

Chastity in the Salesian Constitutions

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Renewing the Salesian Constitutions

Updating: Trends and Time-Lines

In a letter dated May 24, 1966, Fr. Luigi Ricceri (1901-1989), then Rector Major of the Salesian Society, introduced a new edition of the Constitutions to his confreres. Nearly one year had elapsed since the close of the nineteenth general chapter of the Salesian Society, and six months had passed since the close of Vatican II. In this context, Fr. Ricceri introduced the constitutions which carried a number of changes that were to usher the Society toward its twentieth general chapter. He affirmed that the modifications did not alter the spirit of the Rule. Indeed, the rector major proudly characterized the "XIX General Chapter [—] the Chapter of Vatican Council II and of the 150th anniversary of the birth of our Father and Founder" — as having proved itself faithful to Don Bosco, "the torch which shines in all its splendor along the whole length of our road."¹

The Call of Vatican II

It was a time of special expectation in the Church and in the Salesian Society, and many felt that the Salesians were especially blest to be able to gather in Rome for their chapter during the year when the ecumenical council was drawing to a close. Vatican II had called for the renewal of religious life.² This in fact seemed to be taking place among the Salesians, who read the new documents coming out of Turin as avidly as they were reading the council docu-

¹ Cf. *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales*, preceded by the Introduction by our Founder Saint John Bosco, Authorized translation (Madras: Provincial Office, 1967), 67.

² Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* (Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life, Vatican II, 28 October 1965), nos. 2-4, 8.

ments emanating from Rome. The work of renewal, however, was not yet accomplished. The nineteenth general chapter had merely located the site where future groundwork would need to take place. Soon the Salesians would discover that the work of updating and renewal would demand a serious commitment on the part of the entire community.

Vatican II, in its decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, made it clear that renewal was a matter of conversion, not just of individuals, but of institutes as well. All "institutes of perfection" were invited to return to the spirit of the founder while opening themselves to the needs of the times. To make concrete what *Perfectae Caritatis* had proposed, Paul VI issued a Motu Proprio, *Ecclesiae Sanctae II*, on August 6, 1966. In this document, the pope called for a "special general chapter" to be held in each religious institute within the following two or three years.³

At first some Salesians felt that their 1965 chapter had served the purpose. Others maintained that the Salesians were such a young community, so close to the founder that they did not need the tremendous changes that other, older groups must face. It soon became apparent, however, that Don Bosco's sons were not exempt from the norms listed in *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, and that they too were in need of renewal, of returning to the founder. A "special general chapter" was to be convened in 1971. Preparations began in the closing months of 1968 as Salesians gathered, province by province, for "special provincial chapters."

After three years of preparation, the twentieth or "special general chapter" of the Salesian Society convened in Rome in the Spring of 1971. It was no longer a matter of approving amendments to the Constitutions. The delegates, working in numerous commissions with theologians and experts, formulated working documents that formed the basis for a thoroughly new Rule. The Constitutions of 1972, which were the result of this long and meticulous process, are the fruit of a long reflection on the theology of Vatican II. They also show the influence of numerous disciplines, including psychology, communications, and the social sciences.

In his introduction to the new Rule, Fr. Ricceri assured the Salesians that "in every phase of the Special General Chapter" the "delicate work" of formulating the new Constitutions was "always conducted with the constant preoccupation of being absolutely faithful to Don Bosco." Again, he would insist that while the form had changed, the new rule represented "that authentically Salesian spirit left us as a precious heritage by our father."⁴

³ Cf. *Ecclesiae Sanctae II* (Norms for implementing the Decree: On the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life, Paul VI, 6 August 1966), no. 3.

⁴ Cf. *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales* (Rome: SGS, 1972), 5-6.

Experimentation, Crisis, Bewilderment

The twelve years that followed the special general chapter were difficult as Salesians, and indeed most religious institutes, entered into crisis. On the one hand, the reforms of Vatican II had not seemed to bring the much hoped for renewal. On the other, membership had diminished considerably. During the period between 1972 and 1982, the Salesian Society had declined in membership by nearly 22%. While they fared better than most religious congregations, Salesians were often miffed by the confusion and chaos of the times. Some looked for a scapegoat. Were the new constitutions too relaxed? Had Vatican II opened too many windows? There were no easy answers. The Church, which shortly before had seemed solid and unchanging like a rock, was suddenly the area of conflict.⁵

If a feeling of bewilderment and guilt prevailed among the rank and file, Salesian leadership was also worried. While continually sounding the call for balance throughout those rocky years, Fr. Ricceri readily admitted that the path to renewal was difficult, wearisome, even painful. He spoke of defections as a "continuing drain" and a "deep gash or laceration in the body of the Congregation as well as in the body of the Church," and cited "difficulties in the observance of chastity" as one of "symptoms" if not the cause of the steady decline in membership.⁶ He warned against individualism as the "reef against which even the best effort of renewal can get shipwrecked."⁷ It was a "sinister evil" that compromised the Salesian spirit by making the human person the absolute measure of all, drying up the wellsprings of charity, and prompting distrust for any rule.⁸

New Confidence and New Constitutions

Don Egidio Viganò (1920-1995), who was elected rector major at the twenty-first general chapter in 1977, was more optimistic. He did not dwell on obstacles and threats to the religious life, as much as he urged Salesians to be sensitive to the needs of the times, to be prophetic in their service of the young with hearts afire with pastoral charity as had been the case with Don Bosco himself.⁹

⁵ See: Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Congregations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 65-87.

⁶ Luigi Ricceri, "Living a Life of Consecrated Chastity Today," in *Acts of the Superior Council*, 58.285 (January-March 1977): 5-10, 15-19.

⁷ Luigi Ricceri, "The Sinister Evil of Individualism," in *Acts of the Superior Council*, 58.286 (April-June 1977): 5.

⁸ Cf. Luigi Ricceri, "The Sinister Evil of Individualism," in *Acts of the Superior Council*, 58.286 (April-June 1977): 5-6, 10-16.

⁹ Cf. Egidio Viganò, "The 22nd General Chapter," in *Acts of the Superior Council*, 63.305 (July-September 1982): 7.

It was with these sentiments that Don Viganò convoked what he would term the "final renewal chapter," for 1984. This was the twenty-second general chapter. The new code of Canon Law had been promulgated one year earlier. It was time to add up the balance of years of study and experience. It was hoped that this chapter would bring the years of experimentation to an end as "the final effort of the postconciliar quest to draw up satisfactorily and in harmony with the life of the Church the lines of renewal our Salesian vocation must follow as we approach the third millennium."¹⁰ The 1984 general chapter would draw up the definitive version of the Salesian constitutions, "for the good of the Church," and thereby to "evaluate, clarify, complete, perfect and finalize" the work of renewal that had taken place within the Salesian world over the past twenty years since Vatican II had launched the renewal process.¹¹ With new confidence, Salesians could once more dedicate their energy to educating and evangelizing the young, and return to the "ordinary rhythm" of life and mission.¹²

Chastity and Renewal

While many themes lend themselves to study, the topic of chastity may offer us an insight into how value structures and their expression changed in the course of the renewal process.

In Salesian parlance, *chastity*, *celibacy* and *purity* were practically synonyms, and many Salesians felt that as Franciscans proclaimed the glory of evangelical poverty and Jesuits affirmed the importance of obedience, the sons of Don Bosco were called to witness to the beauty of chastity. This opinion was very common among Salesians, as seen in the deliberations of the 1965 general chapter:

Both as a congregation and as individuals, Salesians must be acutely conscious of the fact that they have a special message of purity to transmit to the modern world. They have a special mission towards the young whom they must train to be vigorous in their practice of purity. For such a mission, they themselves must in a special way be invincible in their own purity.¹³

¹⁰ Cf. Viganò, "The 22nd General Chapter," 13.

¹¹ Cf. Viganò, "The 22nd General Chapter," 9.

¹² Cf. Egidio Viganò, "Convocation of the 23rd General Chapter," in *Acts of the General Council*, 69.327 (October-December 1988): 6: "The GC22 and the approval by the Apostolic See of the revised text of the Constitutions, and the completing of our Rule of life by the last provincial chapters, marked the end of a laborious and fruitful postconciliar period dedicated to the vast work of clarifying the Salesian identity in the Church and its consequent legislative expression at both general and provincial level."

¹³ GC19, 84-85.

The general chapter delegates in 1965 approved what would be the last version of the constitutions before the renewal began. Much of that text was based on original norms written by Don Bosco himself, especially in areas regarding the spirit of the Society. Our study of Salesian chastity will therefore begin with a look at texts on chastity presented in the Salesian constitutions approved in 1965 and published in 1966. We will then pass over to the experimental constitutions prepared by the Special General Chapter in 1971-1972, and end by considering the definitive constitutions elaborated by the Twenty-second General Chapter in 1984.

Analysis of Salesian Texts on Chastity

Tradition and Chastity in the Constitutions of 1966

The 1966 version dedicated 7 articles (with a total of 313 words) to the theme of chastity. The first mention came in article 12, which was the first article in the chapter entitled "Form of the Society." This is the only reference made in the 1966 rule which identifies any type of group dimension with regard to chastity. Chastity is listed here with poverty and obedience, and, given in its traditional order, is understood to be the religious vow which binds "clerics and laymen" together in the common life together with "fraternal charity." Chastity is also listed as a virtue by which the group, "which forms one heart and one mind," is united to "love and serve God." This phraseology reminds one of the standard catechism answer of the last century, as expressed in the answer to the third question of the Baltimore Catechism: "God made me to know, love and serve Him in this life and to be happy with Him forever in the next."

This article basically reproduces Article II-1 of the original constitutions.

In this Society, which comprises clerics and laymen, the members shall live together in common, bound only by the bond of brotherly love and simple vows, which so unite them as to make them one in heart and soul, in order to love and serve God by the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience, and by the exact observance of the duties of a good Christian.¹⁴

The final phrase had seen some evolution in Don Bosco's own mind, for whereas in the early Italian text he had spoken of serving God "through the exact fulfillment of the duties of a good Christian," he had interpreted this in Latin to read "accurate christiana vivendi ratione" — "through a strictly Chris-

¹⁴ C66, article 12.

tian tenor of life."¹⁵ The discrepancy continued in the 1966 version. The English "exact observance of the duties of a good Christian" mirrors Don Bosco's earlier version, while the Italian of 1966 opts for "Christian tenor of life."¹⁶ The Italian version is more faithful to the approved Latin text. For that reason, it shall serve as the text for the analysis that follows.¹⁷

Chastity treated as "Vow"

The rest of the articles on chastity is presented in chapter IV, which is entitled "Vow of Chastity." All of the articles in this chapter date back to Don Bosco. When they do differ, it is only with slight grammatical adjustments which seem to conform more closely to the Latin official text than Don Bosco's translation at times.

This chapter follows that on poverty, and seems to be a development of Chapter II. In any case, the six articles presented here are very direct in language and content.

The presentation in general stresses chastity as a private obligation. All is presented in the third person singular, or in the third person, passive voice. Thus we find phrases such as "Whoever spends his life on behalf of abandoned young people... Whoever has less than a founded hope... Let no one visit... Conversations should be avoided..."

The impression one receives when first reading this chapter is that Chastity is important and also the most endangered virtue of the Salesian religious. It is important because it is "the virtue which should be most highly cultivated, held always before one's eyes." There is no attempt to explain the nature of chastity, except by way of its description as the "angelic virtue, the virtue which is most dear to the Son of God."¹⁸

This type of presentation, which stresses obligation, or which speaks very indirectly about both the "dangers" and the importance, would put the

¹⁵ Cf. *Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales (1858-1875)*, critical edition and notes by Francesco Motto (Roma: LAS, 1982), 82-83 [hereafter, the critical texts of the early drafts of the Salesian constitutions will be cited in the notes as *Cost SDB*].

¹⁶ Cf. *Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales*, precedute dall'introduzione scritta dal fondatore San Giovanni Bosco (Torino: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1966), 65, art. 12: In questa Società, che consta di ecclesiastici e di laici, tutti i soci conducono vita comune, stretti solamente dal vincolo della carità fraterna e dei voti semplici, il quale li unisce in guisa, che formino un curo solo e un'anima sola, per amare e servire Iddio con le virtù della povertà, della castità e dell'obbedienza, e con un tenor di vita strettamente cristiano.

¹⁷ For the present study, the Italian version of the 1966 *Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales* [hereafter cited in the notes as "C66"] will form the basis of our analysis. The English translation of C66 texts, unless otherwise noted, is my own.

¹⁸ C66, article 34.

stress on the individual practice of the vow, rather than on its group dimension. Yet we can find traces of community or group

Chastity is seen less in terms of an evangelical counsel, and more as a moral virtue that is endangered. Salesians must "use the maximum caution when speaking or dealing" with young people who have been "victims of the human passions." Evidently Don Bosco had experienced young people who had suffered sexual abuse, and his comment, "no matter what their age and condition," may indicate that he had found abuse victims even among younger children. He does not elucidate. He simply warns the Salesian to be extremely careful, for even the most innocent "word or glance" may be misinterpreted. Chastity, then, has an educational as well as an ascetic dimension.¹⁹

This educational perspective prompts the rule to insist that chastity must be cultivated. In fact, once it has described "the virtue which among all others is the dearest to the Son of God," it goes on to assert: "Whoever does not have a founded hope to be able to conserve this virtue of chastity, with divine help, in word, deed and thought, should not seek to profess in this Society, for he would often find himself in danger."²⁰ Don Bosco's original was more dramatic.²¹ He wrote, "at every step he would be exposed to great dangers."²²

The last three articles offer concrete "action steps" for "guarding with the maximum diligence" the virtue of chastity.

37) avoid conversation with non-religious, and above all with "persons of the other sex;"

38) do not visit acquaintances or friends without the superior's consent; the superior in turn will look to provide a companion;

39) use spiritual means to combat the assaults on this virtue:

- 1) confession and communion;
- 2) faithful practice of the confessor's advice;
- 3) avoiding idleness; curbing the senses;
- 4) frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament;
- 5) frequent invocations to Mary most Holy, St. Joseph, St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

¹⁹ Cf. C66, article 36.

²⁰ C66, article 35.

²¹ In his earliest drafts of the constitutions, D. Bosco has written "certainty" instead of "well-founded hope." It was Archbishop Luigi Fransoni who suggested the change. See: Francesco Motto, "Introduzione," in *Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales (1858-1875)*, critical edition and notes by Francesco Motto (Roma: LAS, 1982), 17, note 12.

²² *Cost SDB* (1875) V, 1-2.

We could analyze each statement in detail, but we will limit ourselves to a reflection on article 39. Given that "danger" is so prevalent, the rule offers some concrete steps. These directives have something of a "crisis management" approach to them, with phrases such as "turn very frequently with invocations...."

The litany mentioned holds up saints who were special models for Salesians. Saint Joseph is missing from the original rule of 1858, but included as early as 1864.²³ Patron of workers and artisans (and therefore of coadjutors and Brother Salesians), the rule called him "the most chaste spouse" of Mary "most holy." Aloysius Gonzaga, patron of youth and exemplary scholastic, was held up as a model for Salesian clerics. Like Saint Joseph, Gonzaga was renowned for his purity (symbolically, Aloysius, like Joseph, was always depicted with the lily). Francis de Sales, among other things, was remembered for remaining faithful to his vocation in the face of grave opposition from family and peers.²⁴ In a mentality that linked saints to the social fabric of life, their role was to model "the virtue which should be most highly cultivated" for those who hoped to "spend a lifetime at the service of abandoned young people."²⁵

Chastity in the 1972 Constitutions

As in the 1966 constitutions, the 1972 presents the theme of Chastity in six articles. Yet, the text is nearly twice as long, with 577 words in the new rule.²⁶

The chapter is entitled "Our Chastity," and articles 75 to 80 are preceded by a scriptural quotation from the gospel of Matthew which serves as a theological backdrop.²⁷ The material context of the chapter is also interesting. Whereas the 1966 constitutions had located chastity in the section on the "form of the society," the 1972 text places it as the second chapter in the section entitled "Our Consecration." This section follows the articles on community life. The listing of chastity shows a departure from the ascetic tradition of taking second place to poverty. This, however, is in keeping with Vatican II, for the

²³ *Cost SDB* V, 6.

²⁴ For anecdotes told in Salesian circles regarding the patron's personal virtue, see: Giulio Barberis, *Vita di S. Francesco di Sales*, nuova ed. (Torino: SEI, 1919), 1:116-118.

²⁵ Cf. C66, article 34.

²⁶ In the paragraphs that follow, we will analyze the renewed constitutions by means of the official Italian version, i.e., *Costituzioni e Regolamenti della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Roma: SGS, 1972), hereafter cited in the notes as "C72."

²⁷ Mt 19:11: "It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it has been granted."

1972 constitutions follow the order set down in *Perfectae Caritatis* of "chastity, poverty and obedience."²⁸

The language of these articles shifts emphasis by describing chastity with biblical imagery. New terms introduced into these articles are: evangelical celibacy, the Kingdom of Heaven, following Jesus Christ, mystery of the Church. The content is given with titles (a new feature in the 1972 *Constitutions*) which show a presentation of chastity in an ecclesial context rather than as a matter of personal struggle. Thus the 1972 text speaks of "the evangelical significance of our vow of chastity," which is our response to the "precious gift which we receive from the Father." The gift and the response allow for "closely following Jesus Christ" by loving God intensely and loving others "with undivided heart." More than anything else, the vow of chastity prompts the "total gift of self" to the mission and mystery of the Church.²⁹

After setting up this framework, the 1972 *Constitutions* develop the theme as follows:

- 76) Chastity in the Salesian mission;
- 77) Salesian mission requires mature chastity;
- 78) Chastity and life in community;
- 79) Means for preserving and developing chastity;
- 80) Eschatological dimensions.

Don Bosco is quoted in articles 76 and 77, as the first two articles from the old rule are reported in their essence. But now these quotations are put into context. Don Bosco wanted chastity to be the distinctive mark of the Salesian Society, just as youth were the distinctive object of the Salesian mission. This is

²⁸ Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, nos. 1, 12. See also: *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, 21 November 1964), no. 43; *Mutuae Relationes* (Instruction on the Relationship between Bishops and Religious in the Church, Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, May 14, 1978), no. 10.

²⁹ C72, article 75. This theme of "celibacy as precious gift" was developed in the Acts of the Special General Chapter, in document 10, "Salesian Chastity Today"; cf. *Special General Chapter XX of the Salesian Society*, Rome: 10 June 1971 to 5 January 1972 (Roma: SGS, 1972), article 567. C72 follows the themes discussed in this chapter document, which in turn was written "in the hope of making an effective response to the requests of confreres, and contributing to an ever more vital transmission" of the message that "the renewal of the religious life in the Church demands from Salesians [*sic*] the task of making relevant their message of purity" [*Special General Chapter*, article 556]. According to this statement, chastity in the Salesian context has both an moral-ascetical and a social-witness value.

why, according to the new rule, "every effort must be made to enrich oneself with every virtue," but that the virtue to be "most highly cultivated" is chastity.

This phrase is familiar, but it is given a new context, and this context is the whole Salesian tradition, which sees Christ's love, not for "the angelic virtue" but "for the young." Making a clear reference to Don Bosco's "Letter from Rome" of 1884, article 76 reminds the Salesian that love is liberating. This demands maturity, psychological and affective balance, however. With this assertion, article 77 quotes that other traditional statement: "Whoever does not have a founded hope to be able to conserve this virtue of chastity, with divine help, in word, deed and thought, should not seek to profess in this Society, for he would often find himself in danger."

The text immediately returns to a social context. It speaks of interpersonal relationships, building "community into a family" that is at once serene, welcoming, warm: a place where one finds understanding, affirmation, friendship, and a gospel lifestyle. These are the aspects which help every brother to grow, even when facing "difficult moments."³⁰

This represents a definite change from the earlier rule. It is not the caution based on fear of the dangers that helps one live chastity. Rather, it is mutual acceptance and friendship that allows one to "preserve and develop" chastity. This is itself a more dynamic understanding of celibacy.

There is talk about "human weakness" and vulnerability, but Salesians may find help from those traditional sources that Don Bosco himself had listed. Priority is now given to "living in the presence" of a loving God, being nourished at the table of the Word and the Eucharist. The sacrament of "penance" is listed in fourth place.

Help comes also from "filial confidence in Mary, the Immaculate Help," in learning how to imitate Don Bosco's style of loving, and in taking those natural means of mortification, work and temperance, a dyad that was itself another of Don Bosco's slogans.

The entire treatment of the theme ends with an eschatological finale. Chastity has the value of Gospel witness. It is a gift for the entire world, called to new hope in Christ. These values represent the eschatological dimension of chastity, a theme which the *Special General Chapter* develops as a natural conclusion to its discussion of the theological and ecclesial dimensions of chastity. According to the chapter documents, these are values that need to be rediscovered in the life of every Salesian.

A genuine religious community — fruit and support of chastity, sign and anticipation of the kingdom whose advent and fullness we await — is an ideal that the members of every renewed Salesian community must strive after, as the members live and work together day by day. The loftiest eschatological realities of christianity are made present and visible in a prophetic and ex-

³⁰ Cf. C72, article 78; *Special General Chapter*, articles 569-570.

pressive manner in the Salesian community that lives its vocation to consecrated chastity.³¹

Closing reflections on the Constitutions of 1972

There are striking differences in theological language on chastity between the 1972 constitutional text and the earlier version. First of all, and this is in keeping with the tone of the entire document, the use of the first person plural through much of the discussion invites the reader (presumably the Salesian religious himself) to ownership. These are no longer norms to be followed, but a life-style that is described as fully in process. When applied to chastity, this active tone in the 1972 text removes virtue from the realm of caution, and affirms the naturalness of the growth process it describes.

A second major difference is to be found in the stress on relationships. The 1966 *Constitutions* warned against visiting friends. The interim *Constitutions* of 1972 states that friendship and family spirit within the community are necessary to living one's commitment to chastity.

The old rule stressed confession, prayer of petition, and exact fulfillment of duties. The 1972 version, in the wake of Vatican II and the special general chapter, speaks of being nourished by God who is lovingly present. This text offers the image of a God who enters into relationships, rather than one who needs to be stormed by incessant invocations.

The social structure of community and mission, of serving the young who are loved by Christ rather than just the victims of human passion, shows a more confident understanding of the world, of human nature, and of chastity. All is seen in terms that are consistent with the teaching of Vatican II, particularly of the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which builds on the premise that the call to holiness is the universal vocation.³²

³¹ *Special General Chapter*, article 571.

³² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 39-42.

Following the Chaste Christ: Constitutions of 1984

As in 1972, the renewed *Constitutions* promulgated in 1984 offer a small unit on chastity. There are a total of 480 words in five articles. C84's articles 80 to 84 match articles 75 to 79 of the 1972 edition, with some small changes which polish the language somewhat. The final article (80) of the 1972 rule, which treated the eschatological dimension of chastity, has been cut out completely in the definitive rule.

1972	Part 3 Our Consecration	1984	Part 2 Sent to the Young in Communities Following Christ
75.	The evangelical significance of our vow of chastity	80.	Gospel significance of our chastity
76.	Chastity in the Salesian mission	81.	Chastity and the Salesian mission
77.	The Salesian mission demands a mature chastity	82.	Chastity and human maturity
78.	Chastity and community life	83.	Chastity and community life
79.	Means for preserving and developing chastity	84.	Attitudes and means for growing in chastity
80.	Sign and anticipation of future goods	-	

The preceding table compares the titles of the chastity articles in the two documents. While the titles may or may not be considered an integral part of the normative text, their rewording does offer an insight into mentality changes which took place between 1972 and the definitive text.

These subtle changes render the presentation more dynamic, more positive than the former version. The language of each of the five articles has been polished as well, though the actual content differs little from that laid down in 1972. Important changes have taken place, which go beyond wording.

The *Constitutions* of 1972 situated chastity in its section entitled "Our Consecration." The 1984 version places this discussion in the section it calls: "Sent to the Young — In Communities — Following Christ." Nor is chastity treated as an isolated unit, but is found within the chapter entitled "Following Christ, obedient, poor and chaste:" a chapter which considers various theological and spiritual dimensions in "following Christ" before discussing the traditional evangelical counsels. This indicates a development in Salesian thinking.

We are struck by the relational context. Chastity is ascribed first of all to Jesus Christ, who is described with the words of Vatican II as "virginal and poor, redeemed and sanctified mankind by his obedience." Chastity is an integral part of following Christ, and it is only in response to his love that the

"surrender" to God and commitment "to a form of life based entirely on gospel values" is possible to those who follow him.

Continuing in this vein, we see that "following Christ" means a life steeped in the Beatitudes. There are no longer references to "following Christ more closely," but to lives that proclaim the Gospel. The counsels enable one to become a living witness of God's Word, and a balanced chastity on the part of the Salesian religious, we are told, allows the young to respond to God's love. Loving kindness and a life according to the Beatitudes are one.³³

The order of listing the evangelical counsels has again changed. Obedience takes the first position in the trinomial, followed by Poverty, with Chastity in the final slot. The placement is a return to the order adopted by Don Bosco in *all* his constitutional texts from 1858 to 1875.³⁴ Beyond this, chastity is called the "sign and stimulus of love" — words from Vatican II that suggest the ministerial dimension of freeing the religious for service.³⁵ Chastity here receives a clearly Salesian explanation when we are told it "enables us to become all things to all."³⁶ The idea that chastity fosters personal growth while encouraging deep friendships almost seems to have sacramental implications in these descriptions.

The key to understanding Gospel chastity is given by the biblical quotation that introduces the unit. This too has changed. The 1972 *Constitutions* quoted Matthew's gospel (19:11): "It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it has been granted" — a phrase which may or may not be reassuring and is certainly open to dispute.³⁷ In 1984, the new *Constitutions* cite St. Paul's letter to the Romans (8:38-39): "I am sure that

³³ Cf. *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales* (Rome: SGS, 1984), article 15, article 62 [hereafter, this renewed edition of the Salesian constitutions will be cited in the notes as "C84"].

³⁴ Cf. *Cost SDB*, 82-83; 92-111.

³⁵ C84, article 83. The phrase, "sign and stimulus," comes from *Lumen Gentium*, no. 42. Here again, translations can derail reflection. The English text states: "Perfect continency for the love of God is an *incentive to charity*, and is certainly a particular source of spiritual fecundity in the world." C84 uses language that is more in keeping with the official Latin text of this Vatican II document: "Haec perfecta propter Regnum coelorum continentia semper in honore principio ab Ecclesia habita est tamquam *signum et stimulus caritatis*, ac quidem peculiaris fons spiritualis foecunditatis in mundo." [Italics mine].

³⁶ C84, article 83: the phrase "all things to all" is a Pauline phrase (1Cor 9:22) used by the liturgy to describe Francis de Sales.

³⁷ Though Mt 19:11 was often used in the past to reflect on the call to celibacy in religious life and priesthood, many scripture scholars seem to think that the passage refers to staying unmarried after separation. In any case, the line gives a theological passive: it is God who gives the capacity to remain single for the sake of the reign of God; cf. Benedict T. Viviano, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond Edward Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, forward by Carlo Maria Cardinal Martini (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 662.

neither death nor life... nor things present, nor things to come,... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." The emphasis is clearly shifted off the state of celibacy to the experience of God.

Assessing the "Tone" of the Constitutional Changes

This shift in the context of the treatment of chastity, as well as the addition of a clear presentation of the "following of Christ" and the "spirituality of the beatitudes," offers us a more integrated vision of the vow and virtue. The changes in the wording of the titles, even when the text of the individual articles remains almost identical, removes that edge of caution that colored the Salesian constitutions in 1972 and characterized the 1966 text. Chastity is not something to preserve, but something within which one grows. Furthermore, the frequent quotations from Don Bosco — from the original rule as well as other significant writings — have a way of endorsing those traditional Salesian values while integrating the Salesian vision in line with the theology and spirit of Vatican II.

If only a matter of tone, this illustrates a shift in awareness, if not structure. In the 1966 *Constitutions*, as with the original, chastity was listed among the evangelical counsels as constituting the Salesian Society whose members were "bound only by fraternal charity and simple vows." Motto offers evidence that Don Bosco himself wrote this article in 1860, and finalized the entire text on "the form of the Society" by 1864.³⁸ The Salesian Society was only five years old at the time. Don Bosco needed to show the society as a free association in the eyes of the State, and a religious congregation in the eyes of the Church, hence the clear reference to the three counsels as constitutive.

There were also pastoral considerations. Aside from Vittorio Alasonatti, the bulk of Don Bosco's original Salesians were teenagers and young adults, the oldest being Enrico Bonetti and Michele Rua, who were 23 years old in 1860. This trend continued, so that when the constitutions received definitive approval in 1874, an extremely young membership, which numbered 251 professed and novices,³⁹ was principally engaged in oratory work. Don Bosco,

³⁸ Cf. *Cost SDB*, 82.

³⁹ Don Bosco, writing to the Holy See in 1879, claimed that there were 250 members. Pietro Stella points out that there were actually 251 Salesians, if one includes all the professed members and the "registered members"—a term which applied to novices as well as older postulants. For an explanation of Don Bosco's tendency of inflating numbers, see Pietro Stella "Piccola guida critica alle Memorie Biografiche di Don Bosco: Apologia della storia, 1989" TMs [photocopy], Centro Studi Don Bosco, Roma: Università Pontificia Salesiana, 14. The same historian gives complete statistics for the total membership of the Salesian Society from 1862 to 1870 in: Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale, 1815-*

therefore, essentially wrote the rule for a small group of adolescents kept very busy in an exhausting ministry. They were motivated by the goal of the priesthood, and experienced what Salesian historians call the "family spirit" of Don Bosco's earliest works. Under these circumstances, a rule which outlined very practical "do's and don'ts" probably served the purpose, especially with regard to "the angelic virtue."⁴⁰

After 110 years, the median age hovered around 51 years old as the membership recovered its climb beyond 17,000.⁴¹ Members were at work in a wide variety of ministries and circumstances, in over 100 different cultural settings and nations. The rule needed to transmit the spirit and values of "Salesian chastity" if it were to make any sense at all. Thus, Rector Major Egidio Viganò, presenting the revised and rewritten "basic code" to the confreres, could state:

The serious and wide-ranging revision of the text was carried out by the whole Congregation over a period of many years and is the fruit of the work of no fewer than three general chapters (20th, 21st and 22nd); it ensures continuity with our origins, the ecclesial character of the Salesian apostolic consecration and the natural tendency of Don Bosco's mission to reach out to the whole world.

This reflection leads into a prayer that begins with these words:

We thank you, Father, because you have called us individually by name from every continent to be in the Church signs and bearers of your love.⁴²

1870 (Roma: LAS, 1980), 523-541.

⁴⁰ Pietro Stella demonstrates the relationship between Don Bosco's early writings for young people and his "rules" written for the Salesians. Affirmations made regarding virtue and growth in holiness for teenagers in his early ministry years are reaffirmed, with little elaboration, in his notes, texts and conferences for his religious; cf. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco*, vol. 2: *Religious Outlook and Spirituality*, translated by John Drury (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1996), 409-410. One final indication on the "youthfulness" of the early Salesians can be found in the manual prepared by the first Salesian novice director, where the novice and "young Salesian" is offered "the adolescent Jesus" as a model who is complete, specific, "and your own age." See Giulio Barberis, *Il Vade Mecum dei giovani salesiani*, reprint (Torino: Direzione Generale delle Opere Salesiane, 1965), 481-500.

⁴¹ Total membership in the Salesian Society for 1984 was: 17,605; North American membership: 449. Median age in Europe was: 51.5; median age in North America: 49.6. This data is published in La Società di San Francesco di Sales, *Dati Statistici: Capitolo Generale 23°, Allegato alla Relazione del Rettor Maggiore* (Roma: SGS, 1990). See also: Francesco Maraccani, "Avanzamento dell'età nei salesiani dell'Europa occidentale," in *Invecchiamento e vita salesiana in Europa*, edited by Cosimo Semeraro (Leumann: Elle Di Ci, 1990), 70.

⁴² C84, 5, 6.

Conclusion

The Constitutions treatment of chastity, as they treat every other aspect of Salesian community, ministerial, and religious life, has changed tremendously since the close of Vatican II. This change has been part of a global ecclesial effort to return to the sources — the Gospel and the spirit of the founder — mandated by the Council and necessitated by the enormous changes transforming the world. Yet, the leadership of the Salesian Society in both eras assure the members that the rule “is faithful to the spirit” of Don Bosco and “ensures continuity with our origins.” In the case of chastity, texts before and after the reform quote Don Bosco, highlight the relationship between religious consecration and the Salesians’ educational mission, and offer practical measures to “preserve,” “develop,” or “grow in” chastity.

Besides offering norms, the reformed text places chastity in a new context. It shows the interdependence of members who are committed to grow as persons and as Christians, stressing that the community may help or hinder one’s commitment to chaste, celibate love. On the other hand, by highlighting the following of “the chaste Christ,” celibacy is lifted out of the realm of discipline and put into the context of relationships — a relationship with Jesus, relationships with “the brothers,” and relationships with the young. Thus, religious motivation is expressed in terms that are both social and spiritual.

Finally, the cautionary whispers have disappeared. Chastity is presented as a liberating witness and sign to all people. Celibacy encourages friendship, endorses the family, and stimulates authentic love that enables human growth and “the coming of the Kingdom.”