

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

THE ASSOCIATION OF SALESIAN COOPERATORS

1. Presentation to the confreres: The persevering action of Don Bosco – From Don Rua to the present day – The time is ripe for a relaunching.
2. In the light of the path followed by Don Bosco, the Founder: the importance of the revision of the Regulations – Steps to discernment concerning the foundation – The flexible vitality of the charism – Responsibility of the animators. – Essential aspects of your identity as secular salesians: the energy coming from charity among lay people – The salesian spirit of Don Bosco – For a relaunching of the Association: Some practical questions to be faced – A spiritual movement – The living presence of Mary Help of Christians.

Rome, Feast of the Sacred Heart 1986

My dear confreres,

My hearty greetings to you on my own behalf and that of all the members of the General Council; we are gathered here in plenary session, praying and working intensely for all of you.

I would like you to read carefully my letter to our Cooperators, which I offer you in this issue of the Acts.

As you already know, 9 May last saw the approval by the Apostolic See, through the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, of the new text of the “Regulations of apostolic life” of the Association of Salesian Cooperators. The date is of some significance because 110 years ago to the day, 9 May 1876, Pope Pius IX, the great friend of Don Bosco and his guide in his delicate work as a Founder, gave recognition to what was then called the “Pious Union”, whose Regulations had been drawn

up with care and with the already proven experience of our dear Father.

I thought it well to promulgate this important document a few days ago on 24 May, the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians, in the Basilica at Valdocco which was packed to the doors by members of our Family and others of the faithful.

The fact is one of vital importance for all of us.

The persevering action of Don Bosco

Don Bosco did not consider that his long and difficult mission as a Founder was at an end before he had been able to give a valid structure to this Association and provide it with its own Identity Card. It had been present to some extent and in embryo from the very beginnings of his plans for the work of the Oratories.

After the approval of 1876 Don Bosco gave his personal attention to the organization and spreading of the Cooperators; he began the publication of the Salesian Bulletin in 1877, and formulated relevant guidelines and directives for the confreres.

In the first General Chapter of our Society (1877), to which Don Bosco ascribed great importance (“I want this Chapter to make history in our Congregation, so that when I die all our affairs will have been settled and organized”),¹ he wanted the fourth general Conference to deal with the Cooperators and the Salesian Bulletin: “an Association of the greatest importance for us, one which is the soul of our Congregation and will provide us with a link for doing good with the consent and help of the good faithful who live in the world... practising the spirit of the Salesians... These Cooperators must grow in number as far as possible... Let the

¹ BM 13, 177

Rectors and in general all our confreres speak always highly of this association so that its members may increase... and let them seek to enrol in it only those individuals already well known for their piety and probity of life".²

² cf. Marcel Verhulst, *I verbali del 1° Capitolo Generale Salesiano, 1877*, Edizione critica, UPS 1980; pp. 126-141 e pp. 366-372; doctoral dissertation, typescript

Don Bosco himself took on the task of giving the first conferences for the shaping and consolidation of the Association. We read in the Biographical Memoirs that in January 1878 he gave the first conference at Rome in the Church of the noble Oblates of Tor de' Specchi, in the presence of Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, Vicar General of His Holiness. And on 16 May he gave the second conference at Turin in the church of St Francis de Sales.³ He frequently insisted on the novel and original ways in which the Cooperators would carry out their apostolate, on their providential importance and on the "great things" the Lord would deign to do with them and with us working together.

³ cf. BM 13, 477ff.

And little by little the organizational aspects and regulations also came into being.

From Don Rua to the present day

In the 10th General Chapter (1904), Don Rua was already able to codify some directives for the confreres as regards the promoting of the Association; this he did in a set of 37 regulations "for the use of the Salesians with relation to the Pious Union of Cooperators". In it he said:

— that *every Salesian* "without fail should should make this Pious Union known and esteemed";

— that *the Provincials* "should appoint a confrere who would depend on them and help them in

everything concerning the development and proper functioning of the Pious Union in their provinces”;

— that *in every house* “a confrere be specially appointed to help the Rector with the Cooperators”.

His final exhortation recalled the words of Don Bosco’s Regulations: “All the members of the Pious Salesian Society will consider the Cooperators as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and will offer them assistance whenever their work can help towards the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls”.⁴

In the Special General Chapter of 1971 which followed Vatican II, the chapter members, after studying the theme of the “Salesian Family” and rethinking the specific nature of the Cooperator, drew up a reply to the message they had received from the Cooperators themselves. In this they said: “With deep fidelity to our Founder we declare ourselves ready and eager to ‘revitalize your Association so that the splendid project set on foot by our Founder may at last be brought to completion’. We have become fully aware of the fact that we would be traitors were we not to succeed in this undertaking, and we are convinced that it is with good reason that you have sent us your appeal”.⁵

This solemn commitment is reflected in the text of our Constitutions approved by the Apostolic See (1984) which explicitly states the particular responsibility of the Salesians in their regard,⁶ and assigns to the Councillor for the Salesian Family the duty of “directing” and “assisting” the provinces “so that the Association of Salesian Cooperators may develop in the territory of the province”.⁷

And then the General Regulations lay down that

⁴ cf. Guido Favini, *Il cammino di una grande idea*, LDC Turin 1962, p. 199

⁵ SGC 734

⁶ C 5

⁷ C 137

“every community should feel it its duty to increase and support the Association of Salesian Cooperators for the good of the Church. It should help in the formation of its members, promote and spread knowledge of this particular vocation, especially among our more committed young people and among our lay collaborators”.⁸

⁸ R 38

The renewed text too of the Cooperators' Regulations, after describing the ministry of the Rector Major as supreme Moderator of the Association who “is the guarantee of fidelity to the project of the Founder and promotes its growth”, recalls the particular and indispensable function that belongs to Provincials and Rectors: “Salesian provincials”, says the text, “because of the specific responsibilities of the Society of St Francis de Sales, render the ministry of the Rector Major present at local level and guarantee, with the collaboration of the Rectors, especially the bonds of unity and communion. They provide for the spiritual assistance of the Centres and involve their own religious communities in the generous fulfilment of this service of animation”.⁹

⁹ Coop. Reg. 23

The time is ripe for a relaunching

Dear Provincials, dear Rectors and confreres all, these indications of our whole tradition and of our Rule of life are an urgent appeal to get down to apostolic work. If on the eve of the centenary celebrations of '88 we really want to relaunch the charisma of Don Bosco in all its integrity, we must feel ourselves bearers of a “particular responsibility” for promoting and animating a “vast movement of persons”,¹⁰ with particular concern for the Coopera-

¹⁰ C 5

tors. From our first beginnings they have been committed to the common mission for the young and the poor which is a continual challenge to us, extending beyond our present works.

Don Bosco's plan for the Cooperators brings home to us the bold and authentic apostolic dimension of the salesian charism in the uniting of many forces for the service of the Kingdom. The Cooperators serve the same mission as we do!

For them we are their "consecrated" brothers, "the sure and steadfast link expressly desired by Don Bosco... (as) the power-house of this movement of baptized people".¹¹

¹¹ SGC 732

For us they are, in the strong words of Don Bosco, "a most important association, which is the very soul of the Congregation". The Cooperators in fact spur us on to a greater and more dynamic fidelity to the common salesian vocation,¹² reminding us of the permanent criterion of our apostolic action, which puts the oratory experience at the centre of the salesian heart.¹³

¹² cf. SGC 733

¹³ cf. C 40

Going beyond the criterion of our works, this experience calls for many labourers, far more than the necessary presence of Salesians and of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The urgent requirements of needy youth are in fact so great and varied that they demand ever more numerous efforts at intervention; the field of educational and cultural action is so complex that, in addition to religious and priests, it needs the active and competent presence of generous lay people; so vast and subject to change is the sector of youth problems that, as well as renewal of the works that have done so much good in the past it needs a continuous bold and creative apostolic presence, and this often in areas where only lay people can be present and work effi-

caciously. The salesian mission, from the standpoint of what the Cooperators can bring to it, will not allow us to shut ourselves up in our houses, but compels us to adopt that social and ecclesial outlook which moved our Father to seek many strong means for responding to the needs of the young and the poor of society.

Especially must we emphasize the fundamental reason which touches our very identity as heirs of Don Bosco's patrimony. After the approval of the Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1982) and of our own (1984) which followed Vatican II, the recent approval of the "Regulations of apostolic life" of the Cooperators (1986) brings with it a complete overall vision of how the charism of our Founder must be lived in present day circumstances and those of the future. It is entrusted mainly and simultaneously to these three Groups, centred on the ministry of unity of his Successor. We must be aware therefore that a *new era* is beginning for our Family, and that renewed fidelity to the Founder is going to make much greater and more concrete demands on us.

In this perspective one can better understand why communion of spirit and collaboration in commitment must grow in these three groups of the Salesian Family, even for the good of the other Groups. We cannot just passively sit back and be content to maintain the positions we have already reached; we must develop again the dynamism of that "Movement of people" which was characteristic of the apostolic enterprise of Don Bosco. "If a poor priest", said our Father in a conference to the Rectors in 1875, "having nothing, really less than nothing, and driven from pillar to post by everyone, was able to bring things to this present state;

if, I repeat, one man alone could do all this with nothing, what cannot the Lord expect from three hundred and thirty men (the number of confreres in that year), healthy, strong, willing, learned and well provided as we are now? What will you not be able to accomplish with the aid of Divine Providence?

“The Lord expects great things from you. I see them clearly and distinctly in all their phases... If someone next year will remind me of what I have said, I shall be able to point out to you the great things that the Lord was pleased to begin this year, in particular one thing that will truly astonish you (he was referring to the foundation of the Cooperators’ Association)... When I am already in eternity, these things will have an important bearing on the welfare of souls and God’s glory; they will benefit the universal Church and bring glory (yes, allow me to use the word) to our Congregation... You yourselves will marvel and be astounded to see how much you were able to accomplish in the world’s sight for the good of mankind”.¹⁴

¹⁴ BM 12, 63-64

It is then indeed necessary, dear confreres, that every province set about relaunching the Cooperators’ Association. Each member should have a copy of the new Regulations of the Association: reading it will help us to reflect on the contents of art. 5 of our Constitutions and on arts. 36, 38 and 39 of our Regulations.

Every Provincial therefore, with his Council and Rectors, should study this document, so as to renew and intensify the relevant initiatives to be promoted in the houses. We are concerned with a living part of our charisma; to it Don Bosco attributed the possibility of doing “great things”. It is not something extra that has to be done; it is part of

our very selves; it adds a great deal of energy to the "Movement"; it is a promise of greater fertility; it is a growth in fidelity to the Founder and a requirement of the salesian identity.

In the conference to the Rectors from which I have already quoted, our Father ended by saying: "It was the Lord who began it all, who directed all things and gave them growth. As the years roll by he will uphold them and bring them to a successful ending. God is prepared to work all these marvels which will contribute to a wonderful increase in our membership. He asks but one thing of us: that we do not make ourselves undeserving of his goodness and mercy. As long as we remain worthy of his favours by our work, moral conduct and good example, the Lord will make use of us, and you will be astonished at having been able to accomplish so much and be capable of much more... we must really exclaim: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me'."¹⁵

¹⁵ BM 12, 64

Dear confreres, may careful reflection on this letter to the Cooperators (printed in this same issue of the Acts) and on their new Regulations inspire practical resolutions in every province and in every house.

May Don Bosco intercede for us and spur us on!

Affectionately,

Don F. Viganò

Rome, Feast of the Sacred Heart 1986

My dear Cooperators,

On 24 May last, the solemnity of Mary Help of Christians, I promulgated the renewed text of your "Regulations for apostolic life" at Turin in the Basilica of Valdocco, crowded with people. It was a very significant event and one pregnant with hope. The document, the fruit of so much prayer and work, ensures the salesian and ecclesial identity of your Association, so that it can be present in an effective and up-to-date way in the preparations for the third millennium of the christian faith.

The pontifical approval of your Regulations brings to an end the post-conciliar consolidation of the *three great columns of the Salesian Family* erected by Don Bosco: the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the Cooperators. This means that together we shall be the bold and apostolic bearers of the salesian vocation in the years to come.

In these circumstances the promulgation of the Regulations takes on a historical importance of no little significance.

If all of us (you, we Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) are fully aware of this, we shall be able to understand the particular responsibility to which the Holy Spirit has called us as the present century nears its end.

1. IN THE LIGHT OF THE PATH FOLLOWED BY DON BOSCO, THE FOUNDER

Why was it necessary to revise the Regulations which had been drawn up by Don Bosco himself?

If you recall the sense of Church, the practical concern and flexibility shown by our Founder in adapting himself to the times, we can truly say that if he were alive at the present day he would be the first to want to carry out the work of revision.

The importance of the revision of the Regulations

Don Bosco in fact was sensitive to what was likely to happen in society and in the Church, and because he was attuned to the Spirit he knew instinctively what would be the future task of his new and original charisma. He was convinced that the physiognomy he would be able to give in the past century to the vitality of a gift so urgently needed by the Church would be no more than a first "rough copy", rich indeed in its own vitality but needing to be polished up through the designs of Divine Providence, so as to produce the "fair copy".¹ He had the awareness of a Founder, giving life to a spiritual Family destined to grow, develop and endure through centuries to come.

He was raised up by God at the dawn of a new age. He discerned the signs which marked the beginning of the end of the rural civilization; he saw the new importance that would attach to towns, a different way of organizing work, a rethinking of the whole of society; he saw the beginning of a situation in which ordinary people would play a concrete and active part; in short he spotted, even though not very clearly, the first underground

¹ cf. BM 11, 289; 12, 26

movements of social forces which would call at once for pastoral criteria and commitments never thought of in the past. The need was becoming ever more evident of going to the help of the young who were poor and abandoned, and to the masses of ordinary people; the changes that had already begun seemed to be putting their christian faith in danger, that faith which could and should have been a leaven in the new society. And for this reason he gathered the Cooperators around him and imbued them with a new apostolic spirit.

It was an apostolic ideal, therefore, which of its very nature must be able to adapt to continual change and diverse situations, in harmony with the evolution of the times and the guidelines of the Pope and the Bishops.

Now it was precisely in Vatican II that the Holy Father and the Bishops of all the world, meeting in Council over a period of four years, restudied and analysed the identity and mission of the Church, in response to the challenges of the new era then beginning. The Bishops defined its principles of identity and gave guidelines for action: a renewed ecclesiology which demanded that christians should re-think in depth their own vocation in the People of God in the world, revising especially its ministries, charismata and commitments.

This is why every group of the Salesian Family had to revise the fundamental documents in which its own charismatic character is expressed. In the new perspective of the Council a serious reconsideration had to be given to the baptismal vocation of all the faithful and to the ecclesial significance of the charisma of the various spiritual Families; and these are two aspects which are of particular importance for your own Association.

“Being a Catholic” at the present day implies a strong awareness of being a disciple, open in dialogue to everyone, but the bearer of a renewed christian identity and of a courageous formation to bear witness in society.

“Feeling oneself incorporated” into a particular charisma in the Church requires further a participation in its specific characteristics as planned by the Founder so as to reactivate it in harmony with the present indications of the signs of the times.

That is the reason for all the careful work that has gone into the revision of the first Regulations that were written for you by the Founder himself.

Steps to discernment concerning the foundation

At the beginning the basic groups of what we now call the “Salesian Family” seemed like a small seed just dropped into a drill, not yet germinated, undeveloped and without shape.

Don Bosco had started out with the insistent idea of the mission to youth and the urgent need for many permanent collaborators: “Call it what you want. I must open oratories, build chapels and churches, conduct catechism classes and schools; and unless I have a loyal staff I cannot do anything”.² At the centre of his priestly heart there were the problems of needy youth and of the faith and religious practice of the poorer people. He felt himself called and sent by God to start up a movement of people committed like himself to face such problems courageously. The headaches of the discernment process brought him little by little to realize that he had a vocation as a “Founder”, but the task was far from easy. He began with com-

² BM 3, 321

plete trust in Divine Providence and bent all his abilities to the service of the cause.

In this way he was able to develop the possibilities hidden in the initial seed. It was more than thirty years later, after a period extending from 1841 to 1876 and after the experience of an initial diocesan commitment, that he laboriously reached the world level of a charism of the universal Church. From the first embryonic "Congregation of St Francis de Sales", approved by the Archbishop of Turin (Mgr Frasoni), to the foundation of his three consecrated and secular Groups, there is a whole process of clarification and growth towards a common spirit, a common mission and a common shared apostolic responsibility. Today Cooperators, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Salesians are called and sent as a group to promote "a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young".³

³ SDB C 5

In his work Don Bosco always sought the help of lay people. For this reason, when he could not realize his plan for "external members" belonging to the Society of St Francis de Sales, which he wanted to include in the Salesian Constitutions, he set about drawing up (from 1874) a new and wider plan to offer to good Catholics to enable them to do good.

When he presented an outline of his plan to Pius IX, he saw that the Holy Father was surprised that it concerned only men and not women (Don Bosco was in fact planning a separate Association for women, linked with the Institute of the FMA);⁴ he understood at once the vital importance of the Pope's observation: "Women have always played a leading role in the performance of good works in general, in the life of the Church, and in the conversion of

⁴ BM 11, 62; 12, 65

⁵ BM 11, 62

nations. By their very nature they are charitable and zealous in sponsoring good works, even more so than men. If you exclude them you will deprive yourself of the very best help".⁵ Don Bosco accepted the valuable and realistic indication of the Pope, and was later able to see the great advantages that it led to when he developed the "Pious Union" in this sense.

⁶ BM 13, 377

It should be realized that Pius IX had an enlightening and decisive share in everything concerning the foundation of the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Cooperators. Don Bosco himself, when sending his first greetings to the newly-elected Pope Leo XIII, asserted: "This Congregation", and we know the wide significance of the term in his own mind, "was advised, guided and approved by Pius IX of revered memory".⁶

⁷ Reg. Don Bosco, chap. III

Our Founder wanted the Cooperators to be an "Association for good works" or a "Christian union for doing good" intimately linked to himself; it was to be something like the "Third Orders" of old, "with the difference that in the older Third Orders christian perfection was proposed in the exercise of piety; this one has for its principal objective an active life in the exercise of charity towards one's neighbour and especially towards the young who are in moral danger".⁷

The charismatic project finally came to maturity in the Regulations of 1876 and in the accompanying initiatives and those which followed.

In this way Don Bosco's plan is fully and synthetically expressed in a connected and complementary manner in the Salesian Congregation, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Cooperators' Association. The three fundamental documents describe the identity

and special characteristics of each group; taken together they constitute the path followed in practice by the Founder to ensure the future of the "Work of the Oratories" begun in Turin in 1841.

Don Bosco's Regulations affirm the indispensable presence of you Cooperators in the salesian charism; he insists on your close and intimate union with the salesian Congregation (and by analogy with the FMA) in sincere and fervent Family brotherhood ("one heart and one soul"), all cultivating together a dynamic sense of Church, with undisguised affection and concrete adherence to the ministry of the Pope and the Bishops.

In the following year, August 1877, Don Bosco launched the Salesian Bulletin as a means of information, bond of union, a stimulus to creative charity, and an instrument particularly suited to promoting the growth of your Association.

After the publication of the Regulations it was necessary to intensify the life of the Association and give further formation to the mentality of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians so that they would become its enthusiastic animators. In the annual conference of 1877, Don Bosco remarked: "The Work of the Salesian Cooperators has hardly come into existence and it already numbers many members. We shall see its vast growth... Hand in hand with this project we have decided to publish a Bulletin which will pretty much become the Congregation's (today we would say the "Family's") official publication and include many things we shall need to make known to our Cooperators. If they now number one hundred, they will soon be thousands and thousands, and if they number one thousand they will become millions... Let us find ways of making this Association known. God wills it».⁸

⁸ BM 13, 61

⁹ Lanzo, September 1877

In the 1st General Chapter,⁹ the fourth of the 26 general Conferences was dedicated to the Cooperators: “an association which is very important for us, a strong arm of our Congregation (to which, let us not forget it, was aggregated also the FMA). The Salesian Cooperators are nothing else than good christians who, while living in their own families, maintain in the midst of the world the spirit of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales”.¹⁰ And so he laid it down that “the Rectors and in general all the Salesians (and the FMA) shall work to increase the number of Cooperators”.¹¹ To salesian parish priests too he recommended that one of their chief concerns in dealing with their parishioners should be that of fostering the Association of Salesian Co-operators.¹²

¹⁰ OE 29, 468

¹¹ *ibid.* 469

¹² cf. Regulations for parishes, MB 18, 697

And the Association grew to such an extent that Don Bosco was able to say in 1880 in a conference at Borgo San Martino: “From 1876 to the present day the Cooperators, men and women, have grown to thirty thousand and continue to grow every day”.¹³

¹³ BM 14, 430

At the death of Don Bosco, as one may read in the decree preceding his canonization, they were already about eighty thousand (MB 19, 242).

¹⁴ N.B. The study of Fr Guido Favini, *Il cammino di una grande idea*, LDC Turin 1962, is well worth reading.

We see, therefore, the long process¹⁴ of experience of the Holy Spirit, by which Don Bosco patiently sought to discern the design God had suggested to him; he finally set out on the right road, after trying other paths which turned out to be impractical.

But nevertheless some components which constitute the basic structure of your Association have remained constant: a practical and social sense of your own catholicity seen as a gift received in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation; an

ecclesial and civil mission of service to youth in need; an intelligent and courageous promotion of the faith of the people at a time of great changes; a particular pastoral method and the importance of bonds of union with the Society of St Francis de Sales and of communion with the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians so as to live in a genuine manner its characteristic evangelical spirit.

As you can see, it is a case of sharing with us the salesian vocation: with us you are responsible for the vitality of the Founder's project in the world.¹⁵

¹⁵ cf. Reg. Coop. 5

Today Don Bosco would have perfected his plan by a careful consideration of the renewed conciliar ecclesiology, especially as regards the laity. And that is precisely what we have all been trying to do in these recent years, combining your reflections and ours in the drawing up of these "Regulations for apostolic life".

The flexible vitality of the charism

To live the salesian vocation in a genuine manner one must know and accept the vital values of its origins, of its growth, of its efficacious presence in the Church at the present day, and of its future perspectives. One cannot neglect a serious acquaintance, not only with the life of the Founder, but also with the subsequent history of his spiritual Family, trying to discover in the contributions of past events what they contain that is vital and applicable to the future, as required by docility to the Author of the charism. The Holy Spirit is always original; no one knows whence he comes or where he goes, but he gives growth and maturity; one can

tune in to him through prayerful listening and enlightened discernment.

If we look at the life of our Founder we can form some idea of the trouble that accompanies true docility. Of Don Bosco it has been truly said that he appeared (even, and especially, to his friends) as something of a "mystery", because he was fully open to the Spirit of the Lord who does not reveal (not even to Don Bosco himself at first) where he came from nor where he was leading him. Clear enough was the general intuition he had been given, expressed eloquently in symbols in the dream at the age of nine, which Don Bosco recalled and meditated on several times in his later years: the field and style of work, intelligent and generous dedication, the need for collaborators for the beginning and continuation of a mission so urgently needed. But he had to work through a long process of discernment, "personal" in the first instance so as to be clear about his vocation as a Founder, and then "foundational" so as to give a concrete physiognomy and a valid organization to his spiritual Family. In this way he went through various stages of clarification before he could give an identity and characteristic structure, first to the Salesians, then to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and finally to you Cooperators.

The three groups, the principal bearers of his charism, were invited by Vatican II to imitate the Founder by remaining open, in conformity with their historical and ecclesial nature, to the demands of the constant development of the Body of Christ in perpetual growth.¹⁶

Your Association, already recognized as being vitally present at the first beginnings of the Oratory (the Decree of approval of 9 May 1986 recalls the

¹⁶ cf. MR 11

exemplary figure of Mamma Margaret),¹⁷ has received from Vatican II a new injection of life. The experience and headaches of yesterday must serve to enlighten the dynamic fidelity which is needed today, at a time of renewal which implies both a sincere adherence to the origins and a shrewd flexibility as regards the present age.

¹⁷ cf. Reg. Coop.

The organization of the Association must also be taken care of, and the new text of the Regulations indicates its salient features. But this is only one aspect, and one that we might call instrumental. What should be of greater concern to you and to us is the vitality of the charisma, i.e. that force of charity which is capable of relaunching the fervour, creativity, generosity and tireless apostolic dynamism of Don Bosco, of Mamma Margaret and of the first collaborators at Valdocco.

The path to such revitalization passes especially through the heart of each one of you: the gift of the Holy Spirit is for the interior person. The gospel values contained in the new Regulations need to be "personalized". Those who bear a charism in the Church are always "individuals", who have heard the Lord calling them "by name" and with a love of predilection which gives rise to a covenant lived in joyful and faithful friendship; for this reason each one feels committed to make the gift he has received flourish in the Church. The heart of every Cooperator is a depositary of a covenant of salvation; it is enriched by a special grace and shares in the power of the Spirit of the Lord, so that the Cooperator feels sent forth and properly prepared to work in history as a collaborator in the important ecclesial mission assigned to Don Bosco.

It is a case therefore of you yourselves acquiring new life and vigour, and of attending to everything

that constitutes the soul of the Association and gives it life and movement.

Responsibility of the animators

This reinvigoration of the individuals and of the soul of the Association implies a continual return to two poles of reference so that the relationship between them may prove fruitful: one is the spiritual patrimony inherited from the Founder, and the other is the prophetic response you must be able to give to the present social and cultural challenges. Particularly aware of this must be especially the animators of your Association, i.e. the Cooperators who are leaders of the Centres, the Provincials, the SDB and FMA Delegates, but also all the members too. The future of the Association is strongly linked to an updated, realistic and renewed understanding of the apostolic gift given by God to the Church through Don Bosco.

The animators, therefore, whatever salesian Group they belong to, must be aware of the path travelled by Don Bosco in his vocation as Founder, and have an overall knowledge (not limited to their own group) of the true dimension of the charism entrusted to him; of that charism you who are Cooperators are a living and essential part, because he did not consider his work as a Founder fully realized until after the erection of your "Pious Union". In his mind and heart he considered you as "external" brothers and sisters; and it is pleasing to see how he began his circular of January 1881 to the Cooperators: "With a grateful heart I address you, my esteemed brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ"¹⁸.

According to Don Bosco, the expression "after

¹⁸ Boll. Sal. Jan. 1881, 1-3

the manner of a Third Order”, with which he described the form of your Association, had a particular significance which emphasized an original aspect, because by saying “after the manner of” or “like” a Third Order, he wanted to indicate the difference between you and the old Third Orders, which aimed especially at special attention to their life of piety, while your Association was founded to express the commitments of Baptism and Confirmation in concrete works of charity, particularly in favour of the young.¹⁹

But beyond the question of the name (which has never been used in salesian tradition, because neither the Salesians nor the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have ever been called the 1st and 2nd “Orders”), there is the reality of a common and concrete mission to be realized “together”, by uniting all available forces.

2. ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF YOUR IDENTITY AS SECULAR SALESIANS

As we have seen, Don Bosco sought to involve as many people as possible in the realization of his vast mission; he considered as very valuable the collaboration of members of the diocesan clergy because of their known competence in animating others; but he concentrated on finding a big number of lay people. He wanted to “reawaken the Catholic spirit”,²⁰ and sought to make everyone understand the “urgent need that exists at the present day for good christians to unite among themselves to foster good and fight against evil, because in unity there is strength”;²¹ he tried to translate the religious instincts of christians and their sense of

¹⁹ N.B. It may be useful to recall that the former Code of Canon Law (1918) distinguished between “Third Orders” dedicated to a life of piety (can. 702 §1), “Confraternities” dedicated to public cult (can. 707 §2), and “Pious Unions or Solidarities” dedicated to works of charity (can. 707 §1). The new Code gives a wider and more comprehensive meaning to Third Orders, as public associations of the faithful (can. 303; 677 §2; 298-320); this is why the Decree of approval of your Regulations used the latter term.

²⁰ Favini, *Don Bosco e l'apostolato dei laici*, SEI Turin 1952, p. 85

²¹ *ibid.* p. 79

prayer into works of charity: "these days", he used to say, "as well as praying, which we should always do without fail, we need to work too, and work intensely, otherwise we'll be ruined";²² to put it briefly he intended to "shake a lot of christians out of their lethargy, so as to spread the driving force of charity".²³

²² *ibid.* p. 79

²³ Reg. 50

The energy coming from charity among lay people

Don Bosco's mission needed a lot of lay commitment, especially as regards the education of youngsters of the working classes so as to improve society: "Do you want to do a good deed?", he used to say to the Cooperators. "Then educate the young. Do you want to do something holy? Educate the young. Something even holier? Educate the young. Something divine? Educate the young. Indeed, according to the Fathers this is the most divine of all divine things".²⁴ "This Association", he repeated at another time, "has for its objective the bringing together of good christians to do some good for civil society".²⁵

²⁴ BM 13, 490

²⁵ MB 16, 21

Now it is precisely in this field that a lot of progress is being made in the Church, especially after Vatican II. Today the conscience of the lay person, as an active member of the christian People, is much more enlightened than was the case in the past century, and new and vast social and ecclesial horizons have been opened to him.

Hence your Association needs to study at greater depth and to assimilate more fully the Council's doctrine on the laity: the commitments deriving from the priesthood of the baptized and from the sacrament of Confirmation, insertion in the local Church, the challenges to the faith thrown up by

social and cultural changes, the teaching of the Magisterium concerning temporal duties, christian witness in the family, the significant values of an authentic laity (which are poles apart from the deviations of laicism), etc.

The indispensable means for promoting this awareness are those available to every good member of the faithful: listening to the Word of God, reflecting on its content, on the texts of Vatican II and on the pastoral guidelines of the Pope and the Bishops; the practice of daily prayer and an adequate frequency of approach to the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance; acceptance of the mystery of the Cross, especially in those life situations which call for ascetical knowledge and courage; and dedication to some apostolic activity.

It is indispensable in particular to promote, through a competent course of animation, those aspects which characterize the "lay spirituality" as such.

Among the more significant notes of such spirituality we may recall the following:

— *The christian animation of temporal duties* which belong specifically to the mission of the lay person, either within the family or in the social and cultural environment. He should feel himself a "citizen" and at the same time a "believer", translating his faith in Christ into a constant effort to transform the world.

— A sensitivity, sharpened by faith, which moves the lay person to a continual discernment of the signs of the times in communion with the local Church and to play an active and authentically christian part in the present-day process of "*social liberation*", which will vary according to the concrete situation in which he happens to live. The lay

person is called to collaborate in the development of a more genuine culture, a more just civilization of work, a more universal human solidarity, this latter being a demanding task for all the People of God (to be lived out with different vocations).

— A careful analysis of “*daily occupations*”, appropriate to his secular character, which provide for the charity of the lay person an inexhaustible mine (albeit hidden and of modest proportions) for a true and practical witness to the gospel; in this way he can demonstrate the existence of the vital resources of christian hope in a transient world.

— Diligent attention to his own “*professional competence*”, to whatever pertains to its right use and constant perfecting, which gives to the existence of the lay person the concrete tone of his sharing in the mission of the Church “in penetrating and perfecting the temporal sphere by the spirit of the gospel”.²⁶

²⁶ AA 5

— Finally, the ever more explicit awareness of what the Council says: “Present circumstances demand from the laity an *apostolate* infinitely broader and more intense”,²⁷ *also in the specific field of evangelization and sanctification*, which offers them “countless opportunities” which go beyond the simple “witness of life”.²⁸ In this sense Vatican II emphasized the importance for the laity of a group form of apostolate: “In fact, associations established to carry on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work so that much better results can be expected than if each member were to act on his own”.²⁹

²⁷ AA 1

²⁸ AA 6

²⁹ AA 18

And it is precisely here that appears, as a synthesis deriving from the gospel, the precious inheri-

tance of the original style of christian life experienced and offered to you Cooperators by Don Bosco with his "salesian spirit". "Lay spirituality" indicates in a fairly general way a collection of aspects to which attention must be paid; but this can be done in many ways. The "salesian spirit" on the other hand suggests a tried and tested way of doing so.

The salesian spirit of Don Bosco

"Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit", says the text of your renewed Regulations, "Don Bosco lived and has passed on to the members of his Family an original style of life and action: the salesian spirit.

"It is a characteristic evangelical experience which delineates and gives a concrete tone to presence and action in the world, to relationships with one's neighbour and to rapport with God. In has its source in the very heart of Christ, is nourished in apostolic commitment and prayer, and pervades the whole of life, making of it a witness of love.

"The Cooperator gladly receives this spirit as a gift of God to the Church, and in a manner proper to his secular condition causes it to bear fruit".³⁰

³⁰ Reg. 26

This article enshrines the summit of your commitments in the line of salesian formation. Christian love is a lived practice which cannot be simply identified with a doctrine nor even a generic spirituality. In practice it is given living expression in a clearly recognizable synthesis.

When the Regulations speak of "salesian spirit" they are describing the characteristic features of the gospel experience tested in the school of Don Bosco as an original style of life, a synthesis of criteria of judgement and of methodology of action. It

is not a conceptual analysis of relationships with God and one's neighbour, and neither is it the doctrinal presentation of the spirituality of a state or ministry, but the description of the spiritual features which identify the salesian vocation; it gives considered attention to the visible and practical traits which earmark it in real life (i.e. its symbolic representation), highlighting some of its characteristics, so as to give to it its own spiritual physiognomy.

Just as human nature, which is in essence common to everyone, is expressed in distinctive physical features, so in an analogous manner baptismal life presents models of holiness with their own distinguishing characteristics, giving rise to different spiritual schools. In them the "spirituality" of a ministry or state of life becomes involved in fact in a concrete "spirit", as a typological expression of the following of Christ.

Among us, who together form the "Family of Don Bosco", different "spiritualities" in fact come together to form the one "salesian spirit": lay, priestly, religious, that of the married and consecrated secular states, etc.

It was in this connection that Don Bosco used to say that you Cooperators live and testify "in the world" to the spirit by which the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are animated in their "consecrated life". You are in fact called to live the same spirit of Don Bosco in the secular condition which is properly yours. Your vocational task consists in being able to incarnate the general values of lay spirituality (if you are lay people) or priestly and diaconal spirituality (if you are secular priests or deacons) in the characteristic style of holiness and way of action of Don Bosco's charism. It

is a spirit of communion which you do not live on your own or in separation, but rather as members of an Association which ensures for each one the identity, vitality, support, opportunity for checkup, joy and the hope of deep gospel brotherhood: "united in a single mind and heart", say the Regulations, "they live in fraternal communion with the bonds characteristic of the spirit of Don Bosco".³¹

³¹ Reg. 19,1

Canon Law itself, after saying in connection with associations like your own that they are made up of "members who live in the world but share in the spirit of some religious Institute",³² exhorts these Institutes of consecrated life "to have a special care that these associations are imbued with the genuine spirit of their family".³³

³² can. 303

³³ can. 677 §2

This "spirit" is a vital component of the Founder's charisma. In our Family it is a harmonious blending of interior forces which renders the members fit for the realization of the mission, which develops in them that special standpoint from which they judge reality, which gives rise in them to a particular sensitivity as regards the problems of the young and the poor, which builds up a balanced and positive mentality, which enables them to appreciate the wonderful fact that they have been born and called by name with a love of predilection; it implies, above all, growth in the joyful contemplation of the mystery of God: of the Father of mercies who in his love creates and forgives, of the Son the Redeemer who in love becomes incarnate and gives himself in sacrifice, of the Spirit the Consoler who through love transforms and sanctifies.

In this way the spirit of Don Bosco appears also as a precious gift for the whole Church.

Granted therefore that at the foundation of your group consciousness there is found the "salesian

spirit", you must give great attention to the interior dynamism to which it gives rise, because that is the soul of your Association.

— The Regulations present first of all, as the basic condition for this spirit, a particular kind of "*life of faith*" which is truly "*committed in the events of daily life*". This condition implies two characteristic attitudes.

The first is that the Cooperator "feels God to be his Father and the Love who saves; he meets in Jesus Christ the only Son and perfect Apostle of the Father...; he lives in intimate union with the Holy Spirit, the Animator of the People of God in the world". In other words he lives a kind of interior life which finds in God himself the impulse to work intensely for the salvation of souls:³⁴ the fervour of the apostolate, "da mihi animas"! This is the root or "the most profound aspect" of your vocation: to be true 'cooperators of God' in the realization of his saving design".³⁵

The second attitude is to feel himself called and sent forth on a concrete mission, that of contributing to the salvation of the young,³⁶ by being committed "to the same mission among the young and the poor"³⁷ as Don Bosco.

Hence every Cooperator, by this very experience of the mystery of God, lives a committed faith which gives him a "deep solidarity with the world in which he lives and in which he is called to be light and leaven. He believes in man's interior resources; he shares the positive values of his culture; he accepts its novelties with a critical christian sense, integrating into his own life 'everything that is good', especially if it is to the liking of the young".³⁸

This is why there is found at the centre of the

³⁴ cf. Reg. 27

³⁵ Reg. 27/3

³⁶ Reg. 1

³⁷ Reg. 3

³⁸ Reg. 29,1

salesian spirit, as a “mystical spur”, that pastoral charity which is an incentive to work tirelessly for the Lord. Don Bosco expressed it synthetically in the motto: “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle”, and bore eminent witness to it by “bringing to life among the young the merciful love of God the Father, the saving charity of Christ the Shepherd, and the fire of the Spirit which renews the face of the earth”.³⁹

³⁹ Reg. 28,1

— He wanted too to clothe this activity in a *simple, cordial and joyful kindness*, or in other words in a style of life and action which tends to promote “relationships of trust and friendship so as to create around himself a family atmosphere marked by simplicity and affection. (Every Cooperator) is a worker for peace who tries to reconcile conflicting views by dialogue and so bring about agreement”.⁴⁰ This is really the distinguishing characteristic of the spirit of Don Bosco; he himself described this style as “salesian” because he saw in St Francis de Sales a “model of amiability, apostolic zeal and true humanism”.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Reg. 31,2

⁴¹ Reg. 28,1

He expressed it in practice through the manner of acting among young people that he called the “preventive system”: a style that is also called the “method of kindness”, since

— it “uses persuasion and not compulsion, and appeals to the inner resources of the individual, making him progressively responsible for his own growth;

— believes in the ‘invisible action of grace in the heart of every man’ and in the educational value of the faith experience;

— with confidence in the transforming power of love, tries to reach the heart and succeed in making (the educator) loved in a mature and

⁴² Reg. 15

transparent way".⁴²

This kindness is manifested in an atmosphere of joy and hope which arouses fellow-feeling, infuses optimism and promotes happiness. It is an expression of the interior joy that springs from the Easter dimension of the christian faith, the bearer of a supreme innovation particularly attuned to the inclinations of youth psychology.

⁴³ cf. Reg. 30,3

— Tied in with the "mystical spur" of pastoral charity become kindness, there is in this spirit a demanding "*ascetical manner of doing things*" made attractive by a smiling countenance. Don Bosco expressed it in the realistic phrase: "*work and temperance*".⁴³ It implies a true ascesis of activity lived with constancy among the difficulties and toil of daily life: the personal cross to be freely carried behind the Lord. It is accompanied by a continuous and alert control of personal inclinations and passions until there is reached an efficacious balance of self-control in behaviour and wise criticism in the face of environmental ideologies, which is an expression of active christian prudence.

⁴⁴ 2 Pet 1,5-7

In the salesian spirit "ascetics" and "mysticism" mutually compenetrate according to what St Peter says in his 2nd letter: "Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love".⁴⁴

— To preserve and develop this "spirit" (described in chapter 4 of your Regulations) Don Bosco was aware by experience of the uninterrupted *protection of our Blessed Lady*: not only because of his personal experience of the "motherly intervention

of Mary”⁴⁵ at the beginning of his vocation and throughout its development, so that he always considered her his “Teacher and Guide”, but especially because on a wider scale, in the very history of salvation, she “cooperated in a unique way in the work of the Saviour and never ceases to cooperate as Mother and Helper of christian people”.⁴⁶ And a particular reason for so characteristic a trait of this spirit is that the pastoral charity of your Association consists in the imitation of “the motherly concern of Mary, who intercedes for the Cooperator and helps him daily in his witness”:⁴⁷ in fact Mary Help of Christians is, by “her living presence”, the “special guide of the Salesian Family”.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Reg. 1,1

⁴⁶ Reg. 27,2

⁴⁷ Reg. 28,2

⁴⁸ Reg. 35,1

3. FOR A RELAUNCHING OF THE ASSOCIATION

The solemn promulgation of the Regulations, my dear Cooperators, is certainly an event which calls for a relaunching of the Association. I would like to gather together here a few practical suggestions which may prompt you to the formulation of some practical proposals.

Some practical questions that must be faced

— Obviously there is in the first place the need to study, assimilate and put into practice what is contained in your Plan of apostolic life. This is a *task of ongoing formation* to bring about interior spiritual growth, with a secular slant,⁴⁹ able to permeate the texture of daily life (made up of family, professional, cultural, social and ecclesial relationships) with the gospel values of the salesian spirit.

⁴⁹ cf. Reg. 7

It is more urgent at the present day than ever in the past to strengthen the "inner man". It is a task therefore which must serve for the christian identification of the individual, but also provides a stimulus for the Association itself and for all the Salesian Family.

Such a task must be accompanied by careful attention to what Vatican II has proclaimed about "secularity", and in particular about the vocation and mission of the "lay person" in the Church. The doctrine of the Council requires a much wider knowledge and more courageous acceptance of what it means to "feel oneself a Catholic" in a pluralist world pervaded by the frightening temptation of temporal immanence. The materialism in vast social sectors which characterizes our time leads to that terrible "sin against the Holy Spirit" which cannot be forgiven.

In this connection the Pope, in his recent encyclical "Dominum et vivificantem" says that for a materialistic mentality, "the order of values and the aims of action which it describes are strictly bound to a reading of the whole of reality as 'matter'; (materialism appears as) the systematic and logical development of that 'resistance' and opposition condemned by St Paul with the words: 'The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit'." ⁵⁰

⁵⁰ DV 56

The Catholic of the present day cannot fail to accept the mission of proclaiming and bearing witness to the active presence of the Holy Spirit in history, and to his enlivening and transforming action in personal, family and social life.

— Furthermore, inner growth is necessarily accompanied, in the case of a salesian Cooperator, by the revision and intensification of his own apostolic

initiatives. Hence arises an appeal to renew his *personal obligations of witness and apostolate*: in the family,⁵¹ in marriage,⁵² in his environment of life and work,⁵³ in social relationships,⁵⁴ and in salesian works, “especially in Oratories, Youth Centres and Schools”.⁵⁵ It must be acknowledged that the structures of the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians offer a concrete and organic field for apostolic initiatives. In this sense I would also like to remind especially the younger Cooperators, that the lay missionary volunteer project is of wide extension and very appropriate at the present day.

⁵¹ Reg. 8⁵² Reg. 9⁵³ Reg. 10⁵⁴ Reg. 11⁵⁵ Reg. 16-17

Whatever the situation, the Cooperator must feel involved with personal responsibility and a spirit of initiative in carrying out the common mission “according to his capacity and possibilities”. Thus each one enriches the Association, and hence also the Salesian Family, by growth in identity:

— “*adult and elderly Cooperators*”, says the new text of your Regulations, “bring the riches of mature experience and long fidelity;

— *young Cooperators*, with the dynamism of the new generations, help in the carrying out of the common mission by their own dedication and sensitivity;

— *Cooperators tried by ill-health* and unable to help in other ways, render efficacious the apostolate of all by the offering of their sufferings and prayer;

— *Cooperators who are priests or deacons*, whose presence is very useful, offer the services of their specific ministry, especially for formation and animation”.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Reg. 20,3

— A particular sector needing urgent and deep attention and fidelity to the Magisterium is that of *the social teaching of the Church*. This is something of great topical importance at the present day, a sector both delicate and complex, and one moreover which is too easily disregarded or misinterpreted. And yet it stands at the foundation of any christian commitment to the renewal of society or the launching of a civilization of love.

In the teachings of the Pastors of the Church can be found the fundamental principles, criteria of judgement and practical directives for the urgent task of cultural transformation, which implies education of the individual, solidarity of peoples, and the integral humanizing of work. An enlightening synthesis of such guidelines is given in chapter V of the recent Vatican Instruction on “Christian freedom and liberation”.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Cong. Doc. Faith,
22 March 1986

Article 11 of your Regulations gives succinct expression to what the attitude of the Cooperator should be in the face of these ecclesial requirements. Even though “the Association as such remains above all party politics, it is nevertheless concerned that its members be given a strong formation in this area; in fact it “intervenes courageously, following the directives of the local Church, to promote and defend human and christian values. It enlightens and encourages individual Cooperators to fulfil their duties in society in a responsible manner”.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Reg. 11,2

— Another field of action in which the Salesian Family wants to grow, in fidelity to Don Bosco, is that of *social communication*, especially in view of the education of youth and the christian awareness of the masses. There is an urgent need today for

you Cooperators to be a christian presence in the vast world of the "means" of social communication, especially in places where plans and programmes are in preparation which touch on sore points concerning the formation of correct consciences. Communication, in fact, is one of the most incisive factors in the new emerging cultures (because of its powerful influence on public opinion and on the configuration of the 'city of man'), and hence attention must be given to its professional quality through the intervention of those among you who are competent in this sector.

The Regulations consider the commitment of Cooperators in this field as one of the "typical activities" to which priority should be given: in fact, "commitment in social communication... creates culture and spreads patterns of life among people".⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Reg. 16,1

— Finally I would like to recall as a practical challenge to keep before your minds the intensifying of good relations, *fraternal communion and collaboration with the other groups of the Salesian Family*.⁶⁰ This is attained "through reciprocal knowledge and information, by mutual spiritual and formative assistance, and by involvement in common apostolic tasks".⁶¹

⁶⁰ Reg. 5

⁶¹ Reg. 22,1

In the same sense, greater care should be given to the information services which have the scope of circulating experiences, news, testimony and initiatives which stimulate and increase the spiritual and apostolic output of all. In particular you should give constant support to the "*Salesian Bulletin*", to which Don Bosco linked the Cooperators and their apostolate, and foster its promotion and circulation in the various countries.

A greater and more lively awareness of the demands of communion and collaboration in the

Salesian Family will redound to the benefit of the Church, especially of the particular Churches where the various groups are found side by side.

In fact we understand the renewal of the Family not in the sense of each group developing on its own, but rather in that of being "together" the true charism of Don Bosco, or in other words a more authentic and efficacious gift to be presented in salesian fashion to the local Church.

A spiritual movement

Still another incentive.

I have read and read again the latest encyclical, "Dominum et vivificantem", of Pope John Paul II. It is a very profound and lucid meditation which leads us to understand how intimately is inserted the "Mystery" of God in the history of humanity through the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of the Lord makes us aware of the inclinations of the "flesh" and of the "spirit" above shortsighted modern ideologies, and gives us the power of love as the one and only efficacious shaper of man's true future, freeing us from the various determinisms stemming from Materialism. When you read the encyclical you will be able to better understand the contents of the two frontiers in the struggle between good and evil as they appear in modern society: that of "life in the Spirit" and that of "sin against the Spirit".

The Pope invites everyone to strengthen the "inner man", in preparation (even now) for the great Jubilee the Church will celebrate at the advent of the year 2000. It is a case of arousing an eschatological sensitivity which will give a more lively tone of hope at our present period in history, one that

will be marked by the approaching Third Millennium of Christianity. Man is the way of the Church, but is so in virtue of the inner man, because "God... transforms the human world from within, from inside hearts and minds";⁶² that is why the Church is very definitely the "heart of humanity".⁶³

62 DV 59

63 DV 67

Pope Paul VI reminded us that from the time of Vatican II "we are living in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit. Everywhere people are trying to know him better... They are happy to place themselves under his inspiration. They are gathering about him, and they want to let themselves be led by him".⁶⁴

64 EN 75

The Holy Spirit is indeed the bearer of a "new beginning", of a "new creation", of the "new man": he appears as the one who is Lord and gives life, and who "with wondrous providence directs the course of time and renews the face of the earth".⁶⁵

65 GS 26

Our Salesian Family is convinced of the life-giving presence of the Spirit at the origins of our own specific vocation; in addition it considers the postconciliar obligations of the last twenty years (which have seen the revision of the fundamental texts identifying the three Groups founded by Don Bosco) as a journey undertaken in docility to the Holy Spirit, who has visited us to enable us to put into effect once again and promote the charisma He gave to our Founder.

Today we feel that the Spirit-Creator is calling upon us to relaunch together a true "spiritual movement", i.e. a new way of living our common vocation which must be rooted in a more authentic interior apostolic mentality, which must in turn foster a more up-to-date pastoral creativity; this will have a greater social incidence on the advance-

ment of youth and the evangelization of cultures and the common people, so that there may be a more universal concern about missionary activity, and a reawakened courage and joy in belonging to a Catholic Church engaged in ecumenical dialogue.

In my letter of February 1982 on the Salesian Family I used two adverbs, "forward" and "together", as a motto to guide us to some goals of renewal. I think that the expression "spiritual Movement" interprets that motto very well, while expressing synthetically and in a more concrete manner what it is that we are intending to renew: i.e. "life in the Spirit" for both each individual and each Group: we want the witness we give to our vocation to spring from greater interior depth, with more brotherhood and communion, with greater dynamism and agility, with greater pastoral flexibility, with a more attractive and involving presence among youngsters, and with greater social impact.

This demands of everyone an indispensable attentive docility to the Holy Spirit, to his animating presence and to the results of the visit he has made to us during the revision of our Identity Cards.

It is not our aim to organize ourselves in noisy serried ranks (although the noise made by young people causes us no displeasure), but we want to be competent workers in a tapestry of christian authenticity within the concrete though modest limits of our presence in various localities, which on the other hand are numerous and found in every continent.

The Salesian Family, put forward again as a spiritual Movement,⁶⁶ will once again proclaim the up-to-date nature of the charism of Don Bosco, for the present day and the future. A true charisma is characterized, as is stated in the document "Mu-

⁶⁶ cf. SDB C 5

tuae Relationes”, by “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 the gift of self, humility in the face of adversity”.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ MR 12

Don Bosco urged every Cooperator to be a true Catholic, of convinced and living faith, courageous and enterprising: “Do not be afraid! God is with the Church all days to the end of time. It is for the wicked to tremble before the godly, not the godly before the wicked”;⁶⁸ “let us fight (alongside the Pope) for the cause of the Church, which is God’s cause! Let us take courage and work with all our hearts. God is a generous master and will amply reward us. Eternity is long enough for us to rest”.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ BM 6, 275

⁶⁹ BM 7,103

4. THE LIVING PRESENCE OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Dear Cooperators, I must conclude. The study and inner assimilation of the new text of your Regulations of apostolic life must mark the beginning of a new stage in the life of your Association. We shall give each other mutual help in prayer, initiatives of service and organization, formation undertakings, and the urgent work of promoting vocations. Our Councillor General for the Salesian Family and the Vicar General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are already ready and willing to provide advice and stimulus for this new phase of growth. Meanwhile we put all our trust in Mary Help of Christians, Mother of the Church; we are convinced of her living presence and we frequently invoke

⁷⁰ cf. Reg. 35,1

her;⁷⁰ we entrust ourselves to her as to a motherly Teacher and Intercessor, always present and always solicitous in our regard.

On 23 May 1884, eve of the feast of the Help of Christians, Don Bosco gave a conference to the Cooperators in the Basilica at Valdocco, Turin: "Close as I now am to the end of my days", he said, "it gives me great joy to see that the favours granted by Mary instead of decreasing are growing in number every day and in every place. Never a day goes by without us receiving from town and hamlet, near and far, long accounts of extraordinary graces received through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. And our Salesian Cooperators are the instruments that God is using to spread ever more widely the glory of his Mother. It is something that should make you all very happy and lead you to place the greatest trust in Mary's patronage".⁷¹

⁷¹ MB 17, 149

The new text of the Regulations was presented to some of your representatives on 24 May last in the Basilica at Valdocco, as though coming from the hands of the Madonna herself. "The date of this solemn act", says the Decree of promulgation, "is of great significance and importance. Our Holy Father, John Paul II, speaking to members of the World Congress who represented Salesian Cooperators from all over the world, earnestly exhorted them to rely 'on the promptings and motherly inspiration of Mary most holy, the Help of Christians, who is your special and powerful patroness'".⁷²

⁷² Reg. Decree of promulgation

Place your trust therefore in Mary Help of Christians; get down to work; and put no limits to your hope!

The Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help

of Christians are praying for you and are at your side.

I entrust you all to Don Bosco and I send you my blessing, with my admiration for the witness you give and my gratitude for your many and fruitful undertakings.

With deep affection in the Lord,

Don F. Viganò