes and hopes for the future.

The members of the 23rd General Chapter.

Rome, 5 May 1990

**Address of the Rector Major Fr Egidio Vigano
at the closure of the GC23**

My dear confreres and members of the Chapter,

344 The first feeling I have in my heart as we finish our work is one of sincere gratitude to the Lord, who has always been with us in these months of research and fraternal communion. It has been an experience of laborious but fruitful fellowship, to be passed on to the confreres and brought to fruition also in the houses.

Our gratitude is also extended mutually to each other, and we express it in a special way to the able and self-sacrificing Moderator, Fr Francesco Maraccani; to the members of the Intercommission, especially to their president, Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, to their reporter, Fr Antonio Martinelli; to the confreres of the Generalate who have served us so kindly; and in particular to the well-deserving Sisters and their girls, who have prayed so much for us and have fed and looked after us in so many ways with humble generosity and practical kindness. Our concluding Eucharist will be for all of us a real act of thanksgiving, deeply felt and shared in joyful brotherhood.

Allow me now to make one or two reflections on our GC23 to emphasize the thrust it can give to the Congregation in the six years that lie ahead.

THE MESSAGE OF THE GC23

345 Some of you have likened our chapter document to Don Bosco's famous letter of 1884: a message from Rome to take us back to the origins of the salesian method of educating young people to the faith.

We have felt in our assembly the awareness of the accelerated tempo of people's lives in this last part of the second millennium of the christian faith. We have come to understand with ever greater depth that the true fundamental charisma bestowed on the Church in the second half of this century has been the Second Ecumenical

Council of the Vatican; it has taken us into the mystery of Christ and the Church, and the mystery of mankind and history: the Bishops, in fact, – as Paul VI declared – for the love of Christ turned *towards* man and not *away* from him.

In this way there has begun in the Church, through the work of the Holy Spirit, an era of “new evangelization”. Many striking things have happened unexpectedly, but every new event must be assessed in the light of the supreme novelty: the Passover of Christ. And so the Lord’s disciples find themselves with a lot of rethinking to do, a need for creativity, a need to begin all over again.

I would say that in this creative rethinking, we Salesians of Don Bosco have been assigned *the responsibility* for “*refounding the Oratory*”! In fact, in accordance with what our Constitutions tell us, we know that “as we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works” (C 40).

We must think of the new evangelization among youth with the “oratory criterion” of our Founder.

THE EXPLOSION OF CULTURES

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Let us glance rapidly at what has happened in society. The human race, and therefore human culture, exists after Christ in an “eschatological situation”; the further progress is made, the greater are the repercussions of the sense of an absolute future on future history. Only the Risen Christ can reveal to us what we truly are and where we are going. To leave his Gospel aside means to mutilate cultures, to introduce into them gaps and deviations; the most obvious and the most harmful is the loss of the sense of sin through specious pseudo-scientific reasoning. The decline of certain ideologies, which we are witnessing, is a disturbing warning for everyone and a powerful invitation to fill the gap they have left by proclaiming the great evangelical ideals for the whole of man.

A common source for the danger to emerging cultures is scientific and technical progress, with all its dynamism and positive promise, but which easily leads non-believers to think that this is the only motive force in history, and fosters a “post-religious” mentality. Certainly science and technology have produced great benefits, but they do not explain the sense of existence and have nothing to say about man’s final destiny. They mark progress in civilization, but do not possess transcendent truths. They lead quite easily to concepts which are frankly materialist.

This providential dynamism has urgent need of baptism by a new evangelization, that will help to develop in society a culture intrinsically "post-materialist" in nature.

Today we must be able to evangelize from the very roots; we have to collaborate in the launching of a new humanism; as believers we must work in the field of culture, architects of a human social way of living more in line with personal dignity.

THE SPECIFICALLY CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION

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But what specific contribution can the believer with his christian faith bring to culture? This is the key question. The young are waiting for an answer, not so much in words and reasoning as in the witness of life and action.

And the answer is: the believer brings to culture the values of the mystery of Christ: for those who live by faith, as for St Paul, "to live is Christ" (Phil 1,21); he knows that in Christ he is a "new creature" (2 Cor 5,17), and that in the Creator's design there is the plan "to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1,10). Or in other words, he knows that in human history Christ is the absolute, the alpha and omega, and that faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Christ is not just the founder of one religion amongst others; he is not the author of a religious movement which starts from man and ascends to God. He came down from God among men and the events of his human existence are facts of history; this is why he is the second Adam, the Head of the Body, the Lord.

In his regard we speak of "faith" rather than "religion"; christianity is not simply the most sublime form of human religion, but the ineffable fact of the incarnation of God. And hence the christian faith is also history: the history of salvation inseparably inserted into the history of mankind. Faith therefore is more than religion; it is a solid contact, a covenant, a vital attitude which elevates and purifies also the expressions of human religious observance which necessarily accompany it and clothe it. This christian faith is in itself a power for future development, as is the incarnation of the Word which gave origin to the "new man"; this faith grows among people through the centuries to transform society and prepare the construction of the Kingdom; if it is lived authentically it is the exact opposite of "religion - the opium of the people". This objective nature of christian faith leads us to formulate a principle of tremendous interest to us as educators to the faith, i.e. that the mystery of Christ becomes the light and

yardstick of a true and integral anthropology. And since anthropology underlies every culture, this faith – through the work of evangelization – gives to culture the highest possible service.

This is why there must be strongly present in the new evangelization the prophetic ability to proclaim and witness to the mystery of Christ, the light of his Gospel, and the historical events of human salvation. Here lies the centre and summit of education to the faith.

THE UTTER NEWNESS OF EVANGELIZATION OF THE YOUNG

348 The formation of youth to the faith is a vital part of the new evangelization. It presents certain particular aspects: it requires a “new education”.

Don Bosco was raised up for this purpose by the Spirit, and he has left as a legacy to his family an original path to this goal which has earned him in the Church the title of “Father and Teacher of youth”. His is a practical method which combines inseparably evangelization and education. The Pope has reminded us that this is no simple matter – it implies the taking of risks. In its realization there are many elements that are distinct from one another and can be classified as pairs of poles in tension that we must be able to bring together in harmony.

Let us make a brief list of them by way of example:

- one pole is education (as a cultural action); the other is education to the faith (an ecclesial action);
- one pole is to have professional pedagogical expertise; the other, to be competent from a pastoral standpoint;
- one pole, to promote human advancement; the other, to foster christian growth;
- one pole, to remain with the young; the other, to live united to God;
- one pole, to aim constantly at one’s own inculturation; the other, to be courageous in evangelizing that culture;
- one pole, to appreciate the values of the laity; the other, to unite all things in Christ;
- one pole, to give priority to the “home”, “school” and “playground” aspects of the Oratory; the other, to be able to synthesize these things in a parish setting; etc.

A living synthesis of the two poles in each case is made possible by a force from on high, called – as the Pope reminded us – the “grace of unity”. It is lived with a spirituality, i.e. a participation in the living love of the Holy Spirit who is present, that we call

“pastoral charity” and which binds inseparably together union with God and staying with the young. It is an aspect of the continuing mystery of the incarnation. If at Christmas was born the man who introduced a new dynamism into life, at Easter the novelty of its content was manifested in all its fullness. The “absolute finality” of history appeared, introducing into culture a mysterious “eschatological condition”. At Christmas the Word entered human culture, but at Easter, after giving himself on the cross, he began the evangelization of that culture. Between the inculturation of the Gospel and the evangelization of culture there is a clear distinction and mutual correlation which, in Christ, unite two aspects which differ from one another: belonging to culture and correcting culture.

Pastoral charity follows this same path with the enthusiasm of a spirituality lived with ever clearer awareness.

At the beginning of the Chapter we asked ourselves a question: what faith are we talking about? Now we can say that we are talking about a faith which is historical energy translated for us into a practical spirituality; it makes possible an existential synthesis between cultural values and those of the Gospel; it makes the salesian an educator; it causes young people to grow and mature as upright citizens. Through it the Salesian becomes a competent educator because he is a true pastor; and the youngster becomes an upright citizen because he is a good christian. This double “because” is not reductive, but causative; it emphasizes the inherent strength of our salesian spirituality, as a dynamic daily expression of the grace of unity.

THE ORATORIAN FEATURES OF DON BOSCO'S METHOD

350 I spoke earlier of refounding Don Bosco's Oratory! For us the new evangelization passes through the oratory criterion and grows in the process. I will not delay to explain the complementary aspects of this, nor the many rich elements that make it so valuable. I merely point out that such a criterion is intrinsically and inseparably bound up with the preventive system. In my opening address to the Chapter I spoke of this system as “the fruit and source of salesian spirituality”, emphasizing the approach of art.20 of the Constitutions: it is “a way of living and of handing on the gospel message, and of working with and through the young for their salvation. It permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved”. This

art.20, together with art.40 on the Oratory, provides us with basic guidelines for our activities in "new education". The spirituality of pastoral enthusiasm links up with the practice of the pedagogy of kindness to make the Salesian an efficacious worker in the field of the new evangelization.

I said at the beginning of our work, that the qualification of "ordinary" given to the Chapter, should not be considered as indicating something of only sectional interest, because its theme projects the goals attained in preceding Chapters (concerning our ecclesial identity) into the practical area of educational activity; it must serve to translate those principles into practice! Our identity and fidelity to Don Bosco are concentrated by the GC23 in the education of youth to the faith. We must find a way of staying with young people in the world as though the latter were one great Oratory, beyond all structures – necessary though the latter certainly are; this will provide a concrete manifestation of the truth and of Don Bosco's kindness of heart, his friendship and educative presence among the young, and his central concern for their salvation.

It may be that for years we have been statically confined in works, which were certainly valid: the oratory criterion does not destroy structures but goes beyond them; it calls for creativity and dynamism, prompted always by the pastoral anxiety of the "thirst for souls", to use the expression coined by Don Rinaldi.

The Chapter document emphasizes various aspects of this oratorian mobilization, both as regards the journey to be undertaken and the energy it calls for. We remember the four dimensions of the journey with their vast implications; we remember salesian spirituality with its roots in the fascinating approach of the great St. Francis de Sales and with Don Bosco's particular application of it to the young and the ordinary people.

In my opinion the GC23 is presenting us in this document with a rich panorama of guidelines and suggestions that we must foster and develop; putting them into practice will give back to the provinces the dynamism that has become indispensable for setting out on a journey of faith which must remain on a par with today's speeding up of history. It is like an invitation to refound the charisma of the Oratory with a view to the third millennium.

A VIBRANT APPEAL TO THE PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

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The direct responsibility for the success of the relaunching of the oratorian criterion must evidently lie at someone's door. And if

this subject does not respond to the insistent appeal, the Chapter document will do no more than decorate a library shelf. This subject is the provincial and local community.

The Chapter's practical guidelines are explicit and demanding. What they do, in fact, is prolong the resolutions of the solemn renewal of the salesian profession made in all the communities in May 1988. Our capitular document therefore is an authoritative indication of the true path to follow.

The Rector Major with his Council, the Provincials and Rectors are called upon to renew a whole kind of animation. The community is not called upon to get into a tizzy solely for motives of religious obedience. It must feel itself objectively stimulated by the challenges of the youth scene. Our consecration is by nature apostolic, and is therefore intrinsically nourished by the clamour of those to whom we are sent. This is education to the faith, and it is the youngsters themselves with their worries and needs who require the community to be full of Don Bosco's spirit. Pastoral charity will lead them to programme the journey of faith, concentrating always on the fervour of spirituality as an essential condition for success. It is urgently necessary therefore that the community produce a vital harmony between methodology and spirituality, which may be called the body and soul of pedagogical pastoral activity.

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Frequently in the Chapter we have spoken of "ongoing formation", not only as an occasional course for some confreres (an undoubtedly valid element), but as a constant attitude matured through initiatives at provincial and local level which will help to translate the Chapter's directives into daily practice in the houses. In this connection I would like to point out that every province will have to plan initiatives to ensure that the GC23 is known and assimilated, and so formulate proposals suited to the youth condition in their own areas. There is no need for me to repeat here what has already been said by the Chapter itself. All I want to do is exorcize any temptation to discouragement of the kind: the document is full of fine things, but what can we do about it in this house and with these confreres? Of course there will be practical difficulties to be faced.

We must react, and start from ourselves; we must be convinced that in every house there are many more possibilities than we sometimes imagine; and above all we must increase our trust in the real and active presence of the Spirit, in the energy of the resurrection given by Christ in the sacraments, in Mary's

constant motherly help, in the intercession of Don Bosco and our saints and all the heavenly court. We need to renew the enthusiasm of our faith: it overcomes the world and produces miracles. In our case we have an urgent need to develop our powers of interior reflection.

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I would like to emphasize too, with regard to the provincial community, the utility of new interprovincial proposals, with shared responsibility. One of the interesting points we have seen while living together in the Chapter has been the awareness of a greater openness, on the part of those bearing responsibility, to the dynamism of future developments and the problems that extend beyond the confines of a single province or of local Churches. This tendency towards a wider intercommunion is certainly one of the signs of the times and one that is immediately grasped in a congenial manner especially by the young.

We have seen, for example, the European members of the Chapter concerned about the famous "common house", or the proposal that the "Alpine" provinces should form a group; we have seen those working in Africa keen on creating a greater intercommunion of the work in that continent; we have seen the growth in fraternity and the possibilities of collaboration between the provinces of a single region or a single country. This, in fact, is a tendency which opens up new perspectives for youth pastoral work, and is an invitation to augment our own stature and turn our gaze to wider horizons that will have a considerable practical influence on the education of youth to the faith.

This wider interprovincial outlook has already been present, for example, in the formation sector (and it will be a good thing if it can extend still further); but the characteristic point here is that we are being asked to make it grow in the area of youth pastoral work. We must be able to foster it intelligently and with suitable programmes that involve also other Groups of our Family. That will introduce a breath of fresh air and prompt new ideas for the future. The result will depend on everyone adhering to the guidelines we have drawn up during the Chapter.

But without any doubt the element that will move youth groups to enter into mutual harmony, becoming in this way the dawn of a previously unknown hope involving all of them, will be their common communion in the kind of spirituality which is rightly called salesian, and which will lead to a vital feeling of the bonds of a kind of personalized relationship.

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A point worth emphasizing is that of the involvement of the laity in the education of youth to the faith. Every community must be able to animate a growing number of lay people, either members of our Family (Cooperators, Past-Pupils), or collaborators in our works. This is a requirement of the ecclesiology of Vatican II on which the Pope and the Bishops have been recently insisting. Involvement of this kind presupposes not only an updated ecclesial mentality in the confreres – an urgent objective we have to achieve – but also an awareness of the unique nature of the salesian spirit, lived as a benefit to be shared with others in a contagious way. This in its turn implies a change of mentality and conversion of heart. But will this be possible in the communities as they are at present? That is a disturbing question and brings home to us how indispensable it is to decide on well prepared initiatives.

I think it important to point out that the formation of the Laity is a pastoral priority in the Church of the greatest urgency. It is something that surpasses the obligation of the lay people themselves, as though they were the only ones concerned; it is a matter that involves the clergy and both men and women religious. We know that in religious congregations of both men and women (and we too are included) there is a lack of conciliar sensitivity in this regard. We must be more open to this area of formative commitment: it will help us to mature in our own vocation. We may recall that the concept of “formation” has undergone in recent decades a considerable change of significance because of the increased rate of cultural change. Formation is now measured by the ability for continual adaptation; it is in the light of ongoing formation that one now judges and programmes the initial phase. And this comes to mean that the true concept of formation at the present day implies an existential flexibility, a daily concern, a commitment for the whole of life.

If then, in order to carry out this task, we look at the structure of the Apostolic Exhortation “Christifideles laici”, we find that the christian growth of the laity has four great objectives to attain: baptismal identity (chap. 1), ecclesial communion (chap. 2), the new frontiers of evangelization (chap. 3) and the complementary nature of the different vocations (chap. 4). The point of specific interest to us, precisely in view of the new education of the young, is in chap. 3 dealing with the new frontiers of evangelization, and especially nn. 36-44.

Today the expression “new evangelization” is used with

increasing frequency, but maybe not always with a concrete idea of its implications, which are many and spread over different sectors. The above-mentioned paragraphs specify the main frontiers of lay involvement, from which arise many novel and challenging concepts: the dignity of the individual, the inviolable right to life, religious liberty, the family as the cell of society, the desire for solidarity at various levels, the economic and social dimension, and finally – as a kind of overall synthesis – the culture and cultures of people. These are frontiers on which there must be an updated programme for the education of youth to the faith.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CHARITY

355 A point clearly linked with the new evangelization is that of the social dimension of charity. The chapter document deals with it in connection with three of the key issues in education to the faith. I think it important to point out with a certain accuracy two aspects in this regard.

The first aspect is the need to be really competent in the social doctrine of the Church. This will need careful attention, and in more than a few confreres will imply a change of mentality. A clear idea of this doctrine is urgently needed, without allowing oneself to be mentally subjugated by trendy ideas that arose in certain environments and to some extent are still circulating, as though it were a matter of a kind of ideological mediation of a one-sided and conceptualistic kind. The encyclical "*Sollicitudo rei socialis*" (n. 41) specifies its identity: it is neither a "third way" nor an "ideology", but an interpretation of reality from the standpoint of the Gospel. It belongs, says the encyclical, to the field "of theology, and especially moral theology". "The teaching and spreading of her social doctrine are part of the Church's evangelizing mission". The Church is specifically concerned with the ethical aspect of problems, while not neglecting technical angles. This is the mediation of that evangelical wisdom presented to the world by the Church as an "expert in humanity" and the courageous teacher of the truth that sets men free.

The second aspect is that of the salesian authenticity of the initiatives and commitments to be made in this field. Certainly the Congregation needs to do more and make further progress. Art. 33 of the Constitutions requires this of us, but with a clear discernment that ensures the identity of our charisma. In this field it is easy both to hang back and to go too far ahead, and unfortunately we have had experiences of both in some parts of the Congregation: defects of those who are bogged down in an easy life style, and exaggerated

ideological ideals embraced in arbitrary fashion. It would be a kind of betrayal of poor youngsters if we were to distort our specific vocation and mission in either of these two senses.

It is true that the appeal of poor and needy youth should be a continual challenge to us to do something about it and embark on courageous initiatives, even with some sacrifice. In the provinces it is important to maintain a balance between our various works which characterize us as friends and educators of youngsters of the poorer classes, remembering those words of our Founder: "that you are young is enough to make me love you very much". This is a statement that should serve us always as a yardstick. In any case, our presence among poor youth and those entering the world of work will be a continual stimulus to us to be better communicators for them of the Church's social teaching.

THE APOSTOLIC ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE HOLY FATHER

356 In the final days of the Chapter we had the exhilarating visit of Peter's Successor. This was a quite extraordinary gift for us, and we may consider it a historic event to be understood in relationship to the relevance of Don Bosco's charism in the Church.

John Paul II had already spoken to the General Council (on 4 February 1989, after the ending of the centenary celebrations) about the importance of the theme selected for this General Chapter. Then later he sent us that stimulating message when we were beginning our work. And then with kind generosity he took the initiative of coming in person to speak to us here in our chapter assembly. He had wanted to do this in the evening of Sunday 29 April, after the solemn beatification of Fr Philip Rinaldi, but it was not possible. And so he came instead on May 1st, the liturgical commemoration of St Joseph the Worker, and not only did he speak to us on the theme we have dealt with in the Chapter, but he remained affably amongst us, greeting each one personally before sharing our table and the genial enjoyment of our family style of joy. His Message, his Address in our assembly, and his happy conversation in the refectory will guide us in the study and assimilation of the Chapter's guidelines.

But our commitment to the education of youth to the faith finds also in his other important interventions special lights and concrete directives for living our salesian vocation with updated fidelity. We can never forget his priceless letter "Iuvenum Patris", which will always be for us the most authoritative invitation to

relaunch, in fidelity to Don Bosco and the present day, the oratorian criterion through the educative practice of the preventive system. Meditation on this letter will help us to get a deeper, clearer and more certain understanding of the more demanding aspects of the journey of faith.

The Holy Father's initiative too of officially conferring on Don Bosco in the universal Church the title of "Iuventutis pater et magister" must remind us constantly to contemplate the gift the Holy Spirit has given to the world's youth in the life and oratorian experience of our Founder.

We could not have had a more authoritative assessment and encouragement concerning the urgent need to commit ourselves with all our strength to live our vocation with a new apostolic ardour, and to make ourselves loved by the young as "signs and bearers (for them) of the love of God". Generous dedication to the task of educating them to the faith will be a practical demonstration of the usefulness of the salesian charisma among God's People on their way to the third millennium. Finally, this unforgettable visit will strengthen our sincere and courageous adherence to Peter's ministry, as it is described in our Constitutions (arts. 13, 125); this is one of the great values left us as an inheritance by Don Bosco. Our Founder presented to the Holy See, on 23 February 1874, a report on the life and identity of the "Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales", and in it he wrote: "The fundamental purpose of the Congregation from its very beginning has been to sustain and defend the authority of the Supreme Head of the Church among the poorer classes of society, and particularly young people in danger" (Op. Ed. vol XXV, p. 380: n. XV).

OUR FAITH IN THE ENTRUSTMENT TO MARY

357 I conclude with a thought on the Virgin Mary, Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, the Star of evangelization, the greatest teacher of faith of all time: "She who has believed".

Our Congregation was solemnly entrusted to her on 14 January 1984, at the beginning of the GC22. The Constitutions say that this entrustment helps us to "become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love" (art. 8). To her the GC23 intends to entrust in a special way two great values that we have seen growing during our experience of the work of these months: the communion in fraternal identity of all the provinces, and the launching of a true youthful spirituality.

In the first place then we have brotherly communion in a solid union of all the provinces among themselves and with the Rector Major and his Council. "The General Chapter", the Constitutions tell us, "is the principal sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity. It is the fraternal meeting in which Salesians carry out a communal reflection to keep themselves faithful to the Gospel and to their Founder's charism, and sensitive to the needs of time and place" (C 146). We entrust to the Help of Christians this precious family life style with which Don Bosco taught us to live the unity of the Congregation; even the Pope had words of praise for it during his visit that we appreciated so much. Let us ask Mary to reawaken in us not only sentiments of genuine fellowship but also the happy way of expressing it, so that we may bring it to all our confreres throughout the world. Every General Chapter is meant always to be an event that consolidates family unity. Take it with you to all the houses!

Then secondly, we entrust to her our resolution to proceed on the journey of faith by intensifying our attention to salesian spirituality, and deepening our understanding of it. Let us ask her to help us to share with the young that "spiritual patrimony" proper to the christian humanism of St. Francis de Sales and used successfully and in masterly fashion by Don Bosco for the benefit of youngsters of the poorer classes. Mary herself guided our Founder in this educative experience and taught him how to lead young people to holiness.

I consider it a prophetic and happy sign that we are ending our Chapter work precisely on the Feast of St. Dominic Savio. This is a providential coincidence which shows us the goal we have to reach: a living model of youthful spirituality and apostolic group activity in which the young are the protagonists!

When in September of 1988 the solemn beatification of Laura Vicuña took place at the Becchi, the Holy Father called that spot the "Hill of the youthful Beatitudes", to the resounding applause of thousands of adolescents and young people who thus expressed their enthusiastic acceptance of the title. From the Hill of the Becchi may the spirituality of the youthful beatitudes spread throughout the world!

As a motherly response to our entrustment to her, we await through Mary's intercession the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which will ensure for us truly oratorian hearts so as to be in the world valid educators of youth to the faith.

Thank you, and we look forward to our next meeting.

LETTER TO THE YOUNG

The capitular Assembly, during its reflection on the journey of faith, had constantly in mind young people with the love and interest of Don Bosco. At the end it asked the Rector Major, as Successor of Don Bosco, to send a message to youth in the form of a letter, which would interpret the sentiments of the members of the Chapter and of all Salesians. The letter has already been sent to the provinces and is here published as part of the Acts of the Chapter.

Dear young people, and you personally who are now reading this letter.

358 I am very glad to be able to make contact with each of you in this way, in the name of Don Bosco, your “father, teacher and friend”. I am writing in the name of the very many Salesians who are spread over all five continents, and are at home wherever there are young people like you.

God has put into every salesian heart a burning desire: to be always in the company of those who are young, to understand their deepest feelings, to share their hopes and difficulties, their dreams and plans. Don Bosco is a genial model of this heart that beats for the young. He transformed his predilection for them into a mission, making it the reason for his very existence. He launched the method of kindness, which is at the foundation of all the Salesians try to do for youth.

359 1. Try, on your part, to be open each day to life’s wonders. Explore the world around you, make lasting friendships, savour the joy of being alive, build a happy future, get involved in things of worth. You should enjoy the gift of life to its fullness. It is for this that Don Bosco has made himself your friend!

But his concern for you stems from a greater Master of love, who gives spice, sense and energy to the lives of all. Don Bosco’s friendship for the young, and ours too, is rooted in the fascinating personality of Jesus Christ, who came and continues to come with

the power of God to make everything new, to fill man's future with hope, with justice, with great ideals and values, with true happiness. In him you can see how great man is: it is God who is close to us, who is our companion on our journey through life, and is in fact the Way, the Truth and the new Life.

- 360** 2. But today the human race is living through a period of tremendous changes. And you yourselves are thinking over many and great problems which are at present troubling society and individuals.

Previously unheard of things are happening around us. Myths that have stood for decades are collapsing; yesterday's popular ideologies are crumbling; and at the same time there are appearing on the horizon worrying phenomena which nevertheless exert a certain attraction. To start with, many young people are shaking off shackles that deprived them of freedom and stunted the development of their growth in life; they are trying new ways to proclaim values which must grow stronger.

But a trap lies hidden in the shape of new idols, attractive mirages that are emerging, and you need a watchful conscience and an attentive mind to make sure that what is only fleeting, pleasure, violence, desire for power, indifference and discouragement do not gain the upper hand. Committed research and courageous discernment are called for.

The reactions of youth serve as a stimulus for educators, and in the face of all these innovations the Salesians do not intend to stand on the sidelines as so many spectators. They have taken an initiative, called the "GC23" or "General Chapter", a world assembly that worked intensely for two months (last April and May). Salesians came together from all five continents to reflect, to compare, and to make plans around a theme they felt to be urgent: "How to educate young people to the faith at the present day". And there came out from the assembly plans and decisions, of which the practical consequences will also involve all of you. We wanted it to stir up in ourselves, and in you too, a strong enthusiasm for renewing our mutual friendship and prompting us to journey together towards the ideals of God's plan for the salvation of us all.

But the youth scene varies greatly from one country to another. The complexity is so great that it is important to understand the different cultures, to note what young people are wanting, and identify the challenges emerging from the main situations. We have become aware that faith is lacking because Christ is not known, or at least no value is given to the original aspect of the history of salvation, or in other words of the event that

is central for everyone. Even in traditionally christian countries knowledge of Christ cannot be taken for granted.

And so it becomes important for us Salesians to ask ourselves how we should live as believers in the Lord, enthusiastic for the cause of his Kingdom, committed to making the "good news" resound among youth as something credible at the present day; what kind of journey should we undertake with you young people to grow into new life; how should we live together to produce in our educative communities the oratory, the school and the group so as to be "always prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3,15).

As you can see, these are weighty questions, but we faced them squarely and we have tried to formulate a response, tracing out a road we would like to follow together and clarifying the goal we want to reach.

- 361** 3. A first point we need to think about is the health and visual capacity of your young eyes; what you have them fixed on, what are your sensitivities, your desires, and your worries.

At the present day, to a greater extent than ever in the past, you young people have a growing awareness of the value of each individual. You are convinced that always and everywhere each one must be considered worthy to live: the captain of his soul and responsible for his destiny. And so any educational relationship based on indifference, lack of commitment or manipulation of the person, would be clean contrary to the awareness of your dignity.

All of us, youth and adults alike, contribute to our mutual education, each contributing what he or she is. And so it is not just a fashionable formula to invite you to make a journey with us, but rather a pedagogical requirement with deep roots.

As adults dedicated to the education of the young, the Salesians feel an urgent need to renew with you a kind of "educational pact" to enable us to advance together on the journey of faith. Such a pact would be demanding, but would lead to growth. Travelling together implies attention to one's companions on the journey and a fellow-feeling with them; it calls for reciprocal interest so that there is a common wave-length for communication, willingness to identify authentic values, and the desire to share motives which foster the sense of life.

But to bring all this about, the Salesians have need of you young people. Each one of you personally must make his own indispensable contribution: the vigour of your youth, the will to live, the joy of hoping, imagination in research, generosity in action, enthusiasm in concrete practical commitment.

The areas of interest are many but complementary; there is neither monotony nor uniformity; we are travelling towards a common goal at different speeds but with a clear idea of where we are heading. We have our eyes on the same goal.

The "GC23" has given the Salesians a very interesting document that indicates the different possibilities for this journey, starting as it does from such a wide variety of situations. Approach one of them and get him to tell you about some of the valuable suggestions in the document, the analyses it contains, its reflections and guidelines. It is an up to date gift for the journey towards the year 2000, to give a youthful aspect to history which will continue to develop as it continues into the third millennium of the christian faith with stronger hope.

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4. But there is a fundamental argument that I would like you to think about. Our faith is centred on the concrete facts of human history: it is a far cry from the notion that religion is the "opium of the people", that has been derided and opposed by certain ideologies.

In the era of the ancient polytheistic myths the christian faith was looked on rather like a kind of atheism: it never accepted idols, either on Mount Olympus or in the towns. In more recent times, in the climate of an invading atheism, it has always professed a realism so strong as to reach beyond even the horizons of materialism itself, going as far as proclaiming the "resurrection of the flesh" and the coming of a "new world".

The eyes of our faith are fixed firmly on the Man of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, who became the "Lord of history" at Jerusalem in the Passover of the New Covenant. He has revealed to us who God is: total Love!

The "Father" , who created the world for us, and follows us with infinite mercy; the "Son" who made himself one of us, thus becoming humanity's goal through the centuries; the "Holy Spirit", the bearer of truth and the power of innovation; God, one and three, the source and coronation of everything!

He is a Love, therefore, who invites us to share as leading agents in improving creation by our own work, through science, technology and ecology; who shows us history as the space for playing out an adventure of self-donation for a struggle with him against evil and in support of justice, of solidarity, of peace, etc.; who stays at our side and helps us to develop his plan for the salvation of mankind through the primacy of the values of the resurrection. In this way the bearer of this faith, the authentic

believer, appreciates in the world the real values of the laity; in the vicissitudes of history he sees the values of genuine liberation, and in the signs of the times those of authentic evolution.

Do not tell me that all this is abstract and difficult. It is in fact the supreme reality that becomes ever more fascinating the more it penetrates into our mind. This is the truth the intelligence is panting after; it opens vast horizons for man's activity.

The christian faith has its eyes open to everything; it does not take refuge in things that are obscure, and does not like occult rites; it looks for the light of the Mystery of Love and enjoys sharing in its riches. Everyone feels in his inner being the instinct and nostalgia for this Mystery, for its plenitude of truth, of life and of beauty. It is like the sun which, although one cannot gaze upon it with the naked eye, enlightens and gives warmth to everything, involving us all in the great feast of life. I said that faith looks to the Christ-event, and Christ is no stranger to you. He is concerned that you should have a deep realization of this. He challenges you to make you grow. He died for you and now lives for you; he wants to establish with you a relationship of personal friendship, in response to the dialogue that he himself has begun, a dialogue that is wide and objective in scope and involves you. You would in fact be extremely thoughtless if you were unaware of his love and his truth.

As well as this, since friendship of faith is neither myth nor fantasy nor ideology, but history, he offers you help and a model in Mary, his mother: "She who believed" and who has been appointed by the same Lord to be the Helper of all believers. She will accompany you as a mother in the journey that has been put before you.

363 5. But how can you progress in this journey? Following in the footsteps of Don Bosco, the "GC23" offers you the results of salesian experience in a practical proposal of youth "spirituality".

Here lies the great secret for success. Spirituality is a continually growing internal energy which brings you gradually into harmony with the Lord's Spirit. He is truly present with his gentle power in the life of everyone. With him you can make unbelievable progress: look at Dominic Savio, at Laura Vicuña, at Pier Giorgio Frassati. Through the energy of a spirituality the Lord helps you to build and testify to the synthesis between faith and life which is precisely the content of "holiness".

It is a matter of living the faith by becoming immersed in daily life as the best place in which to listen to the invitations of the Spirit. What Don Bosco – the master of youth spirituality –

indicates from a pedagogical point of view is not only prayer or involvement in exceptional matters, but rather a plan that covers the whole of your existence in its multiple and most diverse expressions.

And so life is spent in joy and commitment. The Spirit in fact does not want you to be sad or a stranger to your environment. Youth is a period of great value. It has traits of similarity with its creative presence. Hope and happiness, the desire for self-donation and responsibility, the will to prepare for life and develop solidarity with others, all find a place in the journey on which you set out. The kind of spirituality Don Bosco offers you leads to the formation of a personal conscience awake to the progressive experience of the Mystery to the point when it becomes expressed in living energy. It is in this sense that spirituality becomes a driving force that gives christian dynamism to existence.

And in this evangelical progress you do not walk alone; you have company: the group, the local community of believers, the Church – the Body of Christ and People of God – who are at your side in every step forward that you make.

* * *

- 364** 6. And there you have the substance of what I wanted to say to you. Don Bosco is calling you by name; he is suggesting a plan to you; he is offering you good company; he is pointing out to you an ideal of “youthful holiness” that is not difficult to attain: an ideal that is simple and for every day, interior and apostolic, joyful and shared with others.

But he makes to you and to all young people an appeal that he has very much at heart. It can be expressed in the slogan “youth for the young”, invented by some of you. Its meaning you can guess at once: to cultivate friendship with Christ means to put yourself on his side, to make your own his plan of action, to live for others, to bring about the growth of good things in society. The “gospel beatitudes”, which are the autobiography of Jesus, express the lines along which you must commit yourself.

The recurring forms of death, like exploitation, alienation, overbearing behaviour, injustice, discrimination, intolerance etc., are all threats which destroy the quality of life and are the ruination of history. They are of use to those fighting for the triumph of good! In this way, with the spirit of the beatitudes the christian faith will appear in truth as the energy of history.

And you, every single one of you, has the task of bringing this

spiritual force to the transformation of the world.

- 365** 7. It is an interesting thought that every generation has to write its own history, its own gospel. In the words of a famous author: "On the day when the spirit of youth goes cold, the teeth of the whole world will begin to chatter." I pray for you; I pray for all young people. And the Salesians are doing likewise. And Don Bosco, whom the Pope has proclaimed to be the "father and teacher of youth", intercedes for you, goes before you and guides you with his heart on fire as the Lord's disciple. To all of you I send my sincere good wishes that you may press on to the goal.

Sincerely, and in the name of all the Salesians,

Fr Egidio Vigano

Successor of Don Bosco

Rome, Pentecost of the Spirit,

3 June 1990

CHRONICLE OF THE GC23

1. Convoking of the GC23 and the preparation process

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The letter convoking the GC23 was given to the communities of the Congregation in n. 327 of the Acts of the General Council of October 1988. The Rector Major wrote: "The Chapter will take place in Rome at the Generalate, Via della Pisana 1111, from 4 March 1990 for a period – I hope – of not more than two months". The principal purpose of the Chapter was to be to deal with the theme: "Educating young people to the faith: a task and challenge for today's salesian community" (cf. AGC 327, p. 5).

The preparation process had already begun in the summer of 1988. In fact in the same issue of the AGC, Fr Francesco Maraccani (who had been appointed Moderator) presented a study-outline drawn up by an appropriate technical commission for the double purpose of clarifying the method to be followed in the Chapter's work and of offering the communities and confreres some lines of reflection and general evaluation on the principal aspects of the theme.

Following the letter of convocation and the study-outline, there took place between December 1988 and July 1989 the provincial chapters, a fundamental step during which the provincial communities elected the delegates to the GC and considered more deeply the Chapter's theme, with particular attention to the situation of young people in the contexts of the province.

In accordance with the calendar laid down, the provinces had to send to Rome by the end of July 1989 the minutes relating to the election of the delegates together with the contributions of the provincial chapters.

Meanwhile the precapitular commission, made up of 18 members from 11 countries and 15 provinces under the presidency of the Moderator, was appointed by the Rector Major. It met in September 1989 and in a month of intense work examined the material submitted by the provinces, and prepared the "Precapitular Schemes". These formed a volume of more than 500

pages divided into two sections: the first contained the so-called "radiograph", an ordered synthesis of all the contributions and proposals on the theme of the GC23, coming from both provincial chapters and individual confreres; the second was a "working document" drawn up by the commission and offered to the capitulars as a basis for discussion in the assembly and a source for the drawing up of practical guidelines for the Congregation.

In December 1989 the precapitular schemes were sent to the Chapter members, so that they could study them and prepare themselves for their subsequent work.

2. Arrival of the capitulars and the Retreat

367 The first Sunday of Lent, 4 March 1990, found the capitulars and observers arriving in Rome from all parts of the world to begin the big meeting. Of the 207 capitulars on the list, only the two from Vietnam were prevented from coming; for the first time for thirty years, provincials and delegates from Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia and Hungary) were present. Five observers had been invited by the Rector Major; later Fr Jacques Mesidor from Haiti was added to their number.

At 6 p.m. there was a preliminary meeting in the assembly hall to hear greetings from the Rector Major and the Rector of the Generalate, and some first announcements from the Moderator. Already a family atmosphere of brotherhood was in evidence, and a commonly felt joy at being together.

At 6.30 p.m. the Retreat began; it was preached by Bishop Oscar Rodriguez SDB, the Secretary General of the Latin American Bishops' Conference. In his meditations he touched on some crucial aspects of what was to be the theme of the Chapter: the challenge of the new evangelization for the education of the young, the architects of the third millennium.

The competent, warm and brotherly words of Bishop Rodriguez, who guided a reflection on the task of educators to the faith according to God's design and in the style of Don Bosco against the background of today's challenges, and the climate of recollection and prayer expressed especially in the community celebrations, proved to be an efficacious means for entering into the "spiritual" frame of mind that characterized the Chapter. The "good nights" of the Rector Major put the seal on each day and contributed greatly to the spiritual atmosphere.

3. Official opening of the Chapter

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On the morning of Friday, 9 March, the Rector Major presided at a solemn concelebration invoking the aid of the Holy Spirit, that he be present by his light and strength throughout all the work of the Chapter.

The same morning at 10.30 the official opening ceremony took place in the Aula Magna. Present with the capitulars for the occasion were Cardinal Jean-Jérôme Hamer, Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated life, together with the three salesian Cardinals, Alfons Stickler, Rosalio Castillo Lara and Antonio Javierre Ortas, the two salesian Bishops, Oscar Rodriguez and Fernando Legal, the Superior General of the FMA, Mother Marinella Castagno, with her Vicar, the Major Superior of the DBV, Miss Gianna Martinelli, the representative of the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Mother Bice Carini, the Central Coordinator of the Cooperators, Mr Paolo Santoni, the President of the Past-Pupils, Mr Joseph Castelli, the representative of the FMA Past-Pupils, Ms Silvana Aloisi, and other guests.

The Moderator, in accordance with the Regulations, set up the Secretariat, and officially declared the GC23 open.

The Rector Major then read the message sent by His Holiness Pope John Paul II. In it the Pope, after his greetings and good wishes, expressed the hope that the Salesians would be able to elaborate concrete and updated plans, in pursuance of that "vital synthesis between pedagogical wisdom and educational practice" which Don Bosco left as a heritage. In the specific perspective of the capitular theme, the Pope emphasized two aspects needing deeper examination: "youth spirituality" and the "social dimension of charity" (cf. Appendix 1).

Fr Viganò was followed by Cardinal Hamer, who gave his own greetings and message to the Chapter members. "You are gathered in an assembly that is one of government," he said. "What are expected of you are deep considerations and deliberations that must give rise to precise guidelines...". And referring to the particular mission of the Salesians in the Church, he added: "Your mission in the Church is one of service. Try to be prepared and qualified, from both a human and spiritual point of view, to make your contribution to the evangelization of those who are poorest and most deprived. In this way you will make yourselves available to those who bear the responsibility for evangelization in their role of successors of the apostles in the various dioceses" (cf. Appendix 2).

Next came the greetings of the representatives of the Groups of the Salesian Family present. They were: the FMA Mother General, the Mother representing the Oblate Sisters, the Major Superior of the DBV, the Central Coordinator of the Cooperators, the President of the Don Bosco Past-Pupils, and the representative of the FMA Past-Pupils. Then, in his role as President of the Chapter the Rector Major gave his official opening address. He presented the GC23 in its guise as an "ordinary" Chapter after the preceding Chapters that had redefined the salesian charisma in the light of Vatican II; he dwelt on the specific tasks of the Chapter, among which he emphasized the delicate responsibility of the elections; he presented some aspects of the theme entrusted to the GC23, in the framework of the preventive system; he expressed the hope, in particular, that they would be able to perfect the educative and pastoral plan with salesian criteria for "journeys" of faith and for outlining a concrete "youth spirituality". "I am convinced," said the Rector Major, "that the organic synthesis between faith and life, that we have to bring to maturity today in young people, will be achieved only through the strength of a concrete spirituality" (cf. Appendix 3).

4. Report of the Rector Major

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At 5 p.m. in the afternoon of the same day, 9 March, the Rector Major presented to the capitular assembly his report on the state of the Congregation, in accordance with art. 119 of the General Regulations. The Report is contained in a volume of 272 pages, entitled "La Società di San Francesco di Sales nel sessennio 1984-1990", with a second volume containing statistical data.

In his presentation the Rector Major ran briefly through the various parts that make up the report: the first part presents a synthetic overview of the individual "Regions" of the Congregation; the second offers an evaluation at world level of the work of each of the Central Departments, according to the animating responsibilities assigned to each of them by the Constitutions; the third provides information on the functioning of certain services and institutions of universal interest; and finally, the fourth offers an overall assessment, with attention concentrated on some aspects that involve us in a special way. The Rector Major dwelt particularly on this fourth part, on the analysis of situations, on problems and challenges, and on reasons for hope.

After a day of personal study of the report, the capitulars made various observations, requests for clarification and further

information in view of the forthcoming discussion of the report in the Assembly. This took place in two sessions on 12 and 13 March; the Rector Major gave prompt and clear replies to the many questions touching on themes much discussed in the Congregation at the present day.

The study of the Report and the discussion that followed confirmed the conviction of the vitality of the Congregation in the various contexts in which it is working and its vast commitment to the mission to youth; at the same time it highlighted the great challenges which the new situations put today to the Salesians, who want to remain faithful to their charisma for the benefit of the young.

5. The first general discussion

370 Once the examination of the report of the Rector Major had been completed, the Chapter got down at once to work on the allotted theme.

On 13 March the Moderator presented the Regulations for the Chapter, and immediately afterwards gave a detailed explanation of the "precapitular schemes", which the members of the Chapter had already received and had to be assessed by the Assembly. In particular the "working document", drawn up by the precapitular commission, had to be given a first overall judgement.

The following day, 14 March, after the approval of the Chapter Regulations and the election of the assembly chairmen, the first general discussion began on the precapitular document, and continued on the following day. The discussion had been prepared by personal study and group work.

From the discussion emerged the first general indications for the Chapter's objectives. In the first place the precapitular document was accepted by the Assembly as a useful working basis, and was therefore adopted as a point of reference for the future work of the Commissions.

But at the same time certain precise indications were given that were to be kept in mind in all the work of study and verification. The Chapter document was to be "pastoral" in character, very concrete and practical, and "addressed to the Salesians in various situations and contexts in their role as educators to the faith". There was a lively desire "to tell of Don Bosco and his experience as educator and evangelizer, speaking with the young but journeying with them too". The attitude was to

be one of "speaking but of listening too", of "service", of "educating them to the faith and ourselves to the faith at the same time".

6. The working Commissions

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With the principal objectives of the Chapter clarified, the next point tackled was the method of working, and here the first point considered was the constitution of the Commissions foreseen by the Chapter's regulations.

The question was a delicate one; a method was needed that would be brisk and efficacious, and at the same time take account of the strong unity of the theme assigned to the Chapter.

The Moderator presented a possible working plan that had been studied in the precapitular commission and also by the General Council. A wide-ranging discussion followed which served to clarify many aspects of the matter, and especially to create a proper standpoint from which to proceed speedily and efficiently. At the end of the discussion on 15 March, the Assembly decided to set up four Commissions, each of which would study the entire theme of the Chapter. Each Commission could divide itself up into smaller groups, by language or type of context, to make the work easier to deal with. Later a smaller coordinating Commission would be formed (the "Intercommission") which would receive the indications provided by the four Commissions mentioned above and by the Assembly, and would then draw up the Chapter document. Also constituted was a fifth Commission, with the duty of studying the proposals that had been sent in with regard to the Constitutions and General Regulations, and other problems of a structural nature. Once the Commissions were formed, each of them elected its own president, reporter and secretary. It was thus made possible to set up also the "Central Coordinating Commission", made up of the President of the Chapter, the Moderator, the three chairmen, and five members elected by the Assembly (who turned out in fact to be the presidents of the five Commissions).

7. Intense work and family communion

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With all the general arrangements, so necessary for efficacious work, completed in the first week of the Chapter, on Monday 19 March, feast of St Joseph, the Commissions were able to get down

to a thorough examination of the basic document, comparing it with what the provincial chapters had said and with the experiences of the capitulars themselves, exchanged in the Commissions or in groups.

For three weeks intense work went on in the Commissions, with periodic reports of each Commission to the Assembly to present observations and proposals as the examination of the various parts of the theme were completed. This gave rise to lively periodic assembly discussions, which first defined certain key issues, and then the structure and essential lines of the three parts into which the document was to be divided.

A typical day of a Chapter member included work in commission, group, regional and other meetings, without any break in continuity. Each day was divided into four working periods: two each morning (9 – 11 a.m. and 11.30 to 1 p.m.), and two in the afternoon (4 – 5.30 p.m. and 6 – 7.30 p.m.).

But the Chapter experienced other periods too, for the expression of family spirit, mutual exchanges and salesian happiness. There was a “group for the animation of community life”, made up of members from various parts of the world, which promoted various fraternal evenings and other initiatives.

Of great importance were the prayer celebrations: these usually took place in the morning in language groups, with everyone coming together in the evenings for Vespers and the “good night”. Once a week, in addition to Sunday, there was a common eucharistic celebration, always well prepared by different groups; some of them were presided over by our salesian Cardinals, who willingly accepted the invitation for these occasions of family unity: Card. Rosalio Castillo came for the Feast of the Annunciation, Card. Antonio Javierre on the Thursday after Easter, Card. Alfons Stickler on 25 April, and Card. Raul Silva on 1 May.

A moment always awaited with much interest was that of the “good night”. In the first week it was given each evening by the Rector Major, who spoke of the life and problems of the Congregation. And then each evening, after the celebration of Vespers, the provincials followed one another in turn to present the history, activities, plans and difficulties of their respective provinces. The result was the gradual unfolding of a most interesting panorama, reflecting the vastly varied activities of the Congregation, its commitment to respond to the needs and expectations of youth, and the problems and difficulties met with en route. Very moving in particular were the accounts given by the confreres from the East-European provinces (Czechoslovakia and

Hungary), who related how they had been able to preserve and foster the charisma of Don Bosco even in the most difficult periods of their recent history.

8. The Intercommission and the conclusion of the first phase of the work

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Once the Commissions had begun work, it soon became evident that the "Intercommission", that had been foreseen for the coordination of the work of the Commissions themselves, needed to be constituted as a matter of urgency, so that it could set about the production of a unified text, that would then be submitted once again to the Assembly.

And so on 24 March, after the necessary clarifications concerning its duties and method of work, the Assembly proceeded to the setting up of this coordinating commission: it was made up of the four reporters of the first Commissions, four members elected one each from the four Commissions, and four others chosen and appointed by the President of the Chapter.

The Intercommission then elected as its own president Fr Juan Vecchi and as its reporter Fr Antonio Martinelli; it got down to work at once on the first part of the theme, on the basis of the material passed on by the four Commissions and what had emerged in the Assembly. Very soon it was able to present a draft statement on the structure of the first part, and make some soundings by means of straw votes to better define its content.

Working along these lines, through successive exchanges between the Commissions and the Assembly, and between the Assembly and the Intercommission, by the end of the first week of April it was possible to complete the first phase of the work. In the Assembly each Commission had presented its own report, and discussions had taken place on each part. The Intercommission too had been able to decide on the general structure, at least of the first two parts.

Towards the conclusion of the first phase of the work, the Rector Major, as President, took stock of the situation and emphasized some points that needed to be kept in mind: the "capitular conscience" and the "goal of unanimity" they wanted to reach in fraternal dialogue and comparison; the concept of "universal" responsibility demanded by the nature of a General Chapter; the specific standpoint from which to assess the questions and challenges – the "pastoral charity" which is the centre of the salesian spirit; the attention to be given to the two

recommendations of the Holy Father: "youth spirituality" and the "social dimension of charity".

At this point too the question was raised again concerning the duration of the Chapter. In this connection the Central Coordinating Commission was able to present a more detailed hypothesis for the work still to be done.

9. The Fifth Commission for the Constitutions and Regulations

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While the first four Commissions and the Assembly were working on the specific theme of the Chapter (educating youth to the faith), the fifth Commission examined the observations and proposals sent in by the provincial chapters and individual confreres concerning our own proper law (the Constitutions and Regulations) and some aspects of the structures of animation and government of the Congregation.

There were very few requests for the revision of legislative texts, which preceding General Chapters had studied extensively and had been approved by the GC22. Some points were indicated, however, for which some corrections of a juridical or practical nature were asked for, or suggestions that had emerged in previous Chapters were taken up again.

The fifth Commission analyzed each question, and then presented all the proposals and suggestions to the Assembly for a first opinion.

Discussion and a series of straw votes led to the decision to accept only those modifications that were considered urgent and important. For this reason the modifications to the Constitutions and Regulations which the Assembly accepted are few and not substantial. Some practical interpretations were given of certain texts, in accordance with C 192.

A point to which the Assembly gave more detailed consideration was that of the configuration of the salesian Regions. The discussion led to the decision that the time was not yet opportune to change the present configuration, which therefore remains substantially unaltered; it was foreseen however that in the course of the next six years some different perspectives would have to be developed.

Finally, to stimulate a better coordination of the salesian presence in Africa, the Assembly approved a specific practical guideline for this purpose.

10. Election of the Rector Major

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After about a month's work the Chapter reached the important moment of the elections. From the time of his opening address the Rector Major had emphasized the responsibility of all the capitulars in this connection. The communal life and fraternal exchange of views had enabled the members to acquire a knowledge of persons and roles, so as to make the necessary discernment.

By way of immediate preparation, the entire afternoon of 6 April, the day before the date fixed for the election of the Rector Major, was given over to recollection and prayer.

7 April opened with a solemn concelebration to invoke the light of the Holy Spirit, and then at 9 a.m. voting began. At about midday the culminating moment arrived, and Fr Egidio Vigano was reelected as Rector Major for a third period of six years; the enthusiastic applause of the Assembly was an expression of the joy felt by all.

Fr Luigi Fiora, the oldest member of the Chapter, acting in the name of the Assembly, asked the newly elected Rector Major whether he accepted the election. Fr Vigano responded simply: "in the name of religious obedience, I say: 'I obey'"; he then added a few words to the Assembly. The applause was renewed while the capitulars filed past the President's table to express their congratulation to the Rector Major.

The news of the reelection spread rapidly, and in the afternoon there was a series of visits of confreres and groups of the Salesian Family, who came to offer congratulations and good wishes to Fr Vigano. In the evening the capitulars, the confreres of the Generalate, and the Sisters with the girls who had helped them in their work, all gathered around the Rector Major for a happy fraternal encounter.

11. Election of the General Councillors

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Immediately after his election the Rector Major had said, among other things: "Now I await good collaborators", and his collaborators, i.e. the members of the General Council, were elected on the following days between 9 and 11 April, in successive voting sessions.

On 9 April the Vicar General was elected in the person of Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi. Accepting his election, he said: "I take on this task not only with peace of mind but also with enthusiasm,

trusting especially in the sign the Lord gives me through the serious nature of your discernment process... I am ready therefore to follow the example of my illustrious predecessors Don Rua, Don Rinaldi, and lately Don Scrivo, to collaborate in full communion and filial understanding with the Rector Major...”.

Tuesday, 10 April, saw the election of the Councillors in charge of the various Departments. The Assembly elected Fr Giuseppe Nicolussi as Councillor for Formation; Fr Luc Van Looy, Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work; Fr Antonio Martinelli, Councillor for the Salesian Family and Social Communication; Fr Luciano Odorico, Councillor for the Missions; and Fr Omero Paron, Economist General. The acceptance by each one was followed in every case by an expression of gratitude to the confreres leaving office after their dedicated service to the Congregation.

Finally, on Wednesday 11 April the Regional Councillors were elected: Fr Carlos Techera for the Atlantic sector of Latin America; Fr Guillermo Garcia Montano for the Pacific and Caribbean sector of Latin America; Fr Martin McPake for the English-speaking Region; Fr Thomas Panakezhram for the Asian Region; Fr Antonio Rodriguez Tallon for the Iberian Region; Fr Giovanni Fedrigotti for Italy and the Middle East; and Fr Domenico Britschu for the Northern Europe and Central African Region. The delegation of Poland would be represented by a delegate of the Rector Major, whom he would appoint in due course.

12. The celebration of Easter

377 The first phase of the work and the elections of the Rector Major and members of the General Council brought the Chapter to Easter.

Many of the capitulars began Holy Week by joining the Holy Father in St Peter's Square on Palm Sunday for the celebration of "Youth Day". But of particular significance was the gathering of the capitular community with the recently reelected Rector Major to concelebrate together the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Fr Viganò emphasized the singular sense of the celebration: "We are celebrating this Eucharist *'in Coena Domini'* as the salesian capitular Assembly. Each of us is here as the representative of all the confreres in the different communities. We may say that brotherly feeling, heartfelt affection, our constitutional mandate and capitular responsibilities, make of our eucharistic Assembly a living synthesis of the whole Congregation, and also the precious animating nucleus of the great Salesian Family... Here as we take

part together in the memorial of the Last Supper, we ensure for every part of the world our identity in the same spirit and mission; we bring into a harmonious organic communion the wide variety of contexts in which we work; we proclaim the unity and present-day relevance of Don Bosco's charism, and by eating of the same eucharistic bread we form a single body with Christ and become signs and bearers of his love for the young."

During the paschal triduum there was a pause in the Chapter's work. Many of the capitulars remaining in Rome were able to participate in the Easter celebration in the holy places of Rome, in union with the Pope.

The celebration of Easter was continued throughout the rest of the Chapter. Among the significant moments in this period we may recall two in particular: the community Mass celebrated on the Thursday in Easter Week, with Card. Antonio Javierre Ortas presiding; and the original initiative of the "Via Lucis" at the Catacombs of St Callistus at dusk on Thursday 26 April, with the participation also of the General Council of the FMA. The "via lucis" resembles the "via crucis" in form: 14 stations which follow the paschal journey of Christ, culminating in the mystery of Pentecost. For us Salesians it recalled art.34 of the Constitutions: "We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord".

13. The second phase of the work

378 On Easter Tuesday, after the brief pause, the Assembly promptly came together again to begin the second phase of the Chapter's work. Each member received almost the entire document, which the Intercommission had prepared with intensive work and much self-sacrifice on the basis of the proposals put forward by the Commissions and in the discussions in the Assembly.

Thus began a new series of exchanges, this time between groups, the Assembly and the Intercommission. The document was first examined in its various parts by groups (either 'regional' in nature or having some aspect in common); it then went to the Assembly for a first communal reaction, and then back to the Intercommission for corrections and opportune additions.

The Assembly discussions on the individual parts led to the first vote on the text with the possibility of voting "iuxta modum" and presenting in writing the "modi" for a better version of the text.

This was a phase that involved painstaking and far from easy work, often outside the normal, especially when it came to the drawing up of the directives or practical guidelines for the guidance of the communities.

14. The long awaited day of Don Rinaldi's beatification

379 Proceeding day after day in its commitment through discussions and reflection to provide a response to the great themes put before us today by the "new evangelization", the Chapter eventually reached the great day of the beatification of Fr Philip Rinaldi, third successor of Don Bosco.

It was a day that had been long awaited! From the time of the Retreat the example of Don Rinaldi had been for the capitulars a shining beacon witnessing to the goal of a pathway to holiness followed out at the school of Don Bosco. Many times during the Chapter there had been spontaneous references to Don Rinaldi in connection with methods of kindness and spirituality. And now that the day had come, it proved to be rich in graces and overflowing with joy to an extent that exceeded all expectations. In the morning, in St Peter's Square in the presence of a huge crowd, one had a feeling of both joy and emotion on listening to the Holy Father proclaim "Blessed" this humble servant who gave everything he had for the young and for his fellow men. And it was good to see him flanked by other "Beati" who had borne witness to the same charity, even to the extent of martyrdom.

In the evening at the Salesian University, the capitulars took part in a solemn act in honour of the new Beatus. Cardinal Rosalio Castillo Lara gave the official commemorative address, but there were other speeches too, including a most moving one by Sister Carla De Noni (who had been miraculously cured through the intercession of Don Rinaldi), and the whole function was a great manifestation of salesian joy for the gift given to the Salesian Family and the Church.

15. The visit of the Pope

380 May 1 will always remain an unforgettable day, not only for the capitulars but for the whole Congregation. Pope John Paul II, who had been asked to receive the Chapter in audience, with an exquisitely friendly gesture decided to come personally to visit the Chapter in its own setting.

It was 12.45 p.m., and the capitulars were gathered in Assembly when the news came that the Pope had arrived. After a few minutes – during which the Holy Father made a visit to the church to pray before the tabernacle and then greeted the confreres of the Generalate – he entered the Chapter hall, to the accompaniment of loud applause and the singing of “Oremus pro Pontifice”. In addition to his personal secretary and Mgr. Monduzzi, he was accompanied by our salesian Cardinals Raul Silva Henriquez, Alfons Stickler, Rosalio Castillo Lara, and António Javierre Ortas, by the Bishop of the diocese, Mgr Diego Bona, and the salesian Bishops Peter Carretto, Ignacio Velasco and Oscar Rodriguez.

It was a historic event!. “We are full of astonishment and gratitude for your fatherly gesture,” said the Rector Major with deep emotion, “in coming to visit us and speak to us in our General Chapter” (cf. Appendix 4).

“My dear members of the General Chapter of the Salesians of St John Bosco,” replied His Holiness, “it gives me great pleasure to be able to meet you in such significant circumstances, against the festive background of the raising to the honours of the altars of your confrere Fr Philip Rinaldi, whom I had the joy of proclaiming Blessed the day before yesterday. I greet you affectionately and thank each and every one of you, who represent the whole Salesian Family, for your cordial welcome.”

The Pope spoke for some ten minutes (cf. Appendix 5), and then invited the capitulars to come up to the presidential platform where he greeted them individually. He shook hands with each one and exchanged a word or two with them, while the photographers captured each instant and the assembly sang the Polish hymn “Madonna nera... Then the Pope came down and stood in the midst of the assembly to allow the capitulars to gather round him for a commemorative photograph.

But this was not all; the Holy Father stayed on to lunch with the capitular community, sharing a characteristic moment of family joy. The happy enthusiasm of all was expressed in friendly greetings and some songs carefully chosen by some of the regional groups.

At the end the Pope spoke once again, without any formality, to express his thanks in the following words which are taken from a recording made at the time:

“They say that when a man reaches 70 he develops the habit of looking back more at the past. I find this same tendency in myself, because when I stand here my mind goes back to another salesian setting in my own town, in the parish where I grew up: the parish

of St Stanislaus Kostka at Cracow (applause). That is where I spent my youth, a difficult time on account of the war but also full of inspirations, thanks mainly to that parish and the people I met there during the Nazi occupation. I have been back there several times: as a priest to celebrate my first Mass, as a Bishop - once again to say one of my first episcopal Masses, as Archbishop of Cracow, and as a Cardinal. I have often relived these events in that church which was in fact my parish church, though not the only one because earlier I had been in the parish of Wadowice. And afterwards there was always a reception and a lunch, just like here. I must say that lunches are very much alike; and so is the salesian atmosphere at lunch, be it at Rome or Cracow. But here at Rome today it is like having a salesian synthesis of the whole world!

"I thank you once again for your salesian invitation, on a day we refer to in the Vatican as a "free day" (applause). On a day dedicated liturgically to St Joseph we celebrate the feast of work by not working. And that is quite right: I think it is in line with the book of Genesis. Even our Creator has given us an example in this sense: celebrate work by taking a rest. I thank you for this feast of work, spent with representatives of the great Salesian Family from all over the world.

"I hope you can continue on the same line. If I have found in this dining room in Rome - are we in Rome here or outside it? (applause); we're in one of the suburbicarian sees - a continuation of the setting at Cracow it means that we have the continuity of an organic principle, something found in all salesian settings wherever they may be.

"And this too belongs to the family spirit. Families always hope to be together. Even if they are separated by distance the members try to live the same life, the same atmosphere, the same customs. This is something very valuable in a human family, and no less so in a religious family.

"Yours is a great family indeed! Providence has truly blessed you, it has blessed the work of your Founder Don Giovanni Bosco by giving to his work a great power of attraction.

"Yours is a vocation that is always attractive. Don Bosco, the Salesians and the young are always to be found together! This attraction between the two is never lost, and never must be lost; because the young need people to love them - and on the other hand we priests, religious and pastors, we need to love the young... but naturally not the young alone; there are the old people too, the poor, the suffering, and so many other categories.

"But I would say that it is very important to preserve this living

link with youth. They are rich, they have a great potential, more or less developed but always very real. By making good use of their talents and potential they become rich in the true sense and are able to enrich others. Enrich them, as did Jesus who, being rich, made himself poor to enrich us (cf. 2 Cor 8,9). This is the kind of riches and poverty that we are speaking of.

"But the young can quite easily behave like the prodigal son, wasting everything and throwing it away. So teaching them how to enrich others without losing anything themselves, their own rich qualities and potential, is a great work of charity, a pastoral work, a work of Christ. This is where the genius of Don Bosco was so evident, his charisma which must always be yours.

"I pray that you may always continue on this same line, that of the salesian charism of Don Bosco. Thank you."

After renewed enthusiastic applause, and after greeting the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the girls who help them, the Holy Father returned to the Vatican. The historic encounter will remain as a permanent stimulus to greater fidelity to the salesian vocation and mission in the Church.

16. The voting of the Chapter document

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After the first voting of the Chapter document in the last week of April, with the possibility of submitting "modi", the Intercommission began an intense period of work to examine the "modes", and whenever possible integrate them into the text, so as to prepare the definitive version of the document. On Monday 30 April it was possible to present the latter almost in its entirety to the capitulars, so that they could read and check it with a view to the definitive approval. There were still one or two minor clarifications or small touches to be made, and these the Intercommission pointed out to the Assembly with admirable diligence.

In this way 4 May was reached, the day fixed for the final vote. The individual parts and chapters of the document were voted, after grouping the paragraphs in an opportune manner. The capitular deliberations and the practical guidelines were voted on individually for each one. It was very satisfactory to note that on every point there was a convergence that far exceeded the majority required for approval. At the end the whole document was voted on in its entirety, and the approval of the text was greeted with prolonged applause.

It should be added that the Assembly had earlier approved the

small modifications to the Constitutions and Regulations and the other deliberations concerning structures.

17. Good wishes, messages and appraisal

382 The Chapter was now approaching its conclusion, but before finishing the Assembly wanted to send some messages and good wishes to express fellowship and encouragement.

The first of these were addressed to the two Groups of the Salesian Family: the Cooperators and the Past-Pupils, which had sent messages to the Chapter at its opening. For these two Groups the Central Coordinating Commission had asked some capitulars to prepare a brief message, which was subsequently submitted to the members for their observations and suggestions. After appropriate revision the messages were once again submitted to the Assembly, which approved them.

But there was a forthcoming event that the capitulars wanted to emphasize in a special way: next September the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will celebrate their own 19th General Chapter, with a theme very similar to that of the GC23. The Assembly wanted to express to the Mother General and FMA capitulars a particular message of greeting and good wishes, with the assurance of their prayers for the success of the great event.

And the young people themselves? They had certainly been present in our Chapter, indeed from many points of view they had been the people most concerned. It was asked how they could be enabled to hear the voice of the Congregation gathered in the Chapter? Among the various proposals put forward, the one adopted by the Assembly was that the Rector Major, as Don Bosco's Successor, should write a letter for them in the name of the Salesians, who are willing to give their own lives, like Don Bosco, for the young.

Finally, among these messages there should not be forgotten an interesting initiative suggested by a group of capitulars: that Don Bosco be proposed as the special patron of those involved in sport, including professionals.

18. The conclusion of the GC23

383 Finally on Saturday 5 May, 58 days after the official opening, the GC23 came to an end. In the afternoon, meeting for the last

time in general Assembly, the members performed the final functions required by the Regulations. Then after all the capitulars and observers had signed the final minutes, the Rector Major gave his closing address: an authoritative summing up of all that had been done, the objectives attained and the obligations to which the Congregation was committed for the coming six years.

Outlining the "message of the GC23", the Rector Major emphasized some of the important points emerging from the Chapter's reflections, which had been translated into practical guidelines: the explosion of cultures, the specifically christian contribution, the originality of the evangelization of youth, the oratorian aspect of Don Bosco's method, a vibrant appeal to the provincial and local communities, lay involvement, and the social dimension of charity. He concluded with a reference to our Blessed Lady, Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, the Star of evangelization: "Our Congregation was solemnly entrusted to her on 14 January 1984, at the beginning of the GC22. The Constitutions say that this entrustment helps us to 'become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love' (art. 8). To her the GC23 intends to entrust in a special way two great values that we have seen growing during our experience of the work of these months: the communion in fraternal identity of all the provinces, and the launching of a true youthful spirituality" (cf. Appendix 9).

Sustained and enthusiastic applause expressed to the Rector Major the thanks and affection of all the capitulars.

Finally, at 6 p.m. the commemoration of St Dominic Savio was anticipated from the following day in a solemn eucharistic concelebration that strengthened the bonds of spiritual unity and apostolic commitment, and at the end of the concelebration the Moderator, Fr Francesco Maraccani, declared the GC23 officially closed.

And so the members returned to their own provinces, to their own young people, to take up again with the confreres and with the youngsters themselves the journey of faith explained by the Chapter, in the light of the plan for a "youthful holiness", witnessed to by Don Bosco and by him passed on to us.

LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE GC23

GENERAL COUNCIL

1. P	VIGANÒ Egidio	<i>Rector Maior - President</i>
2. P	SCRIVO Gaetano	<i>Vicar General</i>
3. P	NATALI Paolo	<i>Councillor for Formation</i>
4. P	VECCHI Juan Edmundo	<i>Councillor for Youth Apostolate</i>
5. P	CUEVAS LEON Sergio	<i>Councillor for FS and CS</i>
6. P	VAN LOOY Luc	<i>Councillor for the Missions</i>
7. P	PARON Omero	<i>Economer General</i>
8. P	BOSONI Luigi	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
9. P	BRITSCHU Domenico	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
10. P	McPAKE Martin	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
11. P	PANAKEZHAM Thomas	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
12. P	RICO José Antonio	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
13. P	TECHERA Carlos	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
14. P	MARACCANI Francesco	<i>Secretary General - Moderator</i>
15. P	FIORA Luigi	<i>Procurator General</i>

Atlantic Region of Latin America

16. P	CANTINI Juan	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina-Buenos Aires
17. P	NEGROTTI Santiago	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina-Buenos Aires
18. P	STOCHETTI Benjamín	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina-Bahía Blanca
19. P	SANTECCHIA Benito	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina-Bahía Blanca
20. P	BRIONES Juan Antolín	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina-Córdoba
21. P	JARA Wálter Luis	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina-Córdoba
22. P	IZURIETA Hugo	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina-La Plata
23. P	TIMOSSI Luis	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina-La Plata
24. P	DEL DEGAN Mario	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina-Rosario
25. P	PERSIG Mario	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina-Rosario
26. P	ZANDONADE Décio	<i>Provincial</i>	Brasile-Belo Horizonte
27. P	CALIMAN Cleto	<i>Delegate</i>	Brasile-Belo Horizonte
28. P	MARINONI José	<i>Provincial</i>	Brasile-Campo Grande
29. P	FORALOSSO José	<i>Delegate</i>	Brasile-Campo Grande

30. P	MORANDO Benjamim	<i>Provincial</i>	Brasile-Manaus
31. P	SUCARRATS João	<i>Delegate</i>	Brasile-Manaus
32. P	BALESTIERI José Jovêncio	<i>Provincial</i>	Brasile-Porto Alegre
33. P	SANDRINI Marcos	<i>Delegate</i>	Brasile-Porto Alegre
34. P	LINARD NUENS Orsini	<i>Provincial</i>	Brasile-Recife
35. P	COSTA Raimundo	<i>Delegate</i>	Brasile-Recife
36. P	PICCOLI Luiz Gonzaga	<i>Provincial</i>	Brasile-São Paulo
37. P	PESSINATTI Nivaldo Luiz	<i>Delegate</i>	Brasile-São Paulo
38. P	ZABALA Ascensio	<i>Provincial</i>	Paraguay
39. P	MACIEL Bienvenido	<i>Delegate</i>	Paraguay
40. P	REYES F. Víctor	<i>Provincial</i>	Uruguay
41. P	MUNIZ Claudio	<i>Delegate</i>	Uruguay

Pacific-Caribbean Region of Latin America

42. P	SOTO Angel	<i>Provincial</i>	Antille
43. P	SOTO Julio	<i>Delegate</i>	Antille
44. P	LONGO Carlos	<i>Provincial</i>	Bolivia
45. P	IRIARTE AGUIRREZABAL José	<i>Provincial</i>	Bolivia
46. P	CHINCHILLA Luis Ricardo	<i>Provincial</i>	Centro America
47. P	VIAN MORALES Oscar Julio	<i>Delegate</i>	Centro America
48. P	EZZATI Ricardo	<i>Provincial</i>	Cile
49. P	NICOLUSSI José	<i>Delegate</i>	Cile
50. P	VIDELA Alfredo	<i>Delegate</i>	Cile
51. P	APONTE Carlos Julio	<i>Provincial</i>	Colombia-Bogotá
52. P	CASTRELLON Camilo	<i>Delegate</i>	Colombia-Bogotá
53. P	CALLE Juan Bautista	<i>Provincial</i>	Colombia-Medellín
54. P	BARON Marcos	<i>Delegate</i>	Colombia-Medellín
55. P	DELGADO Germán	<i>Provincial</i>	Ecuador
56. L	GANIS Luis	<i>Delegate</i>	Ecuador
57. L	PEREZ Gregorio	<i>Delegate</i>	Ecuador
58. P	CHAVEZ Pascual	<i>Provincial</i>	Messico-Guadalajara
59. P	PLASCENCIA José Luis	<i>Delegate</i>	Messico-Guadalajara
60. P	GARCIA MONTAÑO Guillermo	<i>Provincial</i>	Messico-México
61. P	ALTAMIRANO A. Fco. Javier	<i>Delegate</i>	Messico-México
62. P	GIACOMUZZI Carlos	<i>Provincial</i>	Perú
63. P	CORDERO Carlos	<i>Delegate</i>	Perú
64. P	PERON Juan Pablo	<i>Provincial</i>	Venezuela
65. P	DIVASSON José Angel	<i>Delegate</i>	Venezuela

English-speaking Region

66. P	LONERGAN Patrick	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa Meridionale
67. P	COLEMAN John	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Meridionale
68. P	FOX Julian	<i>Provincial</i>	Australia
69. P	FORD Norman	<i>Delegate</i>	Australia
70. P	AUTHIER Richard	<i>Sup. V-Prov.</i>	Canada Est
71. P	CAVOTO Nino	<i>Delegate</i>	Canada Est
72. P	WINSTANLEY Michael	<i>Provincial</i>	Gran Bretagna
73. P	GALLAGHER James	<i>Delegate</i>	Gran Bretagna
74. P	HARRINGTON Joseph	<i>Provincial</i>	Irlanda
75. P	FINNEGAN John	<i>Delegate</i>	Irlanda
76. P	McCORMICK Richard	<i>Provincial</i>	Stati Uniti Est
77. P	ANGELUCCI Patrick	<i>Delegate</i>	Stati Uniti Est
78. L	DUBÉ Emile	<i>Delegate</i>	Stati Uniti Est
79. P	PRENDIVILLE Thomas	<i>Provincial</i>	Stati Uniti Ovest
80. P	WANNER Richard	<i>Delegate</i>	Stati Uniti Ovest

Asian Region

81. P	ZEN Giovanni Battista	<i>Provincial</i>	Cina
82. P	HON TAI-FAI Savio	<i>Delegate</i>	Cina
83. P	THAYIL Thomas	<i>Sup. V-Prov.</i>	Est Africa
84. P	ODORICO Luciano	<i>Delegate</i>	Est Africa
85. P	PANFILO Francesco	<i>Provincial</i>	Filippine
86. P	GUSTILO Francis	<i>Delegate</i>	Filippine
87. P	BACLIG Mario	<i>Delegate</i>	Filippine
88. P	MASSA Bautista	<i>Provincial</i>	Giappone
89. P	MIZOBE OSAMU Francesco	<i>Delegate</i>	Giappone
90. P	PIRES Loddy	<i>Provincial</i>	India-Bombay
91. P	D'SOUZA Joaquim	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Bombay
92. P	ALANCHERIL Sebastian	<i>Provincial</i>	India-Calcutta
93. P	POLACKAL Thomas	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Calcutta
94. P	COLUSSI Luciano	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Calcutta
95. P	NEDUMALA Scaria	<i>Provincial</i>	India-Dimapur
96. P	MULAYINKAL Thomas	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Dimapur
97. P	KALAPURAPUTHENPURA John	<i>Provincial</i>	India-Guwahati
98. P	JALA Dominic	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Guwahati
99. P	THELEKKATT Joseph	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Guwahati
100. P	THEKEDATHU Joseph	<i>Provincial</i>	India-Bangalore
101. P	PUTHANANGADY Paul	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Bangalore
102. P	MALAYATTI Jacob	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Bangalore

103. P	DURAIRAJ Vincent	<i>Provincial</i>	India-Madras
104. P	RAJ JASWANT Joseph	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Madras
105. P	SATHIARAJ John Peter	<i>Delegate</i>	India-Madras
106. P	CUVELIER Marc	<i>Sup. V-Prov.</i>	Korea
107. P	HWANG Paul	<i>Delegate</i>	Korea
108. P	PEDRON Tito	<i>Provincial</i>	Thailandia
109. P	BANCHONG Joseph	<i>Delegate</i>	Thailandia

Region of Spain and Portugal

110. P	BERNARDO David	<i>Provincial</i>	Portogallo
111. P	CRUZ Simão Pedro	<i>Delegate</i>	Portogallo
112. P	CARABIAS Miguel	<i>Provincial</i>	Spagna-Barcelona
113. P	DOMENECH C. Antonio	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Barcelona
114. P	RIU R. Francisco	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Barcelona
115. P	ARIAS GOMEZ Ricardo	<i>Provincial</i>	Spagna-Bilbao
116. P	MIRANDA REGOJO Angel	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Bilbao
117. P	CUADRADO SENDINO Arcadio	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Bilbao
128. P	RODRIGUEZ TALLON Antonio	<i>Provincial</i>	Spagna-Córdoba
119. P	MUÑOZ Eusebio	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Córdoba
120. P	RODRIGUEZ MARTIN Filiberto	<i>Provincial</i>	Spagna-León
121. P	SANMARTIN PEREZ José A.	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-León
122. P	GARCIA MARTINEZ Antonio	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-León
123. P	LAGUNA VEGAS Aureliano	<i>Provincial</i>	Spagna-Madrid
124. P	CASTRO BARCO Manuel	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Madrid
125. P	ALBURQUERQUE F. Eugenio	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Madrid
126. P	VAZQUEZ Francisco	<i>Provincial</i>	Spagna-Sevilla
127. P	CALERO Antonio	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Sevilla
128. P	ASURMENDI Miguel	<i>Provincial</i>	Spagna-Valencia
129. P	ORDUNA Cándido	<i>Delegate</i>	Spagna-Valencia

Italy and Middle East Region

130. P	GALBUSERA Gaetano	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Adriatica
131. P	MAGGI Dalmazio	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Adriatica
132. P	VIGANÒ Angelo	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Centrale
133. L	DALLA TORRE Silvano	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Centrale
134. P	PERRENCHIO Fausto	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Centrale
135. P	SCAGLIONI Arnaldo	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Lombardo Emiliana
136. P	RONCHI Ennio	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Lombardo Emiliana
137. P	RIVA Eugenio	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Lombardo Emiliana
138. P	LIBERATORE Pasquale	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Ligure Toscana
139. P	SAVIO Vincenzo	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Ligure Toscana

140. P	MARTINELLI Antonio	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Meridionale
141. P	ORLANDO Vito	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Meridionale
142. P	PALMISANO Nicola	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Meridionale
143. P	FILIPPINI Carlo	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Novarese Elvetica
144. P	PALIZZI Giuliano	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Novarese Elvetica
145. P	SPERA Ilario	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Romana
146. P	PUSSINO Gian Luigi	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Romana
147. P	PETROSINO Antonio	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Romana
148. P	CASTI Giuseppe	<i>Sup. V-Prov.</i>	Italia-Sardegna
149. P	LILLIU Giovanni	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Sardegna
150. P	COSTANZO Vittorio	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Sicilia
151. P	PERRELLI Vito Luigi	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Sicilia
152. P	ROMEO Umberto	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Sicilia
153. P	BASSET Luigi	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Subalpina
154. P	TESTA Luigi	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Subalpina
155. P	GHIGLIONE Giovanni	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Subalpina
156. P	FILIPPIN Giovanni	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Veneta Est
157. P	ZUPPINI Luigi	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Veneta Est
158. P	TREVISAN Alberto	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Veneta Est
159. P	FEDRIGOTTI Giovanni	<i>Provincial</i>	Italia-Veneta Ovest
160. P	BREGOLIN Adriano	<i>Delegate</i>	Italia-Veneta Ovest
161. P	PICCHIONI Alfredo	<i>Provincial</i>	Medio Oriente
162. P	POZZO Vittorio	<i>Delegate</i>	Medio Oriente

Northern Europe and Central African Region

163. P	DINGENEN Jean	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa Centrale
164. P	TAFUNGA Jean-Pierre	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Centrale
165. P	KELER Josef	<i>Provincial</i>	Austria
166. P	MAIER Bernhard	<i>Delegate</i>	Austria
167. P	DESMET Lucien	<i>Provincial</i>	Belgio Nord
168. P	BIESMANS Hendrik	<i>Delegate</i>	Belgio Nord
169. P	DOUTRELUINGNE Michel	<i>Provincial</i>	Belgio Sud
170. P	DURIEUX Gérard	<i>Delegate</i>	Belgio Sud
171. P	KAISER Jozef	<i>Provincial</i>	Cecoslovacchia-Bratislava
172. P	DERMEK Andrej	<i>Delegate</i>	Cecoslovacchia-Bratislava
173. P	VIK Ladislav	<i>Provincial</i>	Cecoslovacchia-Praga
174. P	KUNETKA František ¹	<i>Delegate</i>	Cecoslovacchia-Praga
175. P	WIRTH Morand	<i>Provincial</i>	Francia-Lyon
176. P	KLENCK Edmond	<i>Delegate</i>	Francia-Lyon
177. P	BALBO Gérard	<i>Provincial</i>	Francia-Paris
178. P	RÉAUDIN Yvon	<i>Delegate</i>	Francia-Paris

179. P	HELBING Reinhard	<i>Provincial</i>	Germania Köln
180. L	MULLER Jean-Paul	<i>Delegate</i>	Germania Köln
181. P	BRECHEISEN August	<i>Provincial</i>	Germania München
182. P	GRÜNNER Josef	<i>Delegate</i>	Germania München
183. P	SCHOCH Johannes	<i>Delegate</i>	Germania München
184. P	HOČEVAR Stanislav	<i>Provincial</i>	Jugoslavia-Ljubljana
185. P	ŠKRABL Franc	<i>Delegate</i>	Jugoslavia-Ljubljana
186. P	BARBARIĆ Mirko	<i>Provincial</i>	Jugoslavia-Zagreb
187. P	PRANJIC Marko	<i>Delegate</i>	Jugoslavia-Zagreb
188. P	ASMA André	<i>Provincial</i>	Olanda
189. P	VAN VLIET Bertus	<i>Delegate</i>	Olanda
190. P	PÁSZTOR János	<i>Provincial</i>	Ungheria
191. P	BAJI János	<i>Delegate</i>	Ungheria

Delegation of Poland

192. P	WEDER Zdzisław	<i>Provincial</i>	Polonia-Warszawa
193. P	JANECZEK Aleksander	<i>Delegate</i>	Polonia-Warszawa
194. P	MALINOWSKI Zbigniew	<i>Delegate</i>	Polonia-Warszawa
195. P	SKOPIAK Stanisław	<i>Provincial</i>	Polonia-Piła
196. P	STYRNA Stanisław	<i>Delegate</i>	Polonia-Piła
197. P	GLISCIŃSKI Jan	<i>Delegate</i>	Polonia-Piła
198. P	ŚMIGIELSKI Adam	<i>Provincial</i>	Polonia-Wrocław
199. P	WILK Józef	<i>Delegate</i>	Polonia-Wrocław
200. P	BIEGUS Piotr	<i>Provincial</i>	Polonia-Kraków
201. P	DZIUBIŃSKI Marian	<i>Delegate</i>	Polonia-Kraków
202. P	KRASOŃ Franciszek	<i>Delegate</i>	Polonia-Kraków

Vice-Province of Salesian Pontifical University

203. P	VAN LUYN Adriaan	<i>Sup. V-Prov.</i>	UPS
204. P	BERTONE Tarcisio	<i>Delegate</i>	UPS

Generalate, Rome

205. L	ROMALDI Renato	<i>Delegate</i>	RMG
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Observers

1. P	DZIĘDZIEL Augustyn	<i>Delegate of RM for Poland</i>
2. L	DUSABEYEUZU Cyprien	<i>Central Africa</i>
3. L	MARTIN Fernando	<i>Mexico-México</i>
4. L	VALERI Nello	<i>India-Guwahati</i>

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