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1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Father Egidio VIGANO'

THE CHALLENGE OF SYNOD 80

"THE CHALLENGE OF SYNOD 80" - 1. The recent Episcopal Synod - 2. The importance of the family theme - 3. Inspirational highlights of the Synod - 4. Two basic principles: love and life - 5. How our pastoral and educational commitment is affected: The mystique of kindness; Updating pastoral and moral theology; Activity within the local Church; Our influence in culture and education; Importance of sex education; Pre-nuptial catechumenate; Concept of "The Domestic Church"; New concepts regarding the importance of women - 6. Close link between family and consecration - 7. The family spirit.

Dear Confreres,

The recent earthquake catastrophe that struck vast areas of southern Italy has caused immeasurable sorrow and dismay; it also set off an explosion of solidarity and Christian charity that gives the heart much cause for hope. The Holy Father's visit to the stricken zones was a source of great comfort and a moving invitation to prayer and co-operation.

Throughout Italy, Europe, and indeed the whole world, the Salesian Family has played an active part in the Church's efforts, with its prayer, practical and generous help and reconstruction. We have nothing but admiration for the Naples Province of Blessed Michael Rua who have thrown themselves into the task of succouring the needy. We assure them of our collaboration and help, especially from the other Provinces of Italy.

These tragic disasters certainly burst into our lives and shake us out of the ordinary quiet we may enjoy; they thrust before us the important values of life and the realisation of man's true destiny. They leave us querying the why's and

wherefore's; but if we pose our questions in a spirit of faith we shall find our answers in work, confidence and hope.

Jesus Christ has given us no treatise on suffering: but he has left us his wonderful example whereby he transformed suffering, accepting even his passion and death and thus opening up for man the vision of his resurrection.

May our prayer and work ever be in Christ; let us renew our solidarity and union with our brothers whom the earthquake has so grievously afflicted.

1. The recent Episcopal Synod

From 26 September to 25 October, with nine other Superiors General, I had the great grace of being called to participate in the Synod of Bishops as they discussed the DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD. I consider it well worth while to devote this letter to the significance of "Synod 80" and what it means for us Salesians. It was an ecclesial event that will have wide repercussions. Two years of preparation went into it, 213 Synodal Fathers participated; there were 43 observers (including 16 married couples) and 10 consultants in theology, ethics, demography and medicine. Altogether there were 164 papers read and 62 documents presented; 11 language working-groups assembled for more than a week, each preparing a written résumé of suggestions; 43 propositions were drawn up and approved by vote; a special Message was composed, Cardinal Ratzinger delivered two important addresses, several thoughtful homilies were preached

by the Holy Father, and finally half a dozen documents (the fruits of the Synod) were presented to the Holy See. (They included preparatory instructions, a working document, introductory report, a résumé of the papers presented in the hall, reports of the working-groups, and finally the propositions of the Synod.) These will form the basis of an *Apostolic Exhortation* similar to "Evangelii Nuntiandi" and "Catechesi Tradendae." Throughout the Synod the Faithful showed their interest and solidarity by offering prayers and good works for the special help of the Holy Spirit.

The particular task of a synod is to set up guidelines for the lives and apostolic activity of the People of God throughout the world. Hence Religious Institutes, especially those of the active life, are very much involved. We Salesians, with our specific commitment to the apostolate of youth, must see the Synod as an invitation to examine our work in the light of the synodal findings and according to the directives of the Bishops united around the Successor of Peter.

Much of the agenda was of a pressing and problematical nature: the inculturation of Christian teaching regarding marriage and the reading of the signs of the times; principles of sexuality and the reformulation of ethical and spiritual directives; the importance of the indissolubility of marriage and the situation of divorcees; the teaching and perfecting of "Humanae Vitae" and reasons for birth-rate control; the mutual demands of faith and sacrament for the validity of marriage; problems and prospects in mixed marriages; the true meaning of the promotion of women; the heinousness of abortion; the education of children; and the social and cultural function of the family, etc.

The vast array of problems makes it obvious that there is a compelling need to open up cultures to Gospel influence, especially in regard to the disquieting concerns of sexuality that are so significant and dramatic in the present-day development of mankind. These will not be solved by ingenuous and outmoded simplifications that insist solely on norms that were formulated in another type of culture. We need to be aware of and accept the greatly increased complexity of modern life and the increased relevance (with all its contradictory expressions) that sex manifests in today's social behaviour.

We are called on to search out the signs of the Spirit and the relevance of his Gospel message so that we may offer a wise response that can deal with the thinking of Illuminists (for whom norms of sexuality are to be decided by each individual conscience), Romanticists (who place human love on a sentimental pedestal that needs no help from ethical tenets), and Psychoanalysts (who reduce sexuality to a compulsive urge that only appears at the conscious level when assuaged).

Furthermore, the individualistic attitude to marriage and the family seem to be producing a new society that in general appears to have no interest in consistent and firm principles for marriage or the family. Hence the so-called "nuclear family" of today is extremely insecure and fragile, for a child is no longer seen as the fruit of love, a blessing, a help, but a mere rationalised addition, another responsibility, a further financial burden.

Christians everywhere anxiously await the inspired teaching of their Pastors on these modern problems.

True, at the moment of writing, the findings

of the Synod are not yet definitive. But the Bishops have given the Holy Father plenty of good clear ideas and practical conclusions for an eventual Apostolic Exhortation. By reflecting on the broad lines of the Bishops' thinking we shall be better prepared for a prompt acceptance of the new document and its directives when they appear.

2. The importance of the Family theme

As the Synodal Fathers examined the duties and problems of the family in the modern world, two opposite poles emerged: the profound values and grand future development that belongs to every family; and its practical problems and limitations.

— In the first place the Synod emphasised the divine plan that assigns to the family a scope that is vast, beautiful and compelling: marriage is an alliance of love; the hearth is the primary cell where society takes its form.

Seen in this important aspect, it is clear that the theme was not just chosen on the spur of the moment from a list of problems all more or less of equal urgency. The family is not simply a *theme* forming part of a five-year schedule for synodal discussion — one of the problems to take in hand and solve because it is next on the list. It is a very personal, central and indispensable *reality* in civic and ecclesial activity. To quote from a Synod paper: "Modern man is beset by a distressing accumulation of problems; and the family is not simply one more of these problems. The Church has considered it proper to devote a specific Synod to the Family because it claims a privileged place, a starting point for tackling the overall problems

of our world of today. We do not plan to present people with a number of formulated truths on certain specific aspects of the family: no, we wish to illumine anew its reality and significance in the light of the God-family who created us in his image, who sent his only-begotten Son on earth to shed his blood and make us the family of God, a family of sons and brothers. The family is the lever we need to ease the world Godwards and renew its hope. It is a tiny unit, but it possesses a greater energy than the atom. From the humble littleness of millions of homes the Church can renew the might of love needed to become the sacrament of unity among men" (Bp Francis Cox, 14-10-80).

In fine, the theme of the family is not just a discussion topic: it is a privileged vantage-point for more practical and intelligent thinking and planning in our overall apostolate according to God's master-plan.

Dear confreres, this is an aspect that is of the deepest importance for us.

— The second element emphasised by the Synod dealt with the limitations and many distressing situations that confront the family.

The family is not an "absolute"; it was not created for itself, but for *Man* who must develop and achieve his happiness in the Kingdom of God. There is a wealth of significance in the Gospel behest that we be ready to leave all, even our family, for the sake of the Kingdom.

Conjugal love is genuine only when it can reach out beyond the confines of the home. In the long spiritual journey of the Church the family must be open to other values; for instance, it must, paradoxically, be able to appreciate and further the principle of virginity — which, after all, witnesses

to that final goal according to which sexuality itself must be perfected.

When one looks at the facts (and unhappily this holds for all continents) it must be admitted that the family is only too often subjected to political contempt, cultural subjugation, economic oppression and moral sickness. Rather than being the vital and renewing nucleus of society, the family is a victimised unit of society in need of liberation and help.

In view of so many distressing reports, and the fact that fundamentally the family has rights and basic functions before the State and society, the Synod was concerned with formulating the elements of a future basic charter, a Code of Rights. This could be an inspiration for possible renewal projects in democratic States, and duly accepted by intermediary bodies — including Religious Institutes.

3. Inspirational highlights of the Synod

Working as a member of the Synod, I had the opportunity of witnessing a number of vital aspects in one of the most impressive events in the mystical life of the Church. I have made a note of some of these points and they may help us towards a more ecclesial awareness of an event that often reached people only through the media — and the latter's judgement and reporting is usually made against a background very different from the transcendent backdrop of our faith.

— It was a great experience to observe the progressive collegiality of the bishops. For twenty centuries history has recorded a profession exclusive to the Church and ever new and unique: it is the

ministry of Pastor exercised by Bishops in communion with the Successor of Peter. This is a role forged by the Incarnate Word; it makes judgements and offers its teaching on all that is human (sex, culture, economy, politics); it never ceases to be pastoral, nor does it identify itself with any specific sector; it illumines all people with the truths of Revelation researched and presented in the variegated wealth of a practical cultural pluralism. There was general satisfaction at the good progress made in this collegial ministry: there was clear agreement on principles and the requirements of faith, together with a wealth of cultural divergencies.

— I was conscious, furthermore, of the utter importance of the Church's Magisterium in the life of faith. *Our belief is ecclesial!* Between our faith and historical and scientific facts which it can make use of (Scripture, Creed, scholarly and enlightened documentation, the different branches of theological sciences) there is a basic area we must hold to if we would avoid deviations and subjectiveness: it is the *Communion of Believers* that is guided by Peter, the Apostles, and their Successors. Christ has not made our faith dependent on the study of documents, however weighty they may be: it rests on the living testimony of credible persons chosen, enlightened and assisted by him.

In this sense I was struck by the competent discernment and the lively permanence of the Magisterium when dealing with difficult matters subject to the searching spotlight of the new human disciplines. For instance, sexuality and fertility were presented by the Synodal Fathers with unanimity and in the light of the enduring teaching of "Humanae Vitae." It was stated, however, that there was a pastoral need for the Encyclical's

validity to be argued in a manner more suitable to the times.

— Another matter stressed was the special function of the Magisterium in authentically promoting and interpreting that *supernatural sense of faith* (LG 12) proper to all the People of God and spoken of in the Dogmatic Constitution “Lumen Gentium” (35).

This “faith sensitivity” cannot be deduced simply from statistics or sociological or psychological research — even though these investigations help in a deeper understanding of truth and yield practical data for a more rational planning of pastoral action. No, the “faith sensitivity” (*sensus fidei*) is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It transcends time (our creed is stable throughout the centuries) and space (our creed is stable in all cultures), since faith begins from a simple and docile heart and opens up the way to the universal horizons of Christ; just so was the testimony of the poor and humble Virgin of Nazareth (v. Synodal Propositions 2-4).

— Furthermore, the Bishops restated in a novel and original way the extraordinary and hidden *wealth of the Christian teaching on marriage*, beginning with the mystery of the Trinity, of Creation, of Christ, of the Church. Their presentation contains an abundance of pastoral teaching that predates the theological sciences and shows forth the positive function and charismatic profundity of the Magisterium in the genuine life of faith.

— The truths proclaimed by the Bishops were noticeably imbued with a *deep compassion*; for the teaching of the pastoral ministry is of its nature practical and kindly. The Synod was much exercised in this regard, for the Bishops were well aware

that the Church's prime interest is for the "man of reality", in pain and abandoned, with all his sufferings and aberrations. It is the delicate task of the pastoral ministry to achieve a sensitive balance of "saving truth" and divine compassion — not a doctrinal rectitude without kindness and understanding, nor a compassion that rejects truth.

This is an extensive area of pastoral practice, and the many who need this care were referred to by one Cardinal as the "victims of love." It is an area that calls for urgent attention and creativity.

— Finally, among the excellent proposals was one that the Synod should not be limited to a kind of clinic for family ailments, but should be able *to offer the modern world a positive message*, emphasising the wonderful values intrinsic in the divine plan. The family should be presented as an indispensable, dynamic and attractive unit, a gift from God, a small nucleus of atomic energy for every age, a cradle of renewal and improvement in culture and society.

4. Two basic principles: love and life

The Message for Christian Families promulgated at the conclusion of the Synod says succinctly: "All that we have said regarding marriage and the family can be summed up in two words: *love and life*" (Oss. Rom. 26-10-80).

These are two great principles at the centre of a renewed Christian vision of the family. The Message goes on to say that God's design "is achieved when man and woman are closely united *in love in the service of life*. Marriage is a *pact of love and life*."

Before all else, the family is called to cherish and cultivate love, "to form people in love and educate them to act with love in every human relationship, so that love reaches out to the whole community, is imbued with a sense of justice and respect for others, and is conscious of its responsibility to society" (Message).

And love is intrinsically linked with life. It brings life into being, gives it meaning, nourishes it, defends it, gives it fulfilment.

In faithfulness to this deep sense of love and life, the family in its turn "is obliged to take on a style of life contrary to current culture and mentality and common attitudes towards sexuality, individual freedom and material goods" (Message).

The transmission of life through love is at the heart of the mystery of man, the dignity of the person, the grandeur of life, the beauty and responsibility of parenthood. The Message makes special mention of love in the transmission of life as "inseparable from conjugal union"; genuine love must be "fully human, total, exclusive and receptive of new life" (HV 9 & 10).

The proper fulfilment of so high a mission in the harmony of these two great principles needs the grace of God and the ministry of the Church. The reinstatement of God's true plan requires a change of heart that will not be easy, doffing "the old man" and donning "the new"; but all is possible with the help of the Holy Spirit.

When we think of love and life in today's modern culture, we see how inspired and courageous is the Synod's teaching; we see how love is falsified and travestied in a thousand ways and how life is destroyed and suppressed with cold calculation and subversive or legalised violence.

Our cultures have to be radically re-evangelised. Public opinion has to be exorcised of its selfish ways and the false ideologies foisted on it. We have to do battle with a materialism that is whittling down love and life to a mere biological and chemical process. So many live in an atheistic environment, and this has given rise to an anguished bewilderment and an anti-birth mentality. The arrogant illusion that "fatherhood is dead" is undermining human society. Infertility is rife among so many today because they despise marriage and fertility. Men speak of virility and are afraid of being fathers; women boast of their womanhood and dread being mothers. Love and life have been wrenched apart and the result is that both are degraded. People no longer give a thought to love's capacity for suffering and its indispensable historical link with sacrifice; they no longer look to the Cross as the highest expression of love (*id quo maius fieri nequit* — nothing greater is possible). When love is reduced to mere gratification, all man's grand ideals of being called to conquer the world are quickly jettisoned.

This psychological catastrophe is the result of the loss of the sense of God, his fatherliness, his loving kindness, his compassion. There is no longer belief in his love for human life — that love so immeasurable that he sent his only-begotten Son among us to give himself utterly, even to the complete immolation of the Paschal sacrifice.

Rightly did the Synod concentrate on the family itself and deal not only with ethical problems but with the renewal of a Gospel mystique, family life in the Holy Spirit. Indeed, morality without spirituality is lifeless, whereas the Holy Spirit heartens, enlivens, opens up new horizons and

energies — there is no room for discouragement.

Here then lies our post-synodal pastoral work (and it is urgent and complex): today's culture must be imbued with the Gospel so that the two all-important basic principles may be resurrected — love and life, and ways and means must be found to do this for the family. Unhappily we realise that there are so many sad situations where a substitute must be found for the family; and then it is a case of our being able to interpret its special spirit and sublime mission.

5. How our pastoral and educational commitment is affected

It would be well now to note certain practical directives proposed by the Synod that call on us as Religious educators to examine our areas of concern and our pastoral obligations.

Rather than a lengthy dissertation, it is more to the point to present a clear and concise list of the main pastoral duties that affect us. I suggest the following points as of particular importance for us Salesians.

The mystique of kindness

In our efforts to achieve an apostolate of the family (through our youth apostolate), we must begin as the Synod did with a positive message of hope based on the all-important values God has planned for all families. We must see the good there is in all hearts, and be sensitive, understanding and constructive in our attitude to the laws of growth and the need to take things gradually. This gradualism must be based on kindness and compas-

sion; it certainly does not mean a sentimental "peace at any cost." Compassion is not meted out solely with the ladle of justice; but neither must we close an eye to evil, to injury, to scandal, to insult (v. Dives in Misericordia 14).

In the closing homily of the Synod the Holy Father stated that "the so-called 'law of gradualism', or moving by degress, cannot be taken to mean 'gradualism of the law', as if divine law for mankind and different situations were prescribed in various degrees and forms" (v. Oss. Rom. 26-10-80).

The Pope's recent encyclical, "Dives in Misericordia", is a help in developing this necessary attitude. "The true and proper meaning of mercy does not consist only in looking with understanding and compassion at moral, physical or material evil: *mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value and promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil in the world and in man.* Understood in this way, we see mercy as Christ's fundamental messianic message and the force behind his mission" (DM 6).

In this light, kindness becomes the spring of hope.

Updating pastoral and moral theology

New developments in culture, human sciences and faith call for an overhauling of our pastoral principles. Especially do we need to update our moral theology and the social teaching of the Church, and we must set about it in a serious and well-balanced manner, in fidelity to the Magisterium and with the help of carefully chosen and scholarly masters. We could make a start by studying the

forthcoming Apostolic Exhortation and the valid comments that will follow it.

Our updating must be guided by truth, as the Holy Father remarked in his closing synodal homily: "Charity must be built on truth. This principle holds for the family and the pastors who work for the family. It is of paramount important to realise that the charity that is the essence of the Christian family cannot be achieved without a life based on truth. All lay, priestly and religious members of the Church whose task it is to collaborate in this activity can only succeed when their efforts are founded on truth. It is truth that liberates, truth that directs, truth that opens the way to holiness and justice" (Oss. Rom. 26-10-80).

This is indeed that "saving truth"; the Magisterium is its warranty and welcomes all the past and present stimulating progress the human sciences have brought to it.

Enlightened and pedagogical competence in the subtle field of moral theology was always close to the heart of Don Bosco — as is clear from his post-ordination studies at the Convitto — and it forms an important part of our tradition as educators and confessors.

Pastoral renewal requires that we study, update and fathom the meaning of "the truth that saves."

Activity within the local Church

One of the practical results of the Synod will be that every diocese will have to rethink its joint apostolate with a view to a family renewal, dealing primarily with the restoration of its Christian identity, and then with the responsible acceptance of its varied and grave duties.

I had occasion to present a paper myself to the Synod (v. page 47), and stressed the need for some educative scheme for the overall joint apostolate, having due regard for the spirit and suggestions of "Mutuae Relationes." The application of the criteria therein could gather up the many pastoral talents and activities of the different charisms in the local Church and channel them towards a more efficient tackling of the various problems.

This appeal must not find us deaf and passive, but full of activity in promoting collaboration between parents and the Church's educators.

Our influence in culture and education

Our evangelising mission is chiefly concerned with the cultural area in the field of education, and therefore particularly in the school and the media. The Synod made a clear and urgent call for imbuing cultures with the Gospel and helping the young to develop strong Christian principles in our present parlous cultural pluralism. This should be treated as one of the most important duties we owe to the family. Besides the various papers read at the Synod, four of the forty-three Propositions approved by the Bishops refer to this grave obligation and its vast social and ecclesial impact.

Proposition 26 states that "the responsibility of education belongs primarily to the parents and is the main duty or mission (munus) of their conjugal ministry — indeed a duty that is irrevocable and inalienable".

When making his initial address, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger even affirmed that in a situation

of pluralism and cultural transition, the important question should be asked anew just what exactly education is: for these days it can no longer be interpreted from the point of view of an "established society." He added that, given the actual situation and mission of the family today, "education is essentially the development of genuine love; all education must lead to love" (Paper 4).

We must indeed make the family a "school of love"; and all our educational institutions must look for ways of promoting the co-responsibility of the family. Indeed Proposition 29 of the Synod foresees that the Catholic school will undergo substantial change in this regard.

Importance of sex-education

One of the human values that the Synod examined was sexuality. Today there is need for a more updated and objective teaching that will do away with a kind of Manicheism that treats sex as a sort of superstitious taboo. The Synod saw sex as an extraordinary gift of God that permeates the whole person and imbues him with a social energy that enhances his capacity for relationship. It must not be reduced to a mere genital function. It is an inalienable and integral aspect of man who is created in the image of God, an essential element of all personal existence. There is no true education for love that excludes sexuality.

On the other hand it is also true that from mankind's earliest beginnings the ravages of sin have impaired this essential goodness. Modern society's erotic deviations are an abundant confirmation of this.

If Paul VI's "civilisation of love" is ever to

eventuate, a way must be found to provide sex-education that is genuine and Christian. Unhappily certain modern ideologies and materialistic teachings falsely parading as scientific have reduced sex to mere biology with no moral import, and at the free disposal of the individual according to his whims. This sort of "sex-education" would be mere physiology and psychology, a kind of bodily hygienics for teaching how to exploit sex without risking responsibility.

"Against such errors", said Cardinal Ratzinger, "the Church must insist on an education that treats sex as an integral part of a united and undivided man. Such an education therefore is and always must be an education for responsibility, for fidelity; in a word, an education for love" (Paper 3).

Bearing in mind the delicacy of Don Bosco's Preventive System in this matter, and that sex-education is primarily a parent's duty, we Salesians must be thoroughly up to date and positive in the Christian vision of the whole man, especially in regard to sex — and our Pope John Paul II makes this very clear in his frequent addresses. Thus we shall insist on a true sex-education which goes beyond physical and psychological aspects and stresses the moral and spiritual dimensions as a growth in love.

Let us never forget that we have a charismatic tradition of a unique system of education; while devoting its services to love and life, it gives primacy to delicacy, moral sensitivity, and prevention of harmful deviations in educating for chastity.

Pre-nuptial catechumenate

Another of the Synod's emphases was the need for a more careful pre-marriage apostolate (Proposition 35), and the drawing-up of a suitable pastoral directory for this purpose. After all, the more significant vocations in the Church (such as the priesthood, religious life and various apostolic ministries and commitments) all have carefully regulated preparation in the seminary, novitiate, or other appropriate places of training; whereas, speaking generally and factually, Christian marriage, with its many difficult and grave responsibilities towards the basic values of human life, is unfortunately lacking in an adequate formation and preparation. We should be concerned not only with the necessary remote education, but also with a well-organised proximate preparation — a kind of immediate pre-nuptial catechumenate.

This should be a specialised section of the youth apostolate, oriented towards conjugal love and responsible parenthood. Qualified Catholic layfolk could be co-opted to help in this field.

— This "marriage catechesis" should include serious instruction on "family spirituality" — which was the subject of much concern in the synodal discussion on the theology of marriage and the spouses' hitherto rarely mentioned vocation to sanctity. This spirituality is not necessarily (even in the Latin Rite) identified with the spirituality of the laity, though it is closely linked to it. Hence the findings of the various language-groups in this regard were written up in a lengthy Proposition (No. 36): themes such as the following need to be studied and developed — spirituality of creation, spirituality of the covenant, spirituality of the

Cross, spirituality of the Resurrection, and spirituality of witnessing to a characteristic conjugal charity.

This is an extensive area that calls for our collaboration, and we can bring to it the solid help that belongs to our specific consecration.

— Furthermore, the *concept of the "Domestic Church"* spoken of in "Lumen Gentium" was developed by the Synod: the family's role in bringing the mystery of Christ into the home; and its equally important duty to issue forth from the home in the apostolic zeal of Christ to make a practical ecclesial contribution in the service of neighbours and society.

This makes all kinds of animation possible: ascetic, mystic, liturgical, catechetical; also faith-development in the home, prayer renewal, Scripture reading, appreciation of the Rosary, preparation for the Sacraments, Christian care of the sick, the elderly, the dying, and so on. There is also considerable scope for pastoral animation in ecclesial and social responsibilities — among neighbours, in the parish, in the municipality, in civil and political affairs, in diocesan and national apostolates, in the missions, etc. The range is indeed great, and there is room too for suitable help adapted to the different family cultural levels.

New concepts regarding the importance of women

The elucidations of love and life led to a deeper consideration and appreciation of one of the more important signs of the times: the upgrading of women. Bishop Francis Cox maintained that "the theme of woman got to the root of the crisis in modern culture. Thinkers have described our scientific and technical civilisation as one-sidedly

male. The cult of efficiency is a typically male failing. An old proverb has it that man builds a house and woman transforms it into a home" (14-10-80).

"Women's Lib" has wrought havoc with certain important principles and they must be reinstated and promoted. Woman possesses a special talent for humanising and personalising relationships and environments (v. Puebla 848); she is the harbinger of hope for both the Church and society. To *love* she brings intimacy and generous self-sacrifice, and *life* she mothers, cradles and nurses.

The Synod came up with a number of very practical proposals for the liberation of woman and the proper social appraisal of her specific mission. They envision the overcoming of the widespread prejudice that her independence must be won by a career outside the home and that housewife duties are to be despised. It was stated that the promotion of woman has nothing to do with "masculinization", but is achieved by developing and maturing her femininity.

Proposition 16 states that "in promoting the rights of women, motherhood and home duties must be put on a par with public and professional careers. There will have to be an ever-growing merging of these duties in cultural and social evolution. There is need of a new *theology of work* to clarify its meaning in Christian life and its relation to the family."

We must reflect well on Christian tradition in order to collaborate in a social and ecclesial renewal in all the varied modes of life and activity.

Let us stir up our devotion to Mary: she will open up for us new areas of growth and development in this field (v. Marialis Cultus, esp. 34-39).

6. Close link between family and consecration

There is another aspect that is of special significance for us.

It was comforting to note that both in Cardinal Ratzinger's initial address and Cardinal Pironio's incisive remarks and in the telling interventions of other synodal members the deep mutual respect there is in the Church between marriage and virginity, the wedded state and the consecrated life. In pagan societies (both before and after Christ) there is no place of honour for virginity. One could say that when conjugal fidelity is not revered and practised, neither are the merits of virginity recognised; when sex is not seen as a great gift of the Creator, virginity is not recognised as a great charism of the Redeemer. In Christianity, on the other hand, the finest gift a family can offer is virginity for Christ's Kingdom. From love and the conjugal life blossoms forth this loveliest flower of life and love: Christ and Mary were the family's greatest contribution to humanity, to life, and to love's highest expression.

The consecrated life helps the family to be Christian, to overcome temptations against love and to understand and accept life's difficulties. "Where virginity is accepted as a way of life", Cardinal Ratzinger continues, "the infinite value of man is clarified — not only because of his noble ability to transmit life, but specifically because of the sublime fact that he is a person. Furthermore, living a celibate life, man is called to a special relationship with the community; he achieves a new freedom whereby he lives not only for himself and his close ones but also for innumerable others in

their different families. With them he establishes a new and profound communion rightly called the 'Family of God'." (Paper 2)

The past decade has witnessed a deep crisis in both the family and the consecrated life: love faces increasing infidelity and self-gratification; and life, sterility and old age. This problem has affected both the married state and the consecrated life. Family ties and the bonds of religion are falling apart, and the two great principles of love and life face a devastating corrosion.

One of the sad results is the great number of infants, children and teenagers who have no experience of the irreplaceable value of family life. The Church is sent to mother these too and teach them to know God as their Father. Hence the need of many good souls to take the place of mothers: and thus the need for more vocations. Indeed the Synod pointed out the urgency and renewed spirit of understanding between married and consecrated souls that is making for a much more effective vocation-apostolate.

As the "Domestic Church", the family is the cradle of vocations to the consecrated life. Indeed this is one of its main duties, and it should have the help of priests and religious in the many difficult tasks and problems that are increasing because of the new cultural and social situations.

The Synod puts before us these important pastoral aims: to develop this spiritual and pastoral relationship, to realise the increasing social influence of the Gospel principles proper to the various states of life, to appreciate the complementary characters of different kinds of vocations, to cherish and foster the many and various gifts of the Spirit in the Church, to be true to our Charism by collabor-

ation and communion. This is surely food for our meditation and our good resolves.

7. The family spirit

These are brief but impelling thoughts, and it is fitting to conclude with a quick look at the important characteristic of our Salesian mission that is historically linked to the sacred heritage of the Christian family: we call it our "family spirit", and it was born in the early days of Valdocco with Don Bosco and Mamma Margaret.

Father Alberto Caviglia writes, "I believe that we shall never really fathom the fundamental cause of Don Bosco's educational system if we fail to take stock of its primary source, which was the memory, nay, the *longing to relive those early days* (A. Cav.: Vita di Dom. Sav., p. 68; Opere e scritti ed. e ined. di Don Bosco, Vol. IV; SEI - 1943).

Family environment is one of the basic postulates of the kindness of the Preventive System. "Without the family", wrote Don Bosco in 1884, "there is no affection in evidence, and unless it is plainly seen, there will be no trust. If one wishes to be loved one must make it obvious that one loves. Jesus Christ made himself little with the little; he bore our infirmities; he was the master of the family spirit" (Epistolario IV, 265).

To attain this goal, educators must have the kindly heart of Christian parents; they must make every house a home where there is understanding, loyalty, sincerity, indulgence, forgiveness, affectionate trust, a spirit of joy and spontaneity, a filial regime of discipline and gratitude. As educators we should be ever aware that it is basically in the

family that educative charism and ministry are to be found. This assumes a special importance when we think of the charges Don Bosco has committed to our care: youth — poor and abandoned. His pedagogy is geared to the “sons of the people”, the apprentices, the needy from poor and humble families, the migrants, the homeless. Again we read in Fr Caviglia’s book quoted above: “His pedagogy is for the poor, and that is the way he wanted it. The clearest of distinctions must be made between Don Bosco’s system and other systems (even famous ones) drawn up almost entirely for refined and comfortable families, or at least without the conditions of the poor in mind. Our Founder was the originator and founder of a classical system that is not just a charitable hand-out to an impoverished youngster, nor an indulgent and compassionate kindness to the poor; it is an entire and carefully thought-out system that begins with the life and psychology of the poor and empathises with them; it raises them up morally and spiritually; it uses beliefs, precepts and methods that are in harmony with the psychology and mentality of the poor. We could make bold to call it a working-class pedagogy, or at least the pedagogy of the working-classes.”

The thrust of our Salesian vocation is naturally towards the poor and the lowly. “*They are the ones who above all have need of a family*; and it was for them that Don Bosco conceived his characteristic ethos: kindness that educates in a happy united family environment” (P. Braido: *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, ed. 2, page 195, PAS-Verlag 1964).

Salesians will see the work of Synod 80 and the Holy Father as a special appeal to carry the Gospel to the working-folk in particular. Thus shall

we accomplish in union and loyalty that ideal of our Salesian mission that has justly been called "the apostolate to the young and the working-classes."

* * *

Dear confreres, whilst the Synod confirms us in our consecrated vocation and our educational mission among the working-classes, let us remember that this includes a special capacity for *animating the Salesian Family*.

I appeal to all groups who have Don Bosco as their inspiration to look forward to the forthcoming Apostolic Exhortation and accept it as a cry from the heart of the Church for all of us to dedicate to the family the spiritual energies and apostolic labours proper to each group.

We Salesians must cultivate an awareness of our "particular responsibility" (Const. 5) in regard to the various Salesian groups to which we are called to offer "our preferential spiritual service" (Reg. 30).

May the Synod's "Christian Family" theme have a privileged place in our animation and pastoral planning. May we apply to it all our inventiveness and initiative so warmly recommended by the last two General Chapters.

Our attention should certainly go by preference to our many married Co-operators, past pupils and collaborators; and to the young people preparing for marriage.

I write in the aura of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a day that has such special meaning for us Salesians. Let us pray to Mary Immaculate for help and assistance. May she ever be

our Mistress and Guide as we follow in the steps of Christ in each busy day planned and lived in the family spirit of Don Bosco.

I assure you of my prayers and wish you all a happy New Year.

Sincerely in Domino,

Father EGIDIO VIGANÒ,
Rector Major.