

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE LAY PERSON IN THE SALESIAN FAMILY

An invitation to renew our identity card. - Who are the laity who share the mission with us. - The new ecclesial mentality. - Vatican II our guide in a "pilgrimage of discovery". - A valuable initiative of communion. - What our objectives are. - Giving life to a "spiritual movement".

Rome, 24 February 1986

My dear confreres,

The theme expressed in the Strenna for 1986 is deserving of careful consideration in the Congregation.

The vocation and mission of the lay person at the present day is one of the great fronts of renewal opened up by Vatican II. The Council's action of analysis and relaunching has its repercussions also on our Family, which detects in the development of this vocation an enriching experience of returning to its origins. Don Bosco in fact always involved a large number of lay people in his mission for the young and the poor.

An invitation to renew our identity card

In putting forward this theme we are not prompted by an eagerness to feel up to date (which could be nothing more than a fleeting and short-lived attitude), but by docility to the Spirit of the Lord and fidelity to the apostolic project of our Founder.

Failure indeed to follow this line would mean that we had lost interest in our vocational identity. After a hundred years of life we need to rejuvenate our salesian features, so that our authentic physiognomy may be more evident and attractive.

Little by little, in fact, a certain involution was taking place in this sector which would have converted us into self-sufficient administrators of the works already existing rather than animators of an apostolic movement in a Church which is on the move: more tutors of pupils than missionaries of the young.

Fortunately the Council produced a lot of fresh air which reached the lungs of our General Chapters, and in particular the Special one. Today we have available a rich and striking doctrine on the laity with practical and stimulating guidelines, and to some extent we have already committed ourselves to them in various provinces.

Something is certainly happening. We saw it, for example, a few months ago in the 2nd World Congress of the Cooperators. It has been evident for some time in work with the Past Pupils. We watch with fresh attention the "Lay Collaborators" and the "Friends of Don Bosco". But in some provinces progress is very slow; they find it difficult to get going.

What is lacking? A renewed conciliar mentality? A greater sense of the Church as communion? A more objective social sensitivity? A more courageous and compelling vision of our commitment to the young and the poor? More drive from our spiritual batteries?

One thing is quite certain: if Don Bosco were alive at the present day, with the vast horizons

of Vatican II available to him, he would immediately set about involving a multitude of the laity in his working plans.

And why should not we do the same, we who are his sons and who want to show, for the coming centenary celebrations of his death, that the charisma of the Oratory is still fully alive and up to date?

The lay people who are with us in the mission

We want to foster the vocation of the laity involved with us in the service of the young, and we want to do this on the basis of the genuine spirit of the Council. But when we approach the matter from a different angle, and instead of speaking of the laity according to the Council we pass to a consideration of the lay people with whom we ourselves deal and work, we find that a strange difficulty arises from the elastic nature of the meanings given to this term. We seem to be on different levels, which obscure the true ecclesial concept of the lay person, and reduce our consideration to a generic kind of idea which seems to rule out the possibility of speaking explicitly of "vocation" and "mission".

The trouble is due to the many different meanings currently attached to the term "lay"; the variety is now so firmly rooted in our common way of speaking that if we are not careful we ourselves may become victims of mistaken ideas.

Let me give you some examples of the way in which this term is used (at least in the Italian environment). We speak of "lay collaborators",

but what meaning do we attach to the expression? The newspapers often refer to the "lay" parties in politics, and what does it mean there? Or why is it that one can speak of a "'lay' State" but is suspicious of the term "'lay' morality". There is a real difference of meaning in the two cases.

What we are concerned with is the meaning of the term in the context of the Salesian Family: who are the "lay people" in it, the people referred to in the *Strenna*? The answer needs to be an exact one because it is intimately connected with our fidelity to the Council and to Don Bosco. Lack of precision here will lead to activities which are confused and not incisive, which lack concreteness as regards their vocational aspect and in consequence are superficial from a salesian standpoint.

In replying to the question therefore, we must state with deliberate precision that by the term "laity" or "lay people" here we mean those christians who are members of the Catholic Church and who, while remaining in the world according to their characteristic secular status, are disposed to live out their Baptism in the mission with us. In other words, as is obvious, we mean to apply to them and to make flourish in our Family the concrete description of the lay person as was given by Vatican II.

I consider it of vital importance to be exact about this; if we are not we shall never launch in the Church a real spiritual movement among people.¹

1. C 5.

It is not a question of excluding from our consideration and from appropriate involvement at different levels so many other collaborators,

past pupils and friends. We know that Don Bosco sought collaborators everywhere, so long as they had a bit of goodwill and did some good ("bene - factors"), even if they belonged to no religion at all. And this is a very valid trait which we have inherited, one which must be preserved in the Congregation and which at the present day has been endorsed by the Council's opening to ecumenism, to dialogue with non-christian religions and even with non-believers. But this year's Strenna does not refer to this particular aspect, which in many of our communities is already functioning reasonably well.

What we have to do is eliminate the dangerous superficiality of which I spoke in my Report on the state of the Congregation to the 22nd General Chapter; it goes with and characterizes the busy-body jack of all trades who may seem the friend of many but is spiritual father to none.

In our Family we find lay people (in the conciliar sense), or we involve them in fact, among the Cooperators, among those Past Pupils who (according to GC21) "have made the choice of the gospel",² and among those external "collaborators" and "friends" who want to bear witness to their Catholic faith.

The concrete task to which we are called is a greater and better dedication of ourselves to promoting in the first place the Association of the Cooperators in its lay members, and to intensify our care of those who, without being ordained or consecrated, want to be active Catholics among the Past Pupils (in their local Associations and in the World Confederation), among the Collaborators and among the Friends.

These are the laity of our Family to whom

2. GC21 69.

we are referring. We must act in concert with the FMA and the other consecrated Groups in the Family to make these lay people feel the joy of living a wonderful vocation and of sharing with us in the work of the Church's mission in the world in the spirit of Don Bosco.

The new ecclesial mentality

The mature man must have wisdom and be open to the innovations of the Spirit. But in recent years we have seen for ourselves that there are people who on reaching a certain age can easily become sceptical; there is no longer anything new for them, they sit back, they have arrived, and they settle little by little into a comfortable middle-class life style. It is a sad experience to meet people who are mature in age but so lacking in spirit.

I said to you in my last letter that it has been said that the Council produced no unpublished definitions or condemnations, but this notwithstanding there emerged from it an extraordinarily new state of affairs: "nihil novi et omnia nova".

As regards the laity in the Church there is a great innovation that should be noticed, and whoever is unaware of it runs the risk of not being docile to the Spirit, and therefore of not being able to contribute effectively to renewal.

The vocation of the lay person, as presented by Vatican II, makes concrete demands which impose on all of us two simultaneous and complementary obligations: to have a sound knowledge of the Council's doctrine in this regard, and

in addition to take another and discerning look at the thought of Don Bosco and his initiatives. We can never separate these two aspects; if we did, we should fall into either fleeting caprice or static rigidity.

Now, with regard to Don Bosco's thoughts and actions we can say (or at least I hope we can) that we have a sufficient bibliography and a living tradition which can facilitate a serious historical assessment of the presence of the lay person in our mission. We are all fully convinced that our Founder was always concerned to involve the greatest possible number of collaborators in the working out of his plan, from Mamma Margaret to employers, to ordinary good citizens, to theologians, to the nobility, and even to the politicians of the time; he thought, he planned, he sought the opinion of others, and finally he instituted as an organized expression of what was in his mind the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators. "The Cooperators", he declared with conviction and hope, "will be the ones who will promote the Catholic spirit".³

But as far as our knowledge of Vatican II is concerned, there remains some doubt.

As I said in the previous letter, it is the sad opinion of the Pastors of the Church (and I think that unfortunately the opinion applies also to more than a few religious) that Vatican II is not sufficiently known, and still less has it been assimilated and put into practice; indeed interpretations have been more readily followed that are superficial, reductive, partial and even distorted.⁴ Hence the urgent need for all to go back to the Council texts and make an ordered study of them.⁵

3. MB 18 161.

4. Cf. AGC 316, p. 9-12.

5. Cf. Extraordinary Synod, Final report, I, 5-6.

It is necessary therefore, and the task falls particularly on provincials and rectors, to organize concrete initiatives in this regard. It is a duty for every province. Every house too must seek a practical means of acquiring a deeper and systematic knowledge of the Council's doctrine. After the appeal of the Extraordinary Synod such an urgent task must find a place in our plan of life. For my own part I thought it opportune to do this even when I was recently preaching the Spiritual Exercises to the Holy Father and the Roman Curia.⁶

If the Council is a prophetic event, "a gift of God to the Church and to the world", "the great grace of the present century", "a new Pentecost", "the Magna Carta for the future"⁷ and "the great Catechism of modern times",⁸ our pastoral mentality must be adapted constantly and ever better to its great indicational guidelines. One of these is precisely the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church.

Vatican II our guide in a "pilgrimage of discovery"

In his Message for the 1985 World Day of Peace, John Paul II declared that the passage of man through history is like a "pilgrimage of discovery".⁹

Certainly Vatican II is for believers a rich and fruitful source of discoveries.

One of them is the positive view of the World as an authentic religious value, despite the ruin caused by sin: the Father created it for man and loved it so much that he sent to it his only Son.

6. Cf. in this number of the ACTS, p. 37.

7. Extraordinary Synod.

8. CT 2.

9. Message of 1985, 10.

Such a vision brings with it an entirely new manner of looking at the Church in its overall relationship with the world. It lives for the latter's service: in fact the entire People of God is inserted in human history as a sacrament of salvation.

This is the context in which the doctrine of the vocation and mission of the lay person finds its place. The Council gave a formidable response to the prevailing laicism; it stripped it of the banner of the lay or secular state, which it was proudly waving as a post-Christian conquest; it was purely and simply "laicism" which represents the backtracking of an illuminism which is reductive of reality.

The bearer of the banner for the re-assertion of the true secular or lay state in the world is, among the People of God, the lay person. In fact the rediscovery of the World as the creation of the Father, an expression of his omnipotent love; of the World as the story of mankind, in which Christ, the presence of liberating love, became incarnate; of the World moving forward to its final destiny as a plan in developing transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit, the bearer of sanctifying love, all leads to the emergence of the fascinating and inseparable double concept of "God and the World".

We do not know a God without the World, and a World without God is impossible.

The idea of "laity" does not mean thinking of the World as though God did not exist: that would be laicism; but thinking of it precisely as he created it, with its laws, its autonomous values, the consistency of the respective ends, the regality and protagonism of man, his tremen-

dous task in history, his personal dignity, his work, knowledge, technical ability — everything harmonized in a return dialogue of love with which man must meet God's initiative.¹⁰

10. Cf. GS 43.

The more one knows of the World and human history, the more does one realize that God can only be Love. The laicist who accepts the existence of God, but then thinks of him as having no interest in the World reduces him at the best to an unmoved mover but one without a heart, and that is a blasphemous caricature!

A similar rediscovery of the World creates for us an image of the Church which is no longer that of a pyramid, narrow at the top (the hierarchy) and broad at the base (the laity), but that of an immense circle expanding in history, which receives energy and stimulus from the centre for continual extension.

And it is precisely the layman who is on the circumference, on the frontier of progress, of liberation and of transformation of the World. For this he needs Christ and his Spirit (the centre!); he needs light and grace and the values of the Beatitudes which come to him through the service of the Ministry and the witness of consecrated life (close to the centre); he needs communion with everyone so as to feel himself to be a living member of the Body of Christ in history (the Church of all, one and holy), but he is in the front line, he is truly a protagonist. While he receives he also gives; and the "ministers" and "consecrated" persons, while they help him, are also enriched by what his vocation gives to them.

Don Bosco had immediately understood these values of the World and felt himself called to

11. Cf. C 33.

work for the betterment of human society.¹¹ He dedicated himself to young people of the poorer classes, in need and lacking care, so as to make of them upright citizens. He was a realist and had a strong sense of history. His strategy was built on the conviction that religion (i.e. "christian faith") was an indispensable value to be inserted at the centre of culture (and in the heart of every young person) if society was going to be renewed in line with the dignity of the human person.

With his practical and industrious mentality he scrutinized the complex events and circumstances of the time, and in the light of history and faith came to the conclusion (so very clear today in "Gaudium et spes") that God really loves the World, and that he sends all christians to it to save it. In particular he felt that he himself was sent with that purpose, with a mission to the young and the poor. This was the reason for his rich humanism, his appreciation of progress in science and technology, his flair for method and organization; this was why he was so concerned to discuss matters with civil authorities; for this reason he was so anxious to move so many people of good will to be active and share in responsibility, and to appeal to Catholics to be united in doing all the good they possibly could.

Without any doubt he was a holy Founder raised up by the Lord for a prophetic anticipation of what was to come in later times.

The Council invites us today to rediscover this ecclesial vision so as to give a clearer and more committed physiognomy to the salesian dimension of service to the world's youth.

A valuable initiative of communion

One important aspect of the innovation produced by the Council must be considered, because it is closely related to the presence of the laity in our Family.

The fact that the laity are in the mission with us, and we with them, is not simply a matter of a quantitative summation of forces, and still less is it an addition forced upon us by our losses and absences.

It is a question of a mutually enriching communion between distinct but complementary vocations in the Church. There is an interchange of values which improves the qualities of each of the vocations concerned, strengthening their identity, making them more incisive and enriching them with the element of being up to date.

It is evidently necessary to be able to bring about between lay and consecrated persons a true ecclesial communion of complementary vocations, founded on Christ, moved by his Spirit, and nourished by convictions of faith, by mutual witness, and by a concrete and practical choice of tasks. In other words it is a question of a deep communion in the same apostolic spirituality.

And this brings us back once again from another standpoint to the urgent need to root out superficiality!

The communion starts substantially from two distinct poles which however are related one to the other and in mutual tension.

The Layman fulfils his ecclesial vocation by passing from within secular values, from the World as a starting point, to the vertex of a

religious attitude. The Salesian fulfils his vocation by moving from within his consecration towards the World, from the religious vertex towards human values. If we keep in mind the eloquent assertion of "Gaudium et spes" that earthly activity must be carried out in such a way "as to integrate human, domestic, professional, scientific and technical enterprises with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are ordered to the glory of God",¹² we shall understand the difference in direction of the two vocations and also their mutual complementarity.

12. GS 43.

We may think, for example, of the different and complementary tasks of parents (lay people) towards their children, and of educators (Salesians) in respect of the same children.

Don Bosco reminds us of this in a fatherly letter addressed to the confreres: "Above all, if we want to be seen as desiring the real good of our pupils, we must never forget that we take the place of the parents of the dear lads".¹³ (After the Synod of Bishops on the theme of the family, I wrote a circular letter to you in which I emphasized precisely the need to link youth ministry with family ministry; cf. ASC 299).

13. Collected Letters, Turin 1959, IV, 201-205.

The lay parent dedicates himself in a christian fashion to the education of the young, but beginning from the human demands inherent in generation.

The salesian educator, on the other hand, dedicates himself to the education of the young beginning from the standpoint of the supernatural motherhood of the Church.

The two movements converge, meet, enter into communion and mutually enrich each other.

How much the Salesian has to learn from the Layman! And on the other hand, how much the Layman has to learn from the Salesian! Both one and the other, acting alone and merely on their own account, would find themselves very much impoverished in their own particular vocation.¹⁴

14. Cf. C 47.

And we could give many other similar examples in which the Layman, starting from secular values, enriches the Salesian, and vice versa the Salesian, starting from religious values, enriches the Layman with whom he comes in contact in the service of the young.

Between the laity in mission with us and us in mission with them, there is a common purpose which is the apostolate for the young and the poor. But the manner in which the purpose is achieved is different in each case; as the Council puts it: "in the Church there is diversity of ministry, but unity of mission".¹⁵

15. AA 2.

Both of them draw on the same evangelical spirit of Don Bosco, but they do so in different keys and with details which are different but mutually correlated: they mutually enrich each other, as in the classic interchange between celibacy for the Kingdom and marriage in Christ.¹⁶

16. Cf. ASC 299,
p. 24-26.

Don Bosco lived concretely, and has taught us to do likewise, a similar precious communion. We were born in communion with the laity, and they with us, and our historical growth has followed the same line.

After a Council which has studied so deeply and launched this tremendous ecclesial value, how could we fail to commit ourselves to its growth: to improve the quality of communion

and increase the number of those sharing in it?

But it is precisely together that we must speak of Christ, live in Christ and witness to Christ! We have a common christian vocation of being authentic disciples of the Lord, even though it be expressed in different ways.

What are our objectives?

If we are to promote in our communities this precious communion we must have certain concrete objectives at which to aim, seeking and using means which every house has available or which the province can offer.

- The first goal to be attained, and it will subsequently throw light on whatever else has to be done, is a more organic knowledge of Vatican II with a special analysis of its doctrine on the vocation and mission of the laity. I have already referred to this above, and I dealt with at length in the earlier circular.¹⁷ Once again I remind provincials and rectors of their responsibility in this regard. It will be opportune too to promote some well planned study meetings with the lay people themselves.

- As one of the fruits of this deeper study, it will be necessary to instil in the laity the knowledge of being true committed Catholics, witnesses of their Baptism, aware of their secular vocation, courageous members of a Church-Sacrament of salvation, in the family, in the neighbourhood, in society, and in fact everywhere.

Don Bosco sought to bind actively and in spiritual depth with the Salesians "those Catho-

17. AGC 316.

lics who so desire"; "in these difficult times", he said, "we christians must unite to foster the spirit of prayer and charity by all the means that religion provides".¹⁸

18. Cooperators
Regulations.

The sense of being a responsible member of the Catholic Church must become the moving nucleus of this apostolic activity.

- A third objective to be ensured is that of centring the apostolic interest of the laity who collaborate with us on the integral promotion of young people and on the needs of evangelization of the poorer classes. The common mission gives to all the Salesian Family its concrete tone and defines its characteristic place in the People of God.

Don Bosco involved the laity precisely to "remove or at least mitigate those evils which put at risk the morality of the new generations, in whose hands lie the destinies of civil society".¹⁹

19. *Ibid.*

The apostolic interest of the laity for the young and for poor neighbourhoods can be "direct and immediate" (parents, educators, teachers, catechists, social communicators, etc.), or it can be "indirect and mediate" through participation in cultural, social and political tasks etc. which have particular relevance to the young and the poor. It is not a case of listing activities and functions, but of opening horizons before apostolic desires.

- And then, as regards practical kinds of apostolate we need to intensify in the laity generosity and creativity, but keeping always in mind certain aspects which open up a great range of possibilities.

In the first place, insistence is needed on the

daily witness which the laity must be able to provide by their state of life and in their work or profession: this is what gives its christian aspect to their specific secular character.

In addition it is particularly meaningful and enhancing if the laity can be convinced about reserving a space for apostolic activity in their free time. Whether this be much or little, it is certainly one of the best signs of responsible and committed membership of the Church according to the mission proper to the Salesian Family.

The Council's decree "Apostolicam actuositatem" presents three "areas" of apostolic perspective: the first concerns specific tasks in the field of evangelization, the second (and most characteristic) refers to the christian animation of the temporal order, and the third involves initiatives in charitable works and social aid.²⁰ It is not therefore a restrictive, closed and unilateral perspective, but one that is open to ample possibilities of action.

20. Cf. AA 5-8.

The decree also presents various possible "forms" of apostolate. The two basic ones are: the 'individual' form, which in some countries is frequently the only one possible in practice; and the 'associative' form, particularly recommended by the Council, because "it is in happy harmony with a fundamental need in the faithful, a need that is both human and christian; and at the same time it offers a sign of the communion and unity of the Church in Christ".²¹

21. Cf. *ibid.* 15-19.

In our Family various possibilities can be found for apostolic work in groups or associations.

But there exists an outstanding Association,

that of the Salesian Cooperators. From the point of view of the christian vocation of the lay person in our Family, this must be considered the centre of reference for all such possibilities, because it is not an alternative to other associations, but rather aims at animating those others. The Cooperators are not an association which, as such, organizes works and specific initiatives; the Association is aware that it shares responsibility with us in preserving in all its members and in our Family the vitality of Don Bosco's plan, bringing to it the riches of its own secular condition. In doing this it retains the possibility of offering animators for the identity of any other group or association whose specific nature needs to be known and appreciated, without prejudice to its autonomy.

On account of this vocational character, the Cooperators' Association has particular bonds with our Congregation; it is in fact called upon to ensure, in special communion with us, the identity and vitality of the spiritual and apostolic heritage of Don Bosco in the world.

The Founder did not conceive the Association as being independent and made up only of lay people, but rather as an integral part or group aggregated to the Congregation. The great majority of its members are in fact lay, and the Association promotes their secular character; but it also includes diocesan priests and deacons (and even Bishops). It enjoys too its own peculiar autonomy, which however must be efficaciously harmonized with the serious responsibility of taking care (together with us) of the specific character and efficacy of the salesian vocation.

If all the authentic laity who are in mission

with us (Past Pupils, Collaborators, Friends) became members of this special Association, it would strengthen their personal salesian identity and in addition they would bring to the other associations of which they might be members a greater commitment in a better Family communion.

This is what Don Bosco wanted.

• Finally, another important objective to be attained is that of making known and loved the evangelical patrimony of Don Bosco with its specific values of his charisma and criteria for activity. This means helping lay people to grow in the salesian spirit and apostolic method left to us by our Founder as a heritage; but in this formative task it is always necessary to see that everything is in harmony with their secular vocation.²²

22. Cf. C. C. 47.

To achieve these objectives it will be obvious, I think, to everyone that some priorities must be laid down for competent and efficacious action.

I recall some of these, especially for the benefit of provincials:

— To make sure that the confreres in charge of this sector are adequate in number and quality, that they are up to date and have the necessary time available for the work involved.

— Constantly to promote the calling together, friendship and formation of lay people in view of an apostolic involvement; in this connection those who are young should not be overlooked but rather given special attention.²³

23. Cf. AA 12.

— To help individuals to choose concrete and practical commitments in keeping with their personal possibilities in educational, pastoral,

charitable and other works for the common good, either individually or in association with others.

— To organize initiatives at provincial level which will create a climate of renewal and relaunching in every community.

Giving life to a true “spiritual movement”

Vatican II brought with it a vast spiritual renewal. As Paul VI said: “We are living in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit. Everywhere people are trying to know him better, as the Scripture reveals him. They are happy to place themselves under his inspiration. They are gathering about him; they want to let themselves be led by him”.²⁴

24. EN 75.

Now if the Spirit of the Lord is providing the Church at the present day with a special period of spiritual rebirth, it would indeed be strange if we, who are precisely bearers of one of his charismata, remained passive or were satisfied with the simple and meagre effort of repeating what had been done before: that would not be movement, but rather a comfortable way of standing still.

In commenting on the Strenna, I said that the life of the Church provides a yardstick for measuring ourselves: either we launch a characteristic “spiritual movement” with the contribution of the whole Salesian Family and we shall be leaders for the future, bearing the Council towards the third millennium, or else we shall resign ourselves to remaining in the rear, closing ourselves in nostalgic musings on the past and

running the risk of imprisoning ourselves up in a museum of past memories.

We need something to shake us up; and 1988 offers a magnificent opportunity for the purpose.

A significant majority of confreres in the Congregation are already breathing the fresh air of this renewal, nourished and supported (for more than a year now) by the renewed Constitutions.

And so the conditions exist, and indeed in various provinces very positive steps have already been taken for the growth and expansion of a characteristically apostolic "spiritual movement", which involves and catalyzes a large number of lay people together with ourselves.

To this end we must be able to give back to our consecrated life its specific feature of "charisma". This means, as "Mutuae relationes" says, "bringing an element of real originality into the spiritual life of the Church along with fresh initiatives for action". Such a characteristic demands "a constant re-examination of fidelity to the Lord, docility to his Spirit, prudent weighing of circumstances and careful reading of the signs of the times, the will to be integrated in the Church, awareness of obedience to the hierarchy, boldness in initiatives, perseverance in self-giving, humility in the face of adversity. In a genuine charism there is always a mixture of new creativity and interior suffering".²⁵

25. MR 12.

These expressions provide us with a very useful yardstick for comparison and revision.

From the very beginnings the charism of Don Bosco has given rise in the world to a concrete, attractive and adequate "youth spirituality"; St Dominic Savio provides proof of this. At the present day, after the Council, the

members of the Salesian Family must renew in their own Group and in mutual encounters with others the most genuine spirit of the Founder, so as to manifest the existence in all of them of a dynamism of holiness, of a "movement of people" which inspires, guides and sustains a genuine spirituality for young people of the middle and lower classes.

We know that Mary Help of Christians, Mother of the Church, was present in the origins of many charisms in favour of the People of God; we are well aware of her motherly initiative and particular care in the case of our own Family. Let us ask her insistently, in view also of what we want to do for 1988, for the lights, energy and practical gifts which will enable us to make our family in the Church truly "a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young".²⁶

26. C 5.

May she give special help to us Salesians who, in this movement of people, "by the will of the Founder... have particular responsibilities: to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for our mutual enrichment and greater apostolic effectiveness".²⁷

27 *ibid.*

My greetings to all of you, with my best wishes to every community that it may be a lively and dynamic centre of "youth spirituality".

Affectionately in the Lord,

