



ACTS OF THE SUPERIOR COUNCIL

OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY

SPECIAL ISSUE IN PREPARATION FOR GENERAL CHAPTER XXI

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NOTICE

In view of the fact that this special issue of the Acts of the Superior Council contains matters of the greatest importance, it is sent to every Salesian. This is in keeping with the Rector Major's wish that each and every Salesian take his letter in this issue as addressed to him personally.

It is also his wish and recommendation that his letter be made the object of attentive personal reflection and community discussion. This will help towards the formation of a suitable spiritual climate and of a high sense of cooperation which must characterize our preparation for the coming General Chapter.

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

1.1) CONVOCAZIONE OF THE 21st GENERAL CHAPTER

Dear Confreres and Sons,

With the present letter, which for some easily understandable reasons comes out with some delay, I am making the long-awaited official announcement of the convocation of the 21st General Chapter (GC XXI).

According to art. 155 of the Constitutions and art. 99 of the Regulations I hereby announce that this General Chapter will be held in Rome at the Generalate, Via della Pisana 1111, beginning October 31, 1977. It will be preceded by a Spiritual Retreat, which will be attended by all the participating Chapter members (see 1.3 of this issue for the general program; a more detailed one will be made available in due time).

In compliance with article 100 of the Regulations, I have already appointed Fr. Raffaele Farina, Director of the "Centro Studi di Storia delle Missioni Salesiane" (Salesian Missions History Study Center) at the UPS in Rome as the GC Moderator. Also in agreement with the members of the Superior Council, I have nominated the members of the Preparatory Technical Commission which is to collaborate with the Moderator in drawing up a plan of preparation for the Chapter. As you can see from the content of this issue, both the Moderator and the Commission have already got down to some serious work.

The principal goals that we will all try to achieve with GC XXI can be summed up under the following five headings:

1. an in-depth study of the Rector Major's Report on the

state of the Congregation, which is required by art. 106 of the Constitutions;

2. a revision of the Constitutions and Regulations which were approved by the Special General Chapter (SGC) *ad experimentum* until GC XXI;

3. a study of the General Study Topic: "WITNESSING AND PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL: Two essentials of our Salesian life among the young".

This topic is proposed to the entire Congregation for attentive consideration, in order that we may draw some practical conclusions concerning the needs of our times on the matter of evangelization and our duty to meet them.

4. a study of the particular topics which are especially relevant for us at present;

5. the election of the Rector Major and his Council for the next six-year term (1977-1983).

In this issue of the Acts you will find a detailed and clear presentation of all that is necessary to set in motion the machinery in preparation for the new GC. I will therefore hold myself dispensed from needless repetition. Should any doubts or problems arise in your minds at any stage of the preparation, you are invited to present them to the Moderator who will always be available for consultation — and so will be all Superiors concerned. I only want to recommend to all of you to read most attentively the instructions that will be issued from time to time, and to follow them diligently, especially with regard to meeting fixed deadlines.

Allow me now to make some reflections that would help us to render more abundantly fruitful the work demanded of us at this particular time, i.e. the work of preparing, organizing and celebrating the next GC.

1.2) « WE ARE UNDERTAKING A MATTER OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE » (Don Bosco)

At the opening of the First General Chapter of the Congregation 100 years ago (September 5, 1876, to be exact), our Holy Founder told the few Chapter participants: “We are undertaking a matter of the greatest importance” (*Annali* I, 313).

This was very true then. But were Don Bosco to be confronted with the conditions with which we are confronted now, he would probably repeat those very words for the same, and perhaps even more valid, reasons.

The massive work of renewal of our Congregation brought about by the SGC is now behind us. (Just think of the Constitutions and Regulations — which were radically renewed while at the same time remaining faithful to the Founder’s spirit — and of the wealth of thoughts and practical guidelines — which were stored in the thick volume of the Acts of the SGC).

But the Church is asking us to move on and do something more. In her wealth of wisdom born out of many centuries of experience, she demands that a new GC be held to carefully check *whether, how and to what extent* the hoped-for renewal has been accomplished. It is for this reason that I believe we could apply also to the coming GC that note of “the greatest importance” spoken of by Don Bosco with regard to the First GC.

Even though in practice this new GC will be shorter in duration and simpler in realization than the previous SGC, which had the huge task of formulating a ‘comprehensive project’, it will be nevertheless equal to it in importance and interest for the future of the Congregation.

This Chapter is intimately connected with the former, inasmuch as it has the serious obligation of reviewing and examining all that has been accomplished in the last six years. In some way it will be a continuation of it. For it must point out its possible shortcomings and see to what extent and in what spirit the renewed

Constitutions — which, as we know, are the expression of, and the sure guide to, a conscientious evangelical realization of our vocation in all its aspects of consecration and mission — have been accepted and practised by all of us.

An opportunity for reflection

In view of the exceptional conditions present in the Church and in the Congregation during the recent years of agitation and confusion, this time for reflection is most opportune: it fills a real need.

It has frequently been said that in our Congregation no less than in the Church we today stand in dire need of clarity and certainty. This is true indeed. Were we to carry on without clear ideas and solid motivations, we would be heading down the road to deformation, involution and disgregation — to that demise of the Congregation against which Don Bosco warned us in prophetic and foreboding terms.

The SGC gave us what we needed — a set of clear ideas and sure guidelines. The next GC will take on the demanding double task of first verifying *if* and *how* this set of ideas and guidelines has been followed out in our Congregation, and then indicating new ways and means to promote and perfect initiatives which are already being carried out according to the dispositions of the SGC.

As you will see from the documentation contained in this issue, the next GC will endeavor to accomplish other tasks of great consequence for the present and the future of the Congregation, which will be referred to by the Rector Major in the coming months. This will be done both during the revision of the Constitutions and Regulations and when treating of the general study topic and other eventual subjects in the context of a realistic view of the pressing needs of the Congregation.

It is apparent that in order to fully achieve these goals or

objectives the GC must be preceded by a serious preparation. Such preparation is the responsibility of every Salesian both as an individual and as a member of a community, whatever his position.

Everybody must participate actively

I therefore wish to invite each of you most earnestly to express your love of the Congregation by your constructive contributions of experience and reflection. At this time the Congregation needs the irreplaceable support of all her children — so that she may keep young and active and, even in renewal, remain faithful to the ideal clearly delineated by Don Bosco and authoritatively approved by the Church; in other words, so that she may be the alert, consistent and fruitful congregation “*qualis esse debet*” at the present day.

In making his particular contribution, let each one place himself in the presence of God and examine facts, issues and problems under his guiding and revealing light with the sole preoccupation of promoting the vital spiritual and apostolic interests of the Congregation and of the Church. Any other motive would only lead to a destruction of the Congregation and of the reason for her existence in the Church.

Delegates must be well chosen

Every Salesian is responsible, not only in the abstract, but in a concrete and real way, for the success of the next GC. And this, first of all, by the adoption of a realistic and honest view of the true good and of the future of his Province and of the Congregation, and then by the verification and evaluation in the light of the renewed Constitutions and the SGC documents of situations, trends and practices as they exist today in our religious, apostolic, personal and community life.

But there is also another very important means of effective participation in the coming Chapter — that of choosing local and especially provincial Delegates wisely with an enlightened, straightforward and upright conscience.

What kind of men should the Delegates be? First of all, they should be men of God. Then they should be men possessing the true Salesian spirit, as proven by their action. They should be men rich in experience of Salesian life at its various levels. They should be awake and open to the issues and problems which confront our Congregation today at this historic moment of her existence. They should be men who give assurance that at meetings and gatherings they will be capable of making an effective contribution to the strengthening and enriching of our Congregation in her members and in her mission.

An all-out effort to be constructive

The participation in the GC, which everyone must feel as an obligation of love, with its consequent responsibilities, will prevent a weakening in the structure of the Congregation and an evisceration of her mission — a mission today more urgent than ever. It will rather lead to progress for all her members and for the beneficiaries of her activities.

On the contrary a non-participation or an inept, inefficient and unconstructive participation would be a form of desertion, of lack of concern and love... After all, let's remember: "*L'assente ha sempre torto*", the uncommitted are always in the wrong.

Moreover a participation would be negative and harmful if it were prompted by ideas which have been rejected or condemned by the Magisterium of the Church or of the Congregation, or if it were based on experiences which have been proved deviant and unsuccessful in the past.

We surely need to become stronger and more effective. To this end we must also bring to our participation in the Chapter

a lively concern and an all-out effort to be constructive with that sense of sound realism which accompanied our Founder in all his undertakings.

Not so much new documents as rather an evaluation of the renewal accomplished

The new GC, so closely bound up with the SGC, has a tremendous need to be clear and practical.

As we know, its task is not to make a new Special Chapter nor to elaborate new doctrinal documents, but to evaluate in all honesty whatever has been achieved as a result of the rich doctrinal teaching of the SGC. In other words, it aims at finding out not only in what manner the renewed Constitutions and Regulations have been psychologically accepted, but especially how truthfully they have been implemented in the daily lives of the members and communities. It aims at finding out the methods, ways and means that the experience of these years has suggested, and which of them should be adopted to actuate what unfortunately may have remained only on paper... It aims at finding out how to fulfil, perfect and correct any eventual carelessness, omission or distortion that may prevented our communities from achieving the progress intended by the SGC.

Courage, strength and prayer are needed

All this important and irreplaceable work requires a clarity of discernment which only pure and dedicated hearts, solely concerned with the interests of the Congregation, can obtain through prayer from him who is the source of light and discernment for those who grope in the dark.

We need *courage* first of all — the courage to tackle our work with that typically Salesian élan which is indispensable if we

are to move in the right direction with the process of renewal in our Congregation.

Then we need *strength* — if we are to honestly recognize whatever mistakes may have been made, and if we are to come up with the right corrective measures for any deviations or false and harmful interpretations we may have fallen into.

It is therefore necessary for all of us to have recourse to *prayer*. All together we should create in every community an atmosphere of prayer — that genuine prayer in which with simple and deep faith, with humility and love we talk with God and listen to his Word as he manifests his Will when we are well disposed as individuals and communities.

Consequently, Provincial Chapters should be prepared and carried out in a deep spirit of prayer. To this end let an adequate prayer program be organized in each Province. Let animators be chosen, who by their experience and example will be effective guides to all the confreres during the Chapter preparation. Sincere and lively faith is indeed a *conditio sine qua non* for the attainment of that spirit of discernment which enables us to see people and things, problems and solutions in the light of God and of his interests — and his interests cannot but coincide with those of the Congregation. The same atmosphere of prayer will be needed to an even greater degree at the GC, and we will make every effort to create it.

Without this personal and community prayer we would easily run the risk of being dominated, albeit unconsciously, by views, values and goals other than and perhaps even contrary to the eminently supernatural, apostolic and Salesian views, values and goals of the Chapter.

The future is in our hands

As we move towards this Chapter which is so full of possibilities, positive and negative, for the future of our Congregation,

I am sure that Don Bosco would want to repeat to us the same words he addressed to the First Chapter delegates: "We are undertaking a matter of the greatest importance".

Yes, the future of our Congregation is in many respects truly in our hands, because God never does our work, never plays our parts. On the contrary, he *needs* men, he wants to be helped by men.

I feel that the life and the future of our Congregation are perhaps more in our hands today than they were one hundred years ago, when Don Bosco with that small but faithful flock of followers was laying the foundations of what was to become a great living monument in the Church of God.

The future of the Congregation, if we look at the signs of the times, appears rich in well-grounded hope. This must stimulate us to find bold and effective answers to the challenges of the coming decades. It will be up to us to create the conditions necessary for these answers which the new generations of youth will be eagerly, though perhaps unconsciously and confusedly, awaiting from us.

A hundred years ago Don Bosco was urging his sons to unity with these words: "If we are united in the name of the Lord, we can be certain that he will be in our midst and will dispose everything in such a way that it will all turn out for his greater glory" (*Annali* I, 313).

This sincere and loving union of hearts is what Don Bosco wants of us today, and this is what will ensure God's presence among us and our ability to become in today's Church and world effective instruments of salvation on behalf of youth — which today is perhaps more in need of help than it was in Don Bosco's time.

Under Mary's protection

Finally we should also note Don Bosco's ever-present Marian touch. "At this time we intend to place our Chapter under the

special protection of Mary Most Holy", he said on the same occasion. "Mary is a light to the blind. Let us pray to her that she may enlighten our feeble minds throughout these meetings" (*ib.*, 314).

Dear Confreres, let us admit that we too in the presence of so many problems and complicated issues that challenge us feel like blind men groping in the dark. We need a guiding light, a sure and steady point of reference. We need calm and serenity of mind. In the midst of the present-day whirlwind of ideas and attitudes in life, Don Bosco's invitation to the First Chapter delegates is most timely: "Let us invoke Mary, Star of the sea".

With our eyes fixed on her with purity of intention and filial confidence, let us set out on this capítular journey under Mary's protection. She will make it safe and successful for us. She will make it bear those spiritual and apostolic fruits which were Don Bosco's only goal in life and which are still his only fatherly wish for us.

Wishing you a fruitful preparation for the GC and assuring you of a fraternal remembrance in my prayers, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Fr. LOUIS RICCERI

Rector Major

1.3) TWO ADDITIONAL NEWS ITEMS

I feel I should add two news items to this letter.

First of all, I wish to say a word of thanks and sincere appreciation to all the Provinces and Communities which, out of an admirable sense of solidarity, came to the assistance of the earthquake victims in *Friuli*.

As all of you must know by now, some of our houses in that region have suffered considerable damage in their building facilities. Fortunately there were no victims among Salesians. On the

other hand, since disaster struck, our Fiulian confreres have been doing everything in their power to relieve the severe discomforts and meet the various needs of the thousands of people, especially the young, who live in the area.

Secondly, a happy news item is the nomination and episcopal ordination of two of our confreres:

— *Msgr. Fabio Mamerto Rivas Santos*, first residential bishop of the new Diocese of Barahona in the Dominican Republic, and

— *Msgr. Antonio Maria Javierre Ortas*, Titular Archbishop of Meta and Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.

His hometown of Huesca (Spain) being a relatively short distance away, I was able to participate in person with many ecclesiastical and civil authorities and many confreres especially from Spain at his ordination in that city.

From these pages we reiterate to Msgr. Javierre our sincere congratulations and our best wishes: may his service to the Church, accepted in a spirit of Salesian 'availability' in such a momentous and delicate area be very fruitful.

We also congratulate our dear Msgr. Rivas. He is leaving his post as Master of Novices to take up the far from easy responsibility of a new diocese which, from the viewpoint of evangelization is still mostly untilled soil. He will need all his zeal as a true son of the Church and of Don Bosco. We wish him well and give him the support of our prayers.