

acts

of the General Council of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

N. 331

year LXX

october-december 1989

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Editrice S.D.B.
Edizione extra commerciale

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THE "NEW EVANGELIZATION"

Introduction. - The 'pastoral' concern of the Council. - New frontiers, - New perspectives. - The "supreme novelty". - New doctrinal presuppositions. - New methods and language. - New kinds of workers. - New dangers too. - The indispensable interior apostolic conviction in the evangelizer. - Conclusion.

Rome, Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary
8 September 1989

My dear confreres,

The celebration of the GC23 is drawing closer. In this month of September the precapitular commission "under the responsibility of the moderator and in agreement with the Rector Major, will draw up the reports or schemata to be sent in good time to those taking part in the general chapter".¹

¹ R 113

In recent months the Acts of the various provincial chapters have been received and been subjected to analysis by the General Council. I take this opportunity of expressing my pleasure to every province at the serious way in which the work of preparing and carrying out the chapter was done with the active and fraternal collaboration of the confreres.

The theme of the education of young people to the faith is a vital one which has great urgency for the Church, and in a quite special way for us. "The Church has so much to talk about with youth",

said the Pope to us recently, "and youth have so much to share with the Church. This mutual dialogue, by taking place with great cordiality, clarity and courage, will provide a favourable setting for the meeting and exchange between generations, and will be a source of richness and youthfulness for the Church and civil society".²

² CL 46

I think it may be helpful to throw some light on so urgent a task by some general reflections of an introductory nature on the "New Evangelization" of which the Pope and the Bishops are speaking at the present day.

The "Pastoral" Concern of the Council

The absolute urgency of a new evangelization for everyone had already been proclaimed in Vatican II. We may recall the impression and reactions provoked by the opening address of Pope John XXIII: "The Christian, Catholic and Apostolic spirit of the whole world", he said, "expects a step forward. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, but the form in which it is presented is quite another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary".³

³ Address, 11 Oct. 1962

In response to this urgency emphasized by Peter's Successor the Council adopted a typically "pastoral" slant, directing all the Church's activity towards a new apostolic era.

In 1985 the Extraordinary Synod, which took place twenty years after the Council, commented on and relaunched this laborious pastoral research, ensuring its doctrinal strength and its continuity within a living Tradition: "It is wrong", we read in

the Final Report, "to separate the pastoral character of the conciliar documents from their doctrinal force, just as it is wrong to separate the spirit of the Council from its letter. Further, the Council must be understood in continuity with the great Tradition of the Church. At the same time we must accept the light which the Council has to offer to today's Church and to the people of our time".⁴

⁴ Final Report, 5

What is needed therefore is a new manner of presentation which requires a pastoral conversion, but with a strong and accurate doctrinal penetration in deep and conscious harmony with the vitality of christian Tradition under the guidance of the Apostles and their successors.

This is what was stated by the Council itself: "It is clear that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that no one of them can stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls".⁵

⁵ DV 10

The new evangelization therefore must follow the line of the Paschal and Pentecostal events, lived in the Church under the guidance of its Pastors, by cultivating a particular sensitivity to the signs of the times.

It is well to remember that with the Council the idea of "pastoral" took on a deeper meaning. It is not just one of the Church's many activities, limited to the teaching of catechism and the liturgy, but involves all work carried out for human education and advancement. Vatican II has proclaimed the nature, importance and autonomy of temporal realities, which must not be exploited but respected and fostered in line with the objectives given to

them by God the Creator; but the Council added that these realities must be made to converge in a vital synthesis which incorporates them in the evangelizing work of the Church to bring everything under one head in the mystery of Christ. It will be enough to recall, among many statements made by the Council, a very significant one from the pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et spes": "Let Christians follow the example of Christ who worked as a craftsman; let them be proud of the opportunity to carry out their earthly activity in such a way as to integrate human, domestic, professional, scientific and technical enterprises with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are ordered to the glory of God".⁶

⁶ GS 43

The pastoral aspect therefore permeates the whole of human commitment, transforming it by faith: faith, in fact, is the criterion that orientates, it is the objective which coordinates and gives to everything a Christian significance; it refers not only to the internal activity of the Church, but also to the activity that is proper to society itself: the People of God, in fact, must be the universal sacrament of salvation in the world: "To make out that any single element of human life", said John Paul II addressing the Bishops of Chile, "is autonomous with respect to God's law is a form of idolatry".⁷

⁷ Oss. Rom.
28-29 Aug. 1989

It should be noted, however, that the development of society has led in recent decades to a rapid increase in the number of new questions regarding pastoral aspects and work.

We have asked ourselves just what are the new challenges to pastoral work. The Gospel does not change; faith is always a sincere adherence to Christ; what is it therefore that gives novelty to these questions?

There is no simple reply, but I offer for your reflection some of the new circumstances to which we must face up at the present day in our evangelizing activity.

New frontiers

A first pastoral element that is new is that of human development today with its complex problems of emerging cultures and urgent social reconstruction. Today's individual, like his counterpart of yesterday, needs the Gospel, but as God's reply to new questions.

The recent Apostolic Exhortation on the lay faithful indicates in Chapter 3⁸ some frontiers which today have particular need of the light of God's word: they are new from a cultural standpoint.

⁸ CL 37-44

Let us recall them briefly, indicating the vast areas they cover: the dignity of the human person; the inviolable right to life; freedom of religion; the family, where the duty to society begins; solidarity at its various levels; political commitment for a democratic way of social life; the complex economic and social problems; and finally, as a synthesis of all the others, culture (or cultures).

What it reduces to, in fact, is the need to resolve the distressing drama of the divorce between culture and the Gospel denounced in "Evangelii nuntiandi". This means taking seriously the "turning-point" referred to by Paul VI: the Council turned towards man, and not away from him; and keeping in mind the statement of John Paul II that the path of the Church is man. The growing process of secularization and the other signs of the times must be

discerned in faith; of themselves they are ambivalent but, although inclined in fact to reductive and misleading interpretations, carry special values nonetheless and need to be opened to the light of Christ to discover the fullness of truth contained in his Gospel. Intelligence must be led back to faith, not despite culture but thanks to it.

But in evaluating the emerging culture, is there not the risk of falling into secularism? This could indeed happen if due preparation is lacking; but we must not forget that all the faithful are living in a developing world and that the "secular dimension" of the Church is inherent in its condition of being on pilgrimage in the world. On the other hand the young people who are the object of our mission (they too are part of the "laity") have to be formed in their historical environment and be able to bear witness to the christian vocation in their own obligations arising from their "secular character".⁹

⁹ *ibid.* 15

There is therefore a need to acquire all the competence necessary to respond evangelically to the questions coming from these new secular frontiers.

New perspectives

The mentality being inculcated by the developing signs of the times is prevalently directed to the future. The processes of socialization, liberation, secularization, and advancement of women, have helped to develop the idea that in projecting towards the future is expressed the deep truth of man; his natural task is to work for the transformation of the world, especially if it has been defaced by deviations and injustices. The ideologies that have appeared during the present century have

proclaimed, even in their short-lived existence and variety, the urgent need to bring about changes even at the cost of inhuman and cruel means.

It could be said that the concept of "history" that appeals at the present day refers more to the future than to the past: more than memory (which will always be useful as guidance), history is being considered as a project to be drawn up and realized; we want to feel ourselves to be active agents bringing about a better and more humane future. The feeling is growing that there is need for continual renewal. Much importance is given to concrete commitment and practical ability; analysis and development go ahead, and so a new relationship comes into being between theory and practice. In fact, the primacy of the future is linked with this centrality of the practical.

A novel perspective of this kind is not to be considered as something superficial, even though it needs due reshaping. What is of interest to us here is that such a mentality is widespread and the evangelizer must take it into account. It is a new way of looking at situations and assigning priorities; it suggests original decisions and solutions, and leads to a view of existence as a continuous task of personal and social liberation.

In a climate like this we need to find in the Gospel the incentives and appropriate criteria for the future; some rethinking must also be given and adequate explanation provided for certain fundamental values of christianity like "tradition", "observance", "indissolubility", etc. It is not that they are no longer to be considered fundamental at the present day, but the way they are expressed may give rise to the danger of rendering them watertight and obsolete, and hence unable to pass on their true and valuable content.

To give a place of prominence to a perspective of the future, to accompany it with diligent application and creativity, and to enlighten it with new ideals of growth, means changing the psychological lines of social thought, especially among young people, and this has no little influence on the search for a "new form" of evangelization which in no way impairs the integrity of the message.

It is interesting to note how this mentality opens up perspectives of new horizons: talk of war and power is giving way to talk of peace, justice, ecology, solidarity, etc., and this gives rise to the planning of various models at which to aim; social movements have arisen to proclaim the originality of this approach.

It is as though humanity was being given a second Spring with youthful imagination. It is a particularly meaningful manifestation of the deep cultural changes now in progress. By and large this is a new and exciting development.

But unfortunately, as we have already remarked, human happenings tend to be ambiguous in practice, and things that at first sight appear attractive and captivating can become changed into a fleeting utopia or disappointing deviations.

Time is not a matter of the future alone; the future itself is born of the past! Any innovation of value always has need of roots.

In any case what is important in the present circumstances is to keep in mind that because of its specific nature christianity is deeply addressed to the future, and is called throughout the centuries to be in a special way "an expert in innovations". Rightly the Fathers have said that the history of the Church consists of one new beginning after another until the final beginning is reached: throughout the

centuries the work of evangelization is always beginning and never ends.

It is pleasing to note here that Don Bosco gives us a valuable lesson in historical sensitivity, both as regards his re-reading of past experiences and his creative commitment to a pastoral activity for the future. On the one hand he studied the specific evangelizing mission of the Church throughout past centuries (we remember the history of the Church and of Italy that he wrote), and on the other, with the wisdom of the past to enlighten him, he bravely and creatively set about giving a response to the new challenges appearing in his own days; he was a pastor looking to the future, and we could even call him "utopian" in a holy sense, because he delved deeply into the new problems of needy youth and applied the inventiveness of his personal gifts and endowments and his founder's charisma to devise an adequate response to them. He was a saint raised up by the Spirit as a true prophet for the new times, and we must be able to see him as our teacher in a new beginning of pastoral work for youth.

The "supreme novelty"

But it is not enough to consider in chronological fashion the cultural innovations that accompany the development of humanity's progress. Today, as yesterday and as it will be again tomorrow, the supreme novelty of christianity remains alive, enthralling and decisive: it is the death and resurrection of Christ, a novelty which is at once historical and theological. It is not enough to recognize the exceptional nature of this event in an abstract way; it must be presented as the most important "news"

for the present day, something which amazes and renews, which has a response for the most distressing questions, which opens the life of every individual and of all human history to the transcendent: it is a matter of the mysterious eschatological dimension (i.e. of the final end, already in some sense present) which has its incidence on human cultures, enlightens them, judges and purifies them, discerns them and can foster the values emerging from them.

The new evangelization bases everything on this supreme event: the novelty *par excellence*! There has never been, nor will there ever be in the future, a novelty greater than this one; it is the yardstick for the measurement of all others; it never grows old; it is the perennially greatest wonder of God's insertion in history; it is the new creation anticipated in our old world. We have to be able to make this supreme novelty visible and communicate it to others.

When we qualify culture as "new" we are simply referring to what is emerging with the passing of time, even though it may call for a careful and renewed form of pastoral approach; but when referred to the mystery of Christ on the other hand, "new" indicates the fullness of the true and definitive novelty. It is new not because we never heard of it before, or because it is being challenged by problems that previously we did not know to exist, but because it is the wonderful vertex of all human affairs; it proclaims in fact the supreme goal of history and the source of all hope in every century. It never fails to stagger us.

"Great has been the progress in science and technology in recent years and great too have been their repercussions on humanity, but without ever being able to give a complete and satisfactory

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II to Bishops of Chile, Oss. Rom. 28-29 Aug. 1989

response to man's many questions".¹⁰ Only Christ reveals to man what in fact man really is!

To "evangelize" means in the first place to be able to proclaim the happy and pleasing news of Christ's Easter victory, which upsets and disperses the fleeting attraction of evolving novelties which soon become transformed into that boring monotony which usually characterizes the dreary existence of a civilization that is merely horizontal.

It is urgently necessary therefore that we become updated communicators of the great "news" with its tremendous historical values.

There are above all two lines of mediation which are like parallel tracks for transmitting the riches concerned: the Word of God and the Liturgy; they constitute the two paths for "returning to the sources": "Going back to the sources", the Pope has said, "means in our case going back to that same source of life which nourished the 'fervour of the saints'. We must hear therefore from the first witnesses to the Gospel the impact, novelty and vitality of that first proclamation. Let us listen to what John the Evangelist says in his first Letter: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands... we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us'."¹¹

And so the new evangelization will need a real "School of the Word" (such as that being provided by Card. Martini for the youth of Milan, or as we have tried to produce ourselves with the message of the "Youth beatitudes"), and a renewed and lived "Liturgical experience" in which everything converges into initiation to the Eucharist, as we have insisted for the Congregation on several occa-

¹¹ 1 Jn 1, 1-3. Pope's letter for XV Gen. Assembly of Religious of Brazil, Oss. Rom. 30 Aug. 1989

sions),¹² so that Christ's Passover may become always considered as the supreme novelty.

¹² cf. AGC 324,
Jan.-March 1988

The new form of evangelization must be able to lead the young to understand the great good news proposed through these two mediations, as a pedagogical strategy for initiation to the mystery.

New doctrinal presuppositions

The three novelties we have so far spoken of need a whole background of thought which will reconsider and go more deeply into the reality of salvation and its history with a renewed objective approach.

In fact the "new frontiers" call for a more exhaustive reflection on the values of the lay state in the light of the valuation of the whole of the temporal order; the "new perspectives" must be able to measure up the values of future history with the yardstick of the absolute future (eschatology), i.e. Christ's Passover as the latest news par excellence; and finally the supreme novelty of the paschal events demands a basic re-thinking of the whole mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ in history.

And so there you have three big sectors which await doctrinal reflection of a particularly renewed kind: a more updated theology of "creation"; an inviting "theology of hope", with a more involving vision of "eschatology" looking to the future from the starting point of what is always new, or rather the One who is always new; and a "theology of the Church" thought out against the background of the Council and centred on the concept of the People of God living in organic communion.

Today's evangelizer needs a deeper knowledge of these three rich doctrinal areas.

— *The "theology of creation"* must be rethought and developed starting from the notion of the lay state and giving special importance to the "anthropological turning point" enriched by the signs of the times and the progress of the phenomenological sciences. This opens up an immense area of knowledge and one which has a strong incidence on the progressive elaboration of a new culture. The nature of the lay state; the values of secularity; the harmonious laws of nature; the singular nature of human life, of its dignity and the pedagogy of its maturing process; the values and rights of the individual; the just demands of freedom; the rights and duties of the family; the nature and development of society; politics in its relation to the common good; economy and the use of goods for all; human solidarity in its many aspects; all these are vast themes that need to be studied doctrinally from a renewed theological point of view, able to contemplate things according to the creative plan of God the Father in harmony with the present development of culture.

— *The "theology of hope"* enlightens our attitudes and activities with a mentality that looks to the future starting from the supreme novelties of Easter and Pentecost, which imply the presence in history of the Holy Spirit with the gentle energy of his power. It leads to an understanding of the objective and transcendent reality of the resurrection of Christ – which is the concrete and supreme fact of the "Man-type" – as the beginning of the "new creation" in which Christ has taken on the condition of the Second Adam and the Kingship of the Lord of history.

The great interest of christian hope is the future, not a generic and transitory future, but the transcendent and definitive future of Christ. The power of the Spirit is already building in the historical future the premises and roots of the absolute future, impressing on post-paschal history a true eschatological dimension, both in the temporal order of culture and politics and in the ecclesial environment of pastoral work. Christ's Passover is like the "first mover" beginning a historical process designed to transform human reality; it is the principle of a continual renewal impelled by hope. And this opens up a vast area of reflection for the christian doctrine of action.

It has been said that the christian mystery is like "an arrow shot into the world to indicate the future", in such a way that faith must never be subjected to history and manipulated by it, but on the contrary transcends, judges and guides it.

Both the action of the laity in the temporal sphere and the pastoral action of the Church must look intelligently to the future (and all the more so when there is question of pastoral work for youth) with the light and energy of the hope that projects the supreme novelty of Easter on the future of humanity through the power of the Spirit. Christian hope pervades everything with with operative dynamism: it is not only a state of expectation but one of diligent preparation and planning; it is the tirelessness of those who work for the Kingdom; it is stronger than any reasons for discouragement; it goes with the kind of faith that is the victory which transforms the world. The light it infuses brings with it the power to make a critical discernment of all the other emerging cultural novelties and is able to evaluate plans for the future aimed at the progress of the temporal order. Even though there be a

“historical distance” between today’s culture and that of yesterday, with a consequent difference of criteria for action in the face of growing social and ecclesial complexity, the Spirit of truth is nonetheless constantly emphasizing through the Gospel new modes of christian response which emanate in an inexhaustible form from that “first mover” which is Christ’s resurrection.

In fact the supreme novelty of Easter is a dimension always present in daily affairs, in the life of faith, in works of charity, in the Spirit’s multiple initiatives, the whole life of the believer; it is the fruit of Baptism which infuses the innate energy of the new creation, and is nourished through the Eucharist by the assimilation of the body of the Risen One.

It was at one time the custom to reduce the “last things” of the future to death, judgement, hell and heaven. These are certain eschatological themes of particular importance. but they appear rather as terminals being approached than as driving forces in life: the more involving vision of the supreme paschal novelty extends eschatological considerations to the whole texture of existence lived in hope. With Easter in fact the concept of time has been changed: it is not a repetitive circle but rather a spiral through the seasons and centuries; not a straight line always pointing ahead, without knowing where it is objectively heading for; but the paradox of the “now” and “not yet”, in which there is the objective progression of history, but also at the same time its definitive goal, the new man who lives in the fullness of the two already risen again, Jesus and Mary, who as the first parents of the new humanity exert a constant influence on the development of human vicissitudes and inject

already into history the energies of the resurrection.

The theology of hope, re-thought from a paschal standpoint, will bring rich perspectives to the new evangelization.

— *Finally, the “theology of the Church”* has been substantially reconsidered and freshly presented in the documents of Vatican II. They should be studied organically, following the indications of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985. The Synod’s “Final Report” helps to develop an ecclesiology of communion which is not arbitrary and does not appear to differ from living Tradition.

The Council has put paid to a merely social reading of the Church by indicating its central character of “mystery” which makes it the “Body of Christ” and the “Temple of the Spirit” in history; it is therefore the “universal Sacrament of salvation». It is described as the “People of God” through the centuries; a “People” born in baptism with a prophetic, regal and priestly dignity, living in an organic communion constantly guided by Christ the “Eternal Shepherd” through the Pope and the Bishops, chosen as his Vicars to feed them in collegial fashion. In this People all the members have a common vocation to holiness and are committed in the one and the same evangelizing mission, but with different modes of witness and a variety of services according as they belong to the Laity, consecrated life, or exercise the ministry of Orders.

The pastoral consequences of this ecclesiological renewal are in process of realization and are at the base of the new evangelization. It is indispensable to approach this ecclesiological change with a true renewed mentality concerning the theology of the Church. Without this authentic change of per-

spective the famous "step forward" of Pope John XXIII would prove impossible.

Unfortunately recent years have seen the appearance of somewhat arbitrary ecclesiological interpretations which do not adhere to the Council's doctrine and have given rise more than once to dangerous confusion. They need to be judged with careful discernment in harmony with the living magisterium of the Pastors.

It is evident therefore from what we have said that the novelty of doctrinal perspectives, and especially of renewed theological reflection on the themes of creation, christian hope, and the Church as mystery, place a serious obligation on workers in the new evangelization to undertake careful ongoing formation.

New methods and language

For decades methodological disciplines have made great progress and are doing so still: eminent among the human sciences, especially in an era of change, is that of pedagogy, enriched by parallel progress in biology, psychology and sociology. It is true that "method" is a "means" which therefore needs to be thought out and evaluated as regards the objective and content. But it has a truly extraordinary importance in seeking the "new form" of pastoral approach and cultural dialogue referred to when one speaks of new evangelization.

Intimately linked with method is the aspect of "language". Experience shows that without adequate language (which cannot be reduced to the selection of which words to use), one cannot

communicate or transmit anything. And this has become a burning issue at the present day which can provoke a crisis for us because of our kind of mental formation and a certain lack of cultural flexibility. One need only recall that one kind of language must be used with intellectuals, another with simple and ordinary people, another in official communications, still another with those who are illiterate, etc.: it must be a language that has a grasp of the integral truth of the contents and is able to communicate it in such a way as to meet the calls of the least educated. It was in the light of this problem that St Augustine wrote his well known work "*De catechizandis rudibus*".

There is need therefore for a variety of methods and languages in view of the differences in age, culture, situations, etc. The multiplicity and variety of methods is another requirement of the "new form"; it is not a defect but a sign of pedagogical flexibility and therefore a rich adjunct to communication.

It is a case of pedagogical requirements at the service of education. The purpose must evidently be the clear transmission of the Gospel in its totality.

The methods can become defective also through the infiltration of prejudices or arbitrary theories. The temptation to mix in with them some unnecessary ideological suppositions is unfortunately a real one. The new evangelization demands a search for methods which can make an efficacious contribution to education in and of the faith, following integrally the Church's deposit of faith and ensuring the presence of well founded certainties that are well defined, simple and solid, and stronger than the rationalistic misgivings that can arise.

In this search it is important to remember that

there exists also a “pedagogical originality” which is proper to education to the faith and characteristic of it. This was emphasized by Pope John Paul II after the 1977 Synod on catechesis: “Christian identity”, he said, “which is utterly unique and may not be watered down, has for a corollary and condition a *pedagogy of faith that is no less unique and special...* The science of education and the art of teaching are under constant discussion with a view to their improved adaptation and greater effectiveness, though the results of these efforts can vary greatly. Now *there is also a pedagogy of faith...* Throughout sacred history and especially in the Gospels God himself has made use of a pedagogy which must be kept before us as a model for the art of educating in the faith. A technique is of value in catechesis only to the extent that it serves the faith that is to be transmitted and learned; otherwise it is of no value”.¹³

¹³ CT 58

The theme of method and language should represent for us, at the school of Don Bosco the Educator, a matter to which we give priority and from which we should emerge as leaders in the education to the faith of young people of the poorer classes. Our methodology will take its inspiration from that of our Founder who, in the preventive system, has passed on to us a pedagogy which is vitally and consciously tied in with the irreducible originality of revelation and the christian identity: a pedagogy which aims at nothing less than holiness.¹⁴

¹⁴ cf. IP 15-16

New kinds of workers

The Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici" has reminded us that the task of evangelization belongs to the whole of the People of God. In its Chapter 4, the document lists the different groups of "workers in the vineyard" and concludes with a quotation from the "Introduction to the Devout Life" of St Francis de Sales: "In creation God commanded the plants to bring forth their fruits, each one after its kind. So does he command all christians, who are the living plants of his Church, to bring forth fruits of devotion, each according to his character and vocation".¹⁵

¹⁵ CL 56

The Exhortation is devoted entirely to the vocation and mission of the laity. They themselves therefore must be in practice the evangelizers of their environment and place of work. They are called also to collaborate in other evangelizing initiatives of the Church. Missionary activity by lay people has been relaunched by Vatican II, and constitutes in fact a pastoral "novelty" which needs to be given further convinced stimulus.

It is quite clear in consequence that a serious "Laity Project" on our part is not only a faithful response to the apostolic mind of the Founder, but a fundamental requirement of the renewed ecclesiology that constitutes a doctrinal incentive to a deep pastoral change. We must therefore intensify with greater conviction our commitment in favour of our lay associations.

The new Evangelization is expedited and measured more by the mission itself than by the functioning of works programmed in advance; it is the actual requirement of the mission, in fact, that must guide the specific renewal of such works.

For us it is important to note also that in the same Chapter 4 the Exhortation gives a *particular attention to the young*. “Youth must not simply be considered as an object of pastoral concern for the Church: in fact, young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as *leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society*”.¹⁶

¹⁶ *ibid.* 46

These are courageous statements! They indicate the goal of our youth pastoral work. The GC23 will help us to be in this sector competent educators, able to involve in the variety of our works many young workers for the new evangelization.

We need to review in particular, for example, the pastoral effectiveness of group activity among the young. The “Appraisal DB88” function enabled us to touch at first hand the importance and relevance of being able to animate a true Movement among more committed young people permeated by the spirit of Don Bosco, “father and teacher of youth”. The oratory criterion which should characterize the relaunching of this group activity offers not only an original method for the animation of committed groups, but also reminds us that the “oratory” – as a permanent criterion of renewal – is not just a geographical place; it exists also in an association and in a movement which extends beyond the limits of the local environment and can extend to a whole province or a whole country.

This too is an example of rethinking with new ideas our commitment to spread the Gospel among youth.

New dangers too

The convergence of so many innovations brings with it also a shift of attention as regards the care to prevent the dangers which always arise. If an individual changes the terrain along which he is travelling, he must be able to adapt himself to the new conditions and keep an eye on the new path, which will naturally present other dangers different from the earlier ones.

Once the attitude of traditional hard-headed conservatism has been overcome, (the attitude which consists in opposing any attempt to make changes and denies, in fact, the need for any "new form" of pastoral work), the choice of the new evangelization requires us to face up to so many problems never before experienced, find suitable responses, overcome particular difficulties, and also to identify and unmask new dangers which could crop up. And so: avoid both obtuse orthodoxy and genial errors!

This is a risk inherent in the making of this choice. In these first few years of pastoral research, in fact, we have already come across problems that differ from the earlier ones. Before the Council the dangers rotated largely around a fixed evangelizing methodology; after Vatican II they shifted to pastoral creativity, praiseworthy enough as far as looking for a new form is concerned, but could appear dangerous or deviant in some individual items: we can recall for example some extravagant positions concerning liturgical and ecclesiological renewal or certain ideological interpretations of the process of liberation.

I invite you to read again carefully the Letter sent by John Paul II to the XV General Assembly of

¹⁷ Vatican, 11 July 1989

Religious of Brazil.¹⁷ He says among other things: "Faith based on revelation and on the Church's teaching preserves evangelization from the temptation of human utopias; christian hope does not confuse salvations with ideologies of any kind; the charity which must animate the work of evangelization, preserves the proclamation of the Gospel from the temptation to make it nothing more than a means of social transformation or the suffering of violence leading to a class struggle.. Faith, hope and love are the guarantee of this new evangelization".¹⁸

¹⁸ Oss. Rom. 30 Aug. 1989

And so I think it convenient, without attempting to be exhaustive in so delicate a matter, to indicate some of the danger zones most harmful to our pastoral work for youth.

— A first danger zone stems from the "difference or historical distance" which exists, as we have seen, between the biblical and ecclesial world of past centuries and the emerging culture in today's world. This an evident difference, but it can lead to a radical attack on the foundations of the faith through a demystifying interpretation of the Bible and Tradition: this would place us in a situation of post-christian attitude. Fortunately the qualified custodians of the faith put us on our guard and give us direction. The attacks which on the basis of this historical difference are made today against the Church's teaching, ignore the objective will of Christ in rooting the permanence of faith on living and contemporary persons, assisted by the Holy Spirit so that the authenticity of the Gospel is ensured for every generation of believers. The ministry of the Peter and the Apostles, of the Pope and the Bishops, is today – as it was yesterday – the indispensable means for ensuring the identity of the

faith within historical distances. Workers in the new evangelization must pay special and accurate attention to the Magisterium of the Church.

— A second danger zone arises from inability to assume the cultural novelties in a well balanced fashion. Among the principal signs of the times must certainly be included the processes of socialization and personalization, which bring with them new outlooks and values. From these arises a whole field of difficult pastoral research with its own specific problems. Ecclesial communion pushes us on in the evangelization of these signs of the times through both the social teaching of the Magisterium and an intensified personal docility to the Holy Spirit at a time which is particularly rich with his charismatic presence.

But here we can meet a double danger: that of the primacy of the social dimension which leads to political values, important though they be, being assessed too highly, to the detriment of the transcendence of faith and the autonomy of the lay state; or that of a spiritual introversion of a kind that fosters an attitude of alienation from the serious and urgent problems of the temporal order and of the renewal of society.

The style of youth pastoral work we have inherited from Don Bosco shuns both these false notions, without getting into arguments about them; it tries to harmonize, through the wisdom of common sense, political responsibility with interior personal integrity, the “upright citizen and good christian”, promoting in a balanced manner a truly new evangelization in the social sensitivity of political values and in a youthful spirituality which tends courageously to the holiness of the individual.

— Finally, a third danger zone is that of eccle-

siological deviations. Vatican II has placed the ecclesiology of the People of God at the basis of the new evangelization. Underlying this is a whole deeper study which emphasizes the dignity and responsibility that follows from baptism, the vocation and mission of the lay faithful, the special prophetic value inherent in consecrated life, and the precious and indispensable role of the Pastors. The missionary obligation of all the People of God has been accurately described in the Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici".

But along the margin, as it were, of this ecclesiological progress there have appeared some misleading tendencies as, for instance, those concerning the so-called "Church-institution", or the concept of the People of God, or the interpretation of the symbolism in the celebration of the sacraments, and especially the Eucharist and Penance.

If the new pastoral methods are not clearly founded on an authentic conciliar ecclesiology, there can be no true evangelization.

What is of particular interest to us is to be able to salvage with the young the vital values of the Eucharist and Penance, which are the columns supporting the preventive system. In recent years we have seen a falling off in the celebration of these sacraments in youth pastoral work, or else an alteration (and sometimes a desecrating one) in their paschal symbolism, debased at times even to an expression of the class struggle or to a criticism and denouncing of social and ecclesial institutions. There is a pressing need therefore to inculcate in the young a knowledge and convinced participation in the Eucharist and Penance, as the vital centre in practice of the new evangelization. To try to justify the deliberate neglect of these two sacra-

ments through rationalizations of various kinds which do not lead to the authenticity of the Gospel is to evade the absolute importance of this matter!

No christian can be formed without Penance and the Eucharist. We must find a "new form" of pedagogical introduction to their celebration, in the deep conviction that the new evangelization must lead youth to the eucharistic life and the obligations of reconciliation.

The overcoming of the dangers inherent in neglect of the sacraments or alteration of their symbolism should be a matter in which we are particularly competent.

The indispensable interior apostolic conviction in the evangelizer

I think it is fundamental to draw your attention to another "novelty" – because such it always is – which is at the basis of everything: the state of personal renewal in the evangelizers. We have been hammering away for years at this matter of interior apostolic conviction.¹⁹ It will be worth our while to take another brief look at the argument from the standpoint of the new evangelization.

The Pope has spoken of a "new enthusiasm" in this connection. We are talking about the heart and mind of the individual doing the evangelizing. There has never been, nor can there ever be in the future, evangelization without valid evangelizers: think of the apostles and all the disciples.

The new evangelization is a matter of bearing witness. The Pope has said that "the force of evangelization consists at one and the same time in the truth which is proclaimed and the conviction of

¹⁹ cf. *Interioridad apostolica*, Ed. DB Argentina 1989; retreat preached by R. M. at Forin Mercedes, Feb. 1988

the witness with which it is put forward. For this reason the new evangelization requires today that the heralds of the Gospel be faithful in preaching the truth and be witnesses to the saving force of the Word of life. To meet the challenge of the new evangelization at the present day the Church needs holy teachers open to the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, who sharpens the ability to discern reality and lets loose an abundant creativity in words and works that are available to give life to the Gospel as it is proclaimed in different situations in the course of time. And so Religious of the new evangelization must be outstanding in fidelity to the truth and enthusiasm for the mission, in the transparent character of their witness and the supernatural strength of holiness. They must never forget that, in common with their Founders, 'they are sons and daughters of Saints' who proclaimed the Gospel by the sanctity of their lives".²⁰

It is important therefore to concentrate attention on ourselves as "renewed" christian educators.

This perspective must take into consideration a characteristic inherent in an element proper to the preventive system: that of "evangelizing by educating".²¹

John Paul II has reminded us that Don Bosco was able "to establish a synthesis between evangelizing activity and educational work"; his evangelizing concern, said the Pope, "covered the whole sector of the youth condition; it forms an integral part therefore of the process of human formation".²²

I think it is clear enough to all of us that educational activities of a specifically cultural kind (the sciences, professionalism, theatre, music, sport, discipline, etc.) belong of their nature to the process of human development; in themselves they

²⁰ Letter for Religious
(cf. note 11 above)

²¹ cf. ASC 290,
Jul.- Dec. 1978

²² IP 15

are not evangelization; they are cultivated also by non-christians. What raises their significance, without changing their nature, is the vital synthesis in which they are incorporated by the educator who is also an evangelizer. He orders them existentially to the christian objective of an integral formation which leads the young person to the fullness of the paschal mystery. "The educator", said the Pope, "must be clearly conscious of the ultimate objective, because in the art of education the ends aimed at play a decisive part".²³

²³ *ibid.* 16

In the circular letter already mentioned on our educational project²⁴ I pointed out that "in the preventive system there are two aspects which are separate but intimately related: the principle that inspires and creates a particular spiritual attitude of an individual (i.e. the pastoral urge of the evangelizer, and the aspect of his work as a 'parish' following art.40 of the Constitutions), and the criterion that suggests *practical ways and means* of carrying it out (i.e. the pedagogical method of 'house', 'school' and 'playground'). It is a fine logical distinction and one that is useful for gaining a better understanding of various other facets, but it would be a dangerous delusion to forget that the bond that unites them so radically makes them inseparable in practice". To try to divorce Don Bosco's pedagogical method from his pastoral spirit would result in the destruction of both".²⁵

²⁴ ASC 290

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 13

And so the evangelizer with his internal apostolic conviction is in very truth the strategic leading agent of the new evangelization. He needs to have made a vital assimilation of revealed truth and give due weight to the various cultural "novelties" we have spoken of, but he should also consider absolutely indispensable the pastoral renewal of his own

heart. There is urgent need for a "new apostolic enthusiasm" in the soul of the evangelizer. Let us not deceive ourselves; the secret lies in the method too, but it does not leave it at that. Without special attention to the development of this apostolic conviction in ourselves, in the laity and in our young people, we shall not achieve the hoped for new evangelization. It is from the pastoral charity of the heart, the living centre of the salesian spirit, that will flow the "grace of unity" which renders "evangelizing by educating" mutually inseparable from "educating by evangelizing".

The new evangelization will be the result of this interior conviction, or there will be no new evangelization at all; and from this stems the possibility of a "new form".

Don Bosco was a "pastor" always and everywhere; as his primary activity for evangelizing the young he chose education, permeated daily by the zeal of "da mihi animas". Let us imitate the pedagogical art of the vital synthesis that sprang from his apostolic heart.

* * *

Dear confreres, the topic dealt with in this circular is one that is complex and still evolving; it is not therefore an easy one to understand; but in it we find the big challenge of the new times, the response to which has been entrusted by Vatican II to the whole Church.

Let us resolve to begin at once to meditate seriously on its various aspects, and to pay careful heed to what has been said to us in this connection by the Pope and the Bishops, and to what they will say to us also in the future.

I think I can safely say that the Congregation is already on the way to the new evangelization; promising results of it can already be seen. There has been not only the "Appraisal DB88", but a whole series of pastoral experiences, especially through the application of the oratory criterion²⁶ and the initiatives that have been realized in various fields, e.g. the pastoral quality of the school, the christian orientation of social communication, group activity among the young and among lay people in general (Youth groups, Cooperators, Past-pupils, Clients of Mary Help of Christians, etc.), which should attract to a greater extent the attention of all confreres. After Vatican II the Congregation has effectively moved into the orbit of the new evangelization.

²⁶ C 40

Let us recall the great directives of our General Chapters, and in particular the document: "Evangelization and Catechesis" of the Special General Chapter (GC20); "Salesians, evangelizers of the young" of the GC21; and the definitive text of the Constitutions of the GC22.

These same Chapters also introduced in the Congregation certain structural changes which are significant for the new evangelization.

Let us look again also at the guidelines provided by the Rector Major with his Council, and the circular letters sent out with indications for the practical application of decisions of the General Chapters. In a note²⁷ I have listed some of the more significant letters regarding our "step forward" for the new evangelization of the young. There have also been numerous aids, particularly from the Youth Pastoral Department, which have indicated practical steps that can be taken for the realization of the main guidelines.

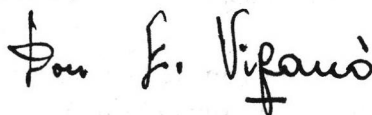
It is true that much still remains to be done: in fact this is where the Congregation meets its most urgent challenge at the present day.

The coming GC23 will tackle this vast problem in a practical and concrete way. Let us pray earnestly in every community for its success, and let us ask Don Bosco insistently to help us to become valid bearers of his charism for an efficacious new evangelization of the young: let us relive with him the unifying force which stems from "da mihi animas", and which far exceeds the historical difference that separates us culturally from his own time!

Assiduous attention to our interior apostolic convictions, together with a careful consideration of the future of humanity, will enable us to look forward to the future with hope.

With my cordial greetings.

Affectionately in Christ,



²⁷ Among the circular letters of the Rector Major we may recall the following as being of particular significance for the new evangelization:

- *Decentralization and unity in the Congregation today*, ASC 272 (1973)
- *Missionaries of the young*, ASC 279 (1975)
- *Personal spiritual direction*, ASC 281 (1976)
- *Salesians and political responsibility*, ASC 284 (1976)
- *The Salesian educational project*, ASC 290, (1978)
- *Youth groups and movements*, ASC 294, (1979)
- *In the ever growing splendour of the Gospel*, ASC 296 (1980)
- *The challenge of the media*, ASC 302 (1981)
- *Our fidelity to Peter's successor*, AGC 315 (1985)
- *The Marian Year*, AGC 322 (1987)
- *The Eucharist in the apostolic spirit of Don Bosco*, AGC 324 (1988)
- *The Letter 'Juvenum Patris' of John Paul II*, AGC 325, (1988)
- *Convocation of 23rd General Chapter*, AGC 327 (1988)

It is important too to recall the letters that deal with: Rediscovery of the spirit of Mornese (ASC 301), the Association of Cooperators (AGC 318), the Past-Pupils (AGC 321), the advancement of the laity (AGC 317), and the Salesian Family (ASC 304).

These provide some valuable aids which bear witness to the entry of the Congregation into its new orbit and which throw light on the long path which still lies ahead.