

acts

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

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

YEAR LXXX **N. 367**
april-june 1999

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR	1.1 Fr Juan E. VECCHI Sent to bring good news to the poor	3
2. GUIDELINES AND POLICIES	2.1 Fr Juan E. VECCHI Salesian celebration of the jubilee 2.2 Fr. Luciano ODORICO Some practical guidelines for the practice of poverty	39 42
3. RULINGS AND DIRECTIVES	(None in this issue)	
4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL	4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major 4.2 Chronicle of the General Council	49 56
5. DOCUMENTS AND NEWS ITEMS	5.1 Martyrs of our Family 5.2 Days of Spirituality of the Salesian Family (21 st year) 5.3 Recognition as Member of the Salesian Family of the Group "Resurrection Witnesses on the way to the year 2000" (TR 2000) 5.4 Decree of canonical erection of the Province "St Francis de Sales" of France 5.5 New Provincials 5.6 New Salesian Bishop 5.7 SDB Statistics at 31 December 1998 5.8 Our dead confreres (1999 - 1 st list)	61 61 63 68 70 73 74 76

Editrice S.D.B.
Edizione extra commerciale
Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco
Via della Pisana, 1111
Casella Postale 18333
00163 Roma

SENT TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.¹

1. Our poverty: Freedom and detachment. - Investing in the Community. - Sign of the salesian mission. - Work and temperance. - Wise administration. **2. Today's challenges:** The divided world. - Money. - Complexity of administration. - individual management. **3. Icons of salesian poverty:** The disciple, the follower of Jesus. - Good news to the poor. - The first Christians. - Don Bosco's poverty. **4. Some suggestions for the present day:** Intelligent responsibility. - Apostolic application of goods. - Solidarity. - Educating to the use of goods. - Loving the poor in Christ. **Conclusion.**

Rome, 25 March 1999
Feast of the Annunciation

My dear Confreres,

I send my Easter greetings to all of you: may the Lord fill you with joy and the power of his Resurrection.

In the month of February we began the Team Visits which will characterize this last year of the millennium. At Nairobi were gathered the Superiors and Councillors of the English-speaking Circumscriptions of Africa to verify the implementation of the GC24 and make an on-the-spot assessment of the process of evangelization being followed by our communities.

This and the following thirteen team-visits are taking place after the Rector Major with the General Council have been able to review the systematic effort made by the provinces in their provincial chapters to give life to the pastoral model already

¹ cf. Lk 4,18

well known and accepted as the best response to the ecclesial situation and the state of our strengths and possibilities.

In every verification we are brought back to the conviction expressed by the GC24: "The profession of the evangelical counsels, as well as being an expression of the following of Christ, has also a pedagogical content of human growth and is a paradigm of the new humanity".²

I thought it fitting, therefore, after our reflections on chastity, to continue our considerations on the counsels by speaking to you about our poverty. I am prompted to do this also by the fact that in our program for the present six-year period, we undertook to "foster the witness of consecration and communion of the communities" and to "create the awareness of the educative power of religious consecration and bear witness to it in daily life".³

While I was thinking over what points to offer you, I wondered what the main objectives of our reflection should be and what requirements should be emphasized in view of the present moment in which we are all living and the variety of contexts in which the provinces are working. I came to the conclusion that the purpose of this letter of mine could be: to call attention to this aspect of our consecrated life around which many ecclesial and secular sensitivities revolve at the present day and on which our witness and vocational fruitfulness depends; to recall the main traits of poverty in line with our charism; to prompt a discernment in the face of the innovations which are appearing in our customs and praxis; and finally to offer some suggestions for responding to the new challenges.

I take it that you will be making a creative reading of the text in communities, and allow yourselves to be prompted by it to a deeper study of your way of life, and a generous assuming of the demands of the Gospel.

² GC24 152

³ AGC 358 (Supplement), p.16, nn 32, 34

1. Our poverty

Poverty has to do with things and money, and equally it is also linked with the heart and spirit. In it our relationship with God and with our brethren is forged through the bond we establish with material and spiritual goods: our use, preferences, and the proper ordering of what belongs to us or we consider ours.

It is not surprising that in a project of life, long lived and studied like the one offered by our Constitutions, there should be found together with stimulating gospel inspirations precise indications about the manner of practising poverty in the way we have learned from Don Bosco.

Each of these indications and all of them together are indispensable if we are to arrive at new expressions of our poverty in the context of the present day.

In fact they not only link poverty with a spiritual tradition which has developed in the course of time, but also unite it harmoniously with the charisma.

Fundamental to our commitment of poverty is the following of Christ, and the conforming of ourselves to him as the Good Shepherd. The settings for the specific daily expressions of this are the mission and the community. To these as points of reference the gospel inspirations return, suggested interior attitudes are linked, and practical guidelines find their motive.

Freedom and detachment

The Constitutions speak to us of detachment of heart⁴ lived in normal daily life,⁵ freedom from concern and worry:⁶ In our meeting with Jesus and in his person we have discovered good things infinitely superior to those which are temporal, though

⁴ C 73

⁵ C 75

⁶ C 72

the latter are not without value. This is the first meaning or significance of our poverty. It is something of advantage for us, like the selling of lesser goods to acquire a longed-for treasure,⁷ in the way expressed by St. Paul: I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in comparison with the sublime knowledge of Christ, my Lord.⁸

This should not be taken as a spiritual reflection which only secondarily leads to practical criteria for assessment and manner of acting. On the contrary it is a primary decision, able to give direction to the whole of personal experience: intuitions, inspirations, desires, appetite for the good things to which the human heart is called, and the conviction that they can be found in Christ: "I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection".⁹

Detachment, because temporal goods are beneath our desires and we have discovered others far superior, is applicable to affections, health, individual freedom, power, personal cultural preparation, sufficiency of our intelligence, material means, and also to our will and decisions. In this sense poverty is founded on and becomes merged with obedience as a necessary means to attain the will of God, and with chastity as necessary for a love proportionate to our emptiness.

Don Bosco used to say: "You cannot practise poverty unless you love it".¹⁰ Many external attitudes not in harmony with the profession of poverty are signs of a lack of internal freedom, of the absence of a yardstick for assessing the quality of goods, of fixed ideas, untenable even from a human standpoint. We can understand why the "poor" person in Scripture represents not only the one who restricts himself in his use of material goods, but also the person who has entered into the

⁷ cf. Mt 13, 44-45

⁸ cf. Phil 3,8

⁹ Phil 3, 8-10

¹⁰ BM 5, 442

mystery of human existence, in his need for the infinity of God. This is a perspective which must not be neglected in the time of formation. The quality of the heart must be judged from the "treasures" to which it is attached.¹¹

Investing in the Community

"We share together our material goods: the fruits of our work, the gifts we receive and whatever comes to us from pensions, subsidies and insurance policies. We do the same with our talents, our energies and our experience. In the community the good of each individual becomes the good of all".¹²

Detachment is a condition for fruitful investment. Rather than renounce our goods, we entrust them to the multiplying power of communion. Communion in the full sense concerns in the first place the goods to be shared. The article of the Constitutions uses broad terms, but it provides only an example of what the individual can place at the disposition of others.

The limitless implications of communion concern also the subjects: in fact they include all mankind. Poverty becomes visible in the personal love of each member for all the confreres of the religious community, to the point where the two realities become inseparable and interdependent. St Francis de Sales puts it with direct simplicity: "To be poor means living in community".¹³ Giving and receiving, showing generosity and gratitude, sharing with everyone gifts and material resources both intellectual and spiritual, constitute its daily practice.

Communion goes beyond the immediate religious community: it extends to the "needs of the entire Congregation, of the Church and of the world".¹⁴

This kind of attitude becomes the criterion for the applica-

¹¹ cf. Mt 6, 21

¹² C 76

¹³ Oeuvres de St. François de Sales, Ed. Annecy, vol.IX, p.229

¹⁴ C 76

tion of goods placed by Providence at our disposal. We cannot pretend to have satisfied our obligation of poverty when in disposing of our resources we have first looked after our own personal needs. Poverty impels us "to be one with the poor and to love them in Christ".¹⁵ In them we see the image of Christ who, through his Incarnation, has entered our human condition marked by suffering, privation and want. In them, therefore, the grace of the presence and a meeting with the Lord awaits us.

Solidarity with the poor generates attitudes of sharing: physical presence especially where poverty means squalor, lack of essentials, want of educative possibilities, absence of prospects. And with our presence there must also be a sharing in the living conditions, and a sharing too in the efforts to improve conditions.

A comprehensive glance at the Congregation gives us heart when we find that in every continent the Salesians are making courageous and determined efforts in those contexts most marked by extreme need and destitution, and are trying to enter into communion with the poor.

A sign of the salesian mission

Our presence among the poor and the sharing of our goods with them are already a witness to evangelical poverty. But our poverty tends to be expressed in concrete service. We instigate projects to evangelize and help people, especially the young, to overcome situations of need, whether they be financial, affective or spiritual.

In the charismatic figure of Don Bosco we discover that the profession of poverty, in addition to being necessary for living authentically in evangelical communities, is an excellent way for realizing our mission to the full.

The "detachment of heart"¹⁶ is directed to the "generous ser-

¹⁵ C 79

¹⁶ C 73

vice of others”;¹⁷ the renunciation of all earthly goods¹⁸ ensures a “spirit of enterprise in the mission of the Church and in her struggle for justice and peace, especially by educating those in need”.¹⁹

It is clearly a matter of two closely linked elements: all the resources we have at our disposal, material and spiritual, personal and communal, are generously aimed at fulfilling the mandate to reach the greatest possible number of young people and make them aware of their being children of God in Christ.

We commit ourselves, therefore, on many different fronts, and always with an educative intention, to giving life to projects for human advancement for which we make use of adequate structures, accept and look for suitable means, support and finance. Don Bosco’s enterprise in this direction has been passed on to his sons. Today we still seek help by directing towards charitable purposes those who are in a position to give it; we promote groups of benefactors to come to the aid of those in need; we stretch out our hands for the poor. All this gains us approval, frequently unexpected collaboration, and (unfortunately) a certain amount of criticism or cliché-ridden reaction which is not always kindly.

The pastoral charity of Don Bosco urges us to appeal and express our thanks, in the awareness that “what we have is not ours, but belongs to the poor”.²⁰ His transparent witness of personal poverty was always united to his determination, carried even to the point of recklessness, to serve the young and mainly the poorest of them with the most up-to-date and efficacious means.

Our poverty, chosen for the sake of the Kingdom and necessary for our mission, has – we hope – a social impact on the task of education. By forming young people and being involved with them we intend to work for a society which gives more

¹⁷ C 73

¹⁸ cf. C 73

¹⁹ C 73

²⁰ C 79; cf. BM 5, 450

consideration to the common good, respects the value of every individual, builds on criteria of justice and equity, and has concern for those who are weak or disadvantaged.

This intention determines the choice of places, contents and forms of education and guides the use of capital and means in line with the various social and cultural contexts.

Work and temperance

What we have tried to clarify above leads us to live our daily poverty through intelligent and sedulous work, made possible and sustained by temperance. "In our daily labours we are at one with the poor who live by the sweat of their brow, and we bear witness to the human and Christian value of work".²¹

The correlation between poverty and work is to be sought in the spirituality of apostolic activity understood as tireless work for the Kingdom. Don Bosco lived it joyfully in faith. Every Salesian is invited therefore to develop and make good use of his talents, waste no time at all, and work for his living.

And so, as we work for our daily bread we share the lot of those who must depend on their work for the support of themselves and their families, and thus express the social value of our poverty. Moreover the appreciation of work as an expression of human capabilities and as a special means of human fulfilment, not exclusively aimed at profit, becomes an educative message and witness.

The importance of work in our spiritual make-up can be easily deduced from a series of facts, real and symbolic: the peasant origin and first experiences of Don Bosco, the protagonists and style of life at the beginnings, the working class to whom our attention is primarily addressed.

Work is the main component of the formation of youngsters in the professional and technical schools; it is the characteristic,

²¹ C 78

though not exclusively so, that marks the figure of the salesian Brother; it is our way of involvement in society and culture. It gives the Salesian his fundamental trait: the Salesian is a worker. Don Cagliero had a strong way of putting it: "One who does not know how to work is certainly no Salesian!"²²

Two facts can serve to sum this up: the place of work in the badge of the Congregation and Don Bosco's recommendations quoted by Mgr. Cagliero who emphasized that in the month of December 1887, Don Bosco "recommended twice over for the Salesians: work, work!"²³

But one or two clarifications will not be superfluous. For Don Bosco work is not just any activity, tiring though it may be, but dedication to the mission full-time and with all one's ability. It includes not only manual work, but intellectual and apostolic activity as well. Workers also are those who write, who hear confessions, who preach and study, who keep the house in order: it is a matter always of working for souls.

Our work is characterized by obedience, by pastoral charity, by a right intention and by a sense of community. It is not a matter of mere activity, but of purpose, choice and the wise ordering of our work; and we must add that in the word 'work' there is a reference to manual and practical skills. The Salesian learns to work with his hands and so is at ease performing "humble" work of a domestic or material kind.

The pastoral charity which directs the work can be seen in spontaneous and generous gestures. But more commonly it means involvement for long periods in a patient daily toil for the growth of individuals and the animation of the community. More than a simple attitude of kindness or gesture of sympathy, it is a praxis: a constant manner of acting competently in a particular environment, similar to political, social or med-

²² MB XIX, 157. Words quoted by Pius XI, 3 June 1929. In 1933 he said again: "Anyone who does not work is out of place among the Salesians; work is their badge, the identity card of this providential army". MB XIX, 235)

²³ MB XVIII, 477

ical practice. All these imply a form of activity which is coherent and constant, well thought out, directly intended and constantly improved. This is the kind of work which ends up by moulding a person's spiritual character.

Work therefore means acquiring and developing a specific professional competence, required by pastoral charity, through which we learn and perfect ourselves in the arts of motivating, instructing, animating and sanctifying. We become capable of understanding a context, of formulating and realizing a project responding to the needs, and taking into account the imponderable elements which are always present in pastoral work.

Work includes the effort of educative creativity: that mental and practical attitude which leads to the finding of original solutions to new problems and situations. Don Bosco thought up a project for street-children while the parishes were still carrying on with their "regular" catechism lessons. Immediately afterwards, when he saw that the boys were not ready for employment nor protected in it, he thought up a small-scale and home-made solution which later grew: work contracts, workshops and professional schools. And he had a similar approach to other needs, like the home and instruction. Don Bosco was imaginative in the matter of work.

But work must be combined with temperance. It is not the same thing as agitation and frenzy but includes a professional approach, dedication, and good order without loss of time or energy regarding the objectives of the mission. Such a requirement cannot fail to be linked with a life-style characterized by its simplicity, dedication, and I would even say its austerity. The two aspects are complementary and they suggest to us that we bring them together in a manner consonant with the grace of unity.

Temperance is linked with the penitential dimension which is essential to Christian maturity. Without it there can be neither a beginning or any further progress in the way of conversion, which consists in assuming some elements and leaving

many others aside, in selecting and cutting, in destroying old or useless practices and allowing oneself to be rebuilt.

Every Institute has an ascetical tradition consistent with its own style of spirituality. In our own, the formula which sums it up is "coetera tolle"; leave aside the rest, order the rest to the primary objective, i.e. to the "da mihi animas", to the possibility of interior life and expressing love for the young, taking them away from situations which are an obstacle to life. And it is precisely the "coetera tolle" that finds daily expression in salesian temperance.

I say "salesian" temperance because in our history and literature there are some very characteristic references to it.

Temperance is the cardinal virtue which moderates impulses, word and actions in accordance with reason and the demands of the Christian life. Around it rotate continence, humility, sobriety, simplicity and austerity. In the preventive system the same realities are combined in the concept of reason. Its manifestations in daily life are: mental balance, i.e. moderation in everything, proper self-discipline, ability for collaboration, a calm interior and exterior, a serene and authoritative rapport with all, but especially with the young.

From a spiritual and apostolic standpoint temperance is the "athletic state", ready for any request in favour of the young; it means keeping oneself free of ties that would be too restricting, from the influence of personal tastes and demands which create dependence: "Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one".²⁴

Temperance is applicable to work: it is the order which gives actions a motivation and priority in respect of their objectives; both personal and "apostolic" ambitions are given both order and measure; others are asked for their just contribution and not for something excessive or which would serve only for our own convenience; matters should be arranged so that work

²⁴ 1 Cor 9, 25

does not mean the elimination of prayer or fraternal relationships. Temperance is needed in activities, in outlay, in seeking funds, in the desire to finish one thing before beginning another; in the control of our own work so that we do not become caught up as in the wheels of a machine.

Temperance is also applicable to fraternal life: without it a good community relationship is impossible.²⁵ Brotherly love implies self-control, an effort at attention, control of spontaneous feelings and reactions, the overcoming of disagreements, the understandings of the sufferings of others: it is all an exercise in getting out of oneself and changing one's personal approach. For us there is also the obligation to show it in perceptible manner: a fraternal love that is able to draw out a response for the good of the other person.

Finally, temperance is applicable to one's personal life-style: relationships commensurate with the mission: the possession and use of consumable goods (cars, equipment, tools); time for relaxation and holidays; interior watchfulness and purification.

These things can seem all too ordinary as the ascetical dimension and practice of evangelical poverty, rather as being a too lighthearted approach to the serious nature of the call to be radical. Don Bosco expressed the apparent contradiction in the dream of the pergola of roses of which the GC24 wanted to remind us²⁶ immediately after the indications for our present commitments to animation and spirituality. The Salesians walk on rose-petals, Everyone thinks they are "rejoicing", and they are in fact "happy". Although pierced by the thorns they do not lose their joy. This is another place where temperance comes in: simplicity, making the best of a situation, no fuss and bother. It is in line with the gospel advice: when you fast, do not look dismal, but anoint your head and wash your face.²⁷

²⁵ C 90

²⁶ cf. GC24, 187-188

²⁷ Mt 6, 16-17

This style of life, made up of work and temperance, concerns also the community itself, as is well emphasized by art.77 of the Constitutions: "Every community is sensitive to the conditions of its neighbourhood and bears witness to its poverty by a simple and sparing way of life in unpretentious dwellings (...) the criterion for our buildings is that they be simple and functional".²⁸

The sensitive point about structures follows two related criteria: that of service to young people in most need and that of simplicity. Constant attention to the need to keep both these criteria in mind, with a balanced discernment at the necessary levels, allows the community to avoid hang-ups regarding projects and at the same time to maintain credibility in bearing witness to the gospel values which are at the basis of the consecrated life and of evangelization itself.

But let us remember that the credibility of the community is linked with the witness of each individual confrere. The personal assumption of poverty, solemnly professed by vow, can be made explicit only by a tenor of life which includes surroundings and practical attitudes to such things as food, instruments for work, furnishings, holidays, means of transport. Submission to the discernment of a community, even through dependence on a superior, is part of our evangelical option, it prevents a practice of poverty tailored to individual criteria and is a protection against falling back on securities and guarantees offered by the institution.

The program for the individual is set out in these words. "Every member lives out his poverty by temperance in the use of food and drink, by simplicity in dress and by moderate use of holidays and amusements. He furnishes his room in a simple manner, taking care not to make it a refuge which keeps him separated from his confreres and from young people. He is watchful so as not to become a slave to any habit opposed to the spirit of poverty".²⁹

²⁸ C 77

²⁹ R 55

Wise administration

Because of the characteristics we have set out above our poverty includes the sound administration of goods: precision, with careful foresight, skill in putting to good use, openness, and with the shared responsibility of the community. Salesian praxis tends to guarantee a shrewd management and at the same time a witness evident to our contemporaries.

The unity of government, application to the apostolate and solidarity among the confreres, houses, provinces and Congregation are the principles which govern our economy and the consequent administration of goods.

The function of economy is instrumental and is subordinate to the purpose of our consecration. It is controlled, however, by specific laws and regulations which cannot be neglected without harm to the objectives of the apostolate. They have in consequence become part of the norms of the Church and of the Institutes of Consecrated Life.

Without going into the technical details, which would need a treatment by itself, I only emphasize that a transparent administration through a careful recording of expenses, a fraternal and trusting reference to the one responsible for administration, and requests for authorizations foreseen by the Constitutions and Regulations, all form part of the spirit of poverty.

2. Today's challenges

If we compare the picture we have just outlined with the tendencies and customs in which we are immersed, we notice a clear division and we feel the urgent need to check up on our life-style and our witness to poverty.

The world is marked and **divided by the possession of goods**. The wealth of a restricted part of the globe is counter-balanced by a majority of peoples and individuals who are

living in penury and want. Development is taking place at different speeds. The distance between rich and poor is getting ever greater and there is no improvement in sight on the basis of factors which govern the economy. Indeed some countries, after a short-lived period of relative wellbeing, seem to fall back into situations of insuperable and desperate need, made still worse by enormous debts to the rich countries.

The well-to-do societies tend to create ever new needs and can produce even in us an unbalanced consumer mentality based on comfort and a free and easy life. Such a mentality can lead to a dangerous conformity which gradually deprives the vow of poverty of its spiritual value and of its social perceptibility and prophetic impact.

Even in the poorer contexts we Salesians are not short of a house, the means of subsistence and the means for the effective realization of our mission. As well as the obligation to thank Providence, this imposes on us a courageous discernment to find suitable ways of witnessing, sharing and giving service. In fact an excessive availability of means and structures, as well as contrasting with gospel values, can place us at a much more comfortable level of life than is warranted by the social and economic situation of the context in which we find ourselves and the tenor of life of those we are working for.

Another element which influences our life is the relevance of economic values in our individual and collective mentality, and at the same time the importance of **money** in the financial and social system. Work loses its value as a feature of identity, as a source of support and as a sign of personal dignity, a point frequently made by John Paul II in his social writings. Money becomes an ever more decisive factor for enterprise, realization and conservation. In its turn it becomes converted into the principal source of income and riches. References are heard to a "financialization" not only of the economy but also of thought and language.

The greater abundance and circulation of money in rich countries has brought about a ready and growing solidarity between individuals, groups, political institutions and humanitarian organizations. It is frequently expressed in a generalized form in connection with dramatic situations such as hunger, epidemics and refugees. Through the universal empathy with the figure of Don Bosco and the lively nature of many salesian works in the midst of the young and people in general, Providence brings us the necessary means for our mission in the different continents. It is quite touching to discover how many benefactors there are who follow with love and tangible offerings the salesian works in the world, the new frontiers in work for the young and the great missionary impulse of the last ten years. Many of the offerings come from simple folk, not always well to do, who regularly and not infrequently with sacrifice make a generous contribution to encourage and sustain us.

A point to be noted is the **complexity** involved in the management and financial support of our works. The structures in which we work and which we have frequently built by our own efforts, with the help of generous persons and humanitarian institutions, have high administration and maintenance expenses, and heavy obligations in respect of regional and state administrations. Many of our educational activities still have a commercial side to them and as such are subject to taxation by local legislation. The ever more consistent presence of lay people at various levels means that we must pay them a just salary, generally regulated by contract with very precise and binding norms.

All these features not only make considerably more complicated the task of those directly responsible and frequently require the regular service of qualified consulting bodies, but require on our part the provision of large sums of money, without which we would be prevented from fulfilling the mission itself.

To all the foregoing we may add the modern incentive towards the autonomous management of affairs which leads to individualistic forms of organizing life.

In a context of abundance and individualism, an appeal is made ever more frequently to the respect due to the individual, and the degree of responsibility he must be recognized as having. This sort of appeal is not necessarily negative or without foundation. But if it were to result in an indiscriminate provision of personal comfort, of equipment and money without vigilant control, it would undermine the charismatic influence of our consecration and would weaken the impact of our mission among the young.

Rightly then we may ask ourselves: how can we reconcile all this with the demands of the vow of poverty, such as not disposing of our own funds, depending on the judgement of others for our multiple personal needs and for what we require for our work and mission? And, on the other hand, how can we avoid the risk of publicly professing evangelical poverty in line with the salesian charism and then in practice, with full awareness we have acquired, interpret in an individual manner a vow with a communal objective significance?

3. Icons of salesian poverty

Many are the paths by which the Bible, right from the Old Testament, links the experience of God and human happiness to a realistic attitude respectful of the truth towards self and possessions. It is an attitude personified in the "poor" of Yahweh.

Our Constitutions have chosen three images to explore the inexhaustible depths of evangelical poverty and guide us to new expressions of it.

The disciple: the follower of Jesus

To the young man who asked him about eternal life, Jesus replied: "Go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me".³⁰

The story, used as an inspiring source for the text of the Constitutions, develops a series of ideas which are of particular interest at the present time: the paradoxical nature of religious poverty, the need for the gift of the Spirit in order to embrace it, the happiness of one who does so, the possibility of living it, shown through the experience of those who entrust themselves to Jesus.

The insistent succession of the verbs brings out the idea of the urgency with which a decision must be made, and what is at stake in it: the fullness of life ("if you wish to be perfect"); the liberating or enslaving relationship with material goods ("sell your possessions"); the place occupied by love in one's life ("give the money to the poor"); the authentic good things to be pursued ("you will have treasure"); the possibility of sharing life with Jesus ("come, follow me").

"Go" ... and "come" at the beginning and end of the advice, express the movement from being centred on one's own concerns, from living in an enclosed and remote manner, to the intimacy with Christ implied by following him.

Art.72 of the Constitutions contrasts the scenario of the young man who did not accept the invitation with the image of the Apostles who declare: "We have left everything and followed you".³¹ They place themselves at the service of the Gospel. We identify ourselves with them and in their gesture we find example and inspiration.

The following of Christ, to which we are invited, is not only acceptance of Jesus' teaching and active participation in his af-

³⁰ Mt 19, 16-22

³¹ Mt 19, 27

fairs but a grafting into his mystery, in his total donation to the Father and his brethren, in his death and resurrection.

The radical poverty of Jesus consists in his becoming a man with the limitations and reality like each of us, but open to the divinity and filled by it. He is not attached to his divine prerogative, but takes on the human condition of weakness and death and finds its meaning in confiding himself into the hands of the Father. As a man he does not impose his higher identity; for many people he is simply the son of Mary, of the carpenter, living as a wandering rabbi with no fixed abode, often in precarious situations and deprived of the human certainty that comes from riches, status and power.

Through poverty those who are consecrated have this first and principal experience: they contemplate with a special light the "poverty" of Christ, they are attracted by it, they share it and become conformed to it: to the poverty of the Servant of Yahweh, who entrusts himself to the Father in everything and finds in Him his happiness and fulfilment.

In Jesus they live the emptying out of themselves so as to be filled by God, and feel happy in receiving and giving. In this way they are introduced into the mystery of the Trinity, as is emphasized in *Vita Consecrata*: "Poverty proclaims that God is man's only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, 'though he was rich ... became poor' (2 Cor 8:9), it becomes an expression of that total gift of self which the three Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in his redemptive death".³²

The emptying out of whatever misleadingly creates the conviction that one is self-sufficient and can reach fulfilment on one's own, the satisfaction of depending on God and one's brethren for happiness and self-realization involves being humble in the manner of Mary's song, i.e. to accept the truth of

³² VC 21 c

our being, of the fact that we are creatures: made by Someone else and for Someone else; aware of our incompleteness, of our moral poverty, our limitations and weaknesses.

It is understandable therefore how prayer, looking towards God and yearning for him, become characteristic of one who is poor: in it is the emptiness of man who invokes the riches of God; the intuitive designs of God become fused with our plans for happiness; we are directly challenged to recognize that we have been loved and to be at ease in loving others.

We understand too how it is that the "poor" man, who thus becomes wise, is willing to give everything he has in exchange for the wisdom which is the consciousness of his own being and of the way to bring it to fulfilment.

Good news to the poor

The first icon identifies evangelical poverty with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God which is the consecration of Jesus of Nazareth.

A second image recognizes in poverty the mysterious secret of the mission of Jesus and hence the key to the fruitfulness of the Church.³³ In both cases poverty is the revealing sign. Men are unaware of it and so cannot accept it, but he declares it publicly when he tells the messengers to say to John the Baptist, who was looking for confirmation of his messianic identity, "the poor have good news brought to them".³⁴ The same thing happens at the present day: where the hope of the poor is reawakened, where they recover their dignity, it becomes clear that the Kingdom is at work.

And so the poor are explicitly chosen as the main significant and fruitful subjects to whom the mission is primarily addressed under the inspiration of the Spirit: "He has anointed

³³ cf. VC 25 a

³⁴ Lk 7, 22

me to bring good news to the poor".³⁵ They are not the only ones. The message is offered also to those who have possessions, as an invitation to poverty, starting from the experience of need, of sharing, of love and liberation.

Poverty is included in the proclamation: "Blessed are the poor".³⁶ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal".³⁷ "What does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"³⁸ With these expressions the Gospel leads man to some fundamental questions about his existence, and at the same time offers him the way to answer them through the life and teachings of Christ.

The very explicit conclusion of Jesus is summed up in the aphoristic expression: "You cannot serve God and wealth".³⁹ He decries as opposed to man's own good the excessive concern for riches which conditions and enslaves him.

It is not that the economic condition of need has priority in a Manichaeian and indiscriminate manner over that which is well-off. It puts the value of the latter in proper perspective and reveals its snares with respect to conversion of heart, building the Kingdom, fulfilling man's destiny and the quality of human relationships. His recommendation is: "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into eternal habitations".⁴⁰ And so do not despise money. He praises the action of the widow who makes her tiny offering,⁴¹ that of Zacchaeus who promises to give half his goods to the poor and to restore four times any amount he may have gained by fraud,⁴² and the shrewd man-

³⁵ Lk 4, 18

³⁶ Mt 5, 3

³⁷ Mt 6, 19

³⁸ Mk 8, 36

³⁹ Lk 16, 13

⁴⁰ Lk 16, 9

⁴¹ Mk 12, 42

⁴² cf. Lk 19, 8

ager who fiddled the accounts so as to ensure for himself friendship and a welcome after his dismissal.⁴³

The poverty of consecrated life continues and gives effect to the teaching of Jesus as regards goods. It is expressed in terms of a different relationship with them in a context of riches which are an end in themselves, of greed and endless craving for possessions, and hence of a different kind of rapport between individuals and peoples. In fact the overpowering longing for money and the intoxication of the desire to possess are at the root of many of the great evils afflicting modern society, the arrogant exploitation of others, concealed injustice, indigence and destitution.

Interior and exterior detachment, keeping to essentials, renouncing of possessions, do not therefore represent an impoverishment and still less a negation of values which are authentically human, but rather their transfiguration; they propose a "spiritual therapy" for humanity, because they reject idolatry with its consequences and in some way make the living God visible.⁴⁴

Poverty, as well as being the human setting and content of the proclamation, is an indispensable characteristic of the evangelizing missionary. He puts his trust in the word, in the convincing power of charity, in the promise of life. For a journey he has no need of "staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic".⁴⁵ On his side he has the power of Jesus to cast out devils, the joy of proclaiming salvation and of curing men's wounds. He is willing to live by what they offer him.

Poverty linked directly to consecration and the proclamation of Christ has for the consecrated missionary an ascetical value: it enables him to purify his heart, relationships and words, freeing him from the tendency to domination and self-affirmation and the seeking for prestige which is so strongly

⁴³ cf. Lk 16, 1-13

⁴⁴ cf. VC 87

⁴⁵ Lk 9, 1-6

rooted in both individuals and the community. "Consecrated persons will be missionaries above all by continually deepening their awareness of having been called and chosen by God, (...) freeing themselves from the obstacles which could hinder the totality of their response. In this way they will become true signs of Christ in the world".⁴⁶

The first Christians

"After the example of the first Christians, we share together our material goods", says art.76 of the Constitutions.

The poverty of Christ is expressed in the gift of himself even to the extreme gesture of his death. The community which is born of his Resurrection, strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, feels itself called to realize fraternal union among all men through the sharing of spiritual and material goods.

"Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common".⁴⁷ The *koinonia* therefore includes many aspects of life, and indeed leaves out none of them: union of hearts, use of material goods, participation in the Eucharist and prayer, daily living, convergence in a unified project of our presence in society.

The will for and realization of communion, an indispensable element of evangelical poverty, is shown in different forms with the passing of time and continues to find new and eloquent expressions: "Consecrated persons, who become 'of one heart and soul' (Acts 4, 32) through the love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5, 5), experience an interior call to share everything in common: material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable service".⁴⁸

⁴⁶ VC 25 b

⁴⁷ Acts 4, 32

⁴⁸ VC 42 b

The result is the multiplication of resources: a patrimony also of temporal goods which increases so that it can be distributed "to all as any had need"⁴⁹ and "there was not a needy person among them",⁵⁰ because it was given to each one as he had need.⁵¹ This is a constant phenomenon throughout the centuries: poverty directed towards communion produces abundance. The individual possession of riches only reproduces and extends destitution.

This poverty, which places its hope in communion, has its first site for sowing and reaping in the religious community where there is giving without measure, in opposition to the principle of "each for himself" and an endeavour to build a joyful fellowship of witness. It cannot be reduced to the use of things, nor is its main intention that of preserving a common economic patrimony, but it provides the possibility of a spiritual experience which also has temporal value.

The desire for sharing among the first Christians overcame the boundaries of the restricted community and extended to sister Churches and those who were in need and destitute. Paul organized a collection for the benefit of the needy Jerusalem community and the Apostles chose deacons as a response to the requirements of the poor and widows. Looking at our own situations, *Vita Consecrata* remarks: "The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option; but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor".⁵²

The experience of religious life through the centuries shows

⁴⁹ Acts 2, 44

⁵⁰ Acts 4, 33

⁵¹ cf. Acts 4, 35

⁵² VC 82 b

that one of the aspects which brought about the decay of common life was the interpretation of the relationship between collective and individual poverty. The paradox was eventually reached of rich religious in poor institutes and vice-versa of religious with no belongings in institutes with vast possessions in contexts of general poverty. One must go beyond a legalistic interpretation and both individually and as a community renew the option to follow Jesus in courageous love, generous sharing, and abandonment to God's mysterious ways.

The taking up of positions like this leads to the making of courageous gestures, even those which may go against the general trend, which enable religious to be credible advocates of the human value of poverty, to denounce by their life-style the injustices perpetrated against so many of God's children and to "commit themselves to the promotion of justice in the society where they work".⁵³

Don Bosco's poverty

Among the evangelical counsels the one which presents the greatest diversity with respect to its practice in the various projects of consecrated life even to the extent of deeply characterizing them, is poverty. There is the poverty of the anchorites, that of the great monastic institutions, of the mendicant orders, of the contemplatives, the institutes of active life and the consecrated seculars.

A careful reading of *Vita Consecrata* must shape our reflection and our practice with a view to a conversion involving both individuals and communities. For this purpose I think it indispensable to invite you to look for a moment at Don Bosco, in order to complete our frame of reference. Of him the Commentary on our Constitutions says in compelling

⁵³ VC 82 b

words: he lived poverty "with one eye on Christ and the other on poor youngsters".⁵⁴

Don Rinaldi gives us an important key to the understanding of what Don Bosco thought about poverty. Speaking to the confreres of Valdocco in December 1930 on the occasion of the exercise for a happy death, he referred to an episode he had witnessed at first hand. Our Father reacted with particular severity to some requests which had been made in the community of San Benigno (new overcoats for all the clerics and curtains for the windows in private rooms). In reply to a confrere who, after the conference, said that he did not think that poverty was incompatible with decorum, he insisted: "The decorum of a religious lies in his poverty". "He had spoken in the same way of poverty", emphasized Don Rinaldi, "just when he was equipping his print-shops with machinery as up to date as any in Turin, and was also building an imposing boarding-school alongside the Church of St John the Evangelist".⁵⁵ An apparent contradiction of this kind suggested to Don Rinaldi a distinction between the poverty of each individual Salesian and the communities, and the requirements of an educative work with which Don Bosco wanted to be in the vanguard of progress, according to the expression he used with the future Pius XI.⁵⁶

In fact he spent much of his time looking for means to support his works, making himself a beggar for the benefit of poor youngsters. People from every level of society in Italy, France and Spain placed at his disposal even large sums of money, struck by the holiness and simplicity of our Father. Vast sums of money passed through his hands without a cent remaining. In his style of life and dress, his meals and journeys, the furnishing of his study, his times for rest and sleep, he was temperate, thanks to his early experiences of joyful poverty in his

⁵⁴ Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco, p.584

⁵⁵ BM 14, 435

⁵⁶ cf. *ibid*

own family, the example of his mother, and his determination to spend every moment of his time and every item of his possessions for the young.

He clearly drew his inspiration from the ideal of the poor Christ, and he frequently drew this to the attention of the Salesians. "Jesus Christ was born, lived, dressed, ate and died a poor man. And this doctrine of holy poverty was what he continually preached. To the multitudes he proclaimed the need to detach the heart from the things of the world and imposed this on those he called to be his apostles; and from those who asked to be accepted as his disciples to be his associates, he demanded that they give up all they possessed, even their families".⁵⁷

We know of his unshakable trust in Providence through the innumerable stories about him that have come down to us from the first generation of Salesians, and his frequent recommendations. "Divine Providence has helped us in the past in all our needs, and even in an extraordinary way. And we are quite certain that we shall continue to receive such help in the future through the intercession of Mary most holy, Help of Christians, who has always been a Mother to us. But this does not take away our obligation of being careful to reduce expenses when possible in our purchases, in making journeys, in building, and in general in everything that is not really necessary. Indeed in this connection we have a particular duty both before Divine Providence and our benefactors themselves".⁵⁸

Don Bosco therefore linked the generosity of Providence with the spirit of poverty, as though what attracted the abundance of God's gifts was our apostolic endeavour, our daily forgetting of self, and our dedication to the good of the young.

On the other hand, as one naturally inclined to the study of the history of the Church and of religious orders, he connected the flourishing of vocations with the growth or falling off of

⁵⁷ MB IX, 699

⁵⁸ MB XVIII, 191

poverty in their life and mission. "A third thing worries me a good deal: it is perseverance in observing the vow of poverty. Remember, my dear sons, that from this observance depends in large part the well-being of our Pious Society and the benefit of our own soul".⁵⁹

Today Don Bosco's message and concern are a challenge to us to return to the healing sources of our history and consecration. In both prosperous and needy settings, the charismatic power inserted in the Church through Don Bosco by the Spirit for the salvation of the young, can only be effective through our humble and clear witness in following Jesus. Don Bosco prompts us to make clear, and to reform if necessary, our way of living poverty, both individually and as communities. As the young see the generous poverty of our gift, they cannot fail to be captivated by the blessings God bestows on us.

4. Some suggestions for the present day

The motives we have outlined above which provide inspiration for our communal and personal way of life have to be applied to the concrete situations in which we are living.

It is imperative to be able to make wise judgements in line with our charism, concentrating on what is essential and entrusting ourselves to the Holy Spirit to find eloquent expressions of our poverty. That implies travail, uncertainty and sometimes strong but fruitful differences. Nowadays extreme poverty is forced on the attention of the whole world in all its tragic reality. Want is an existential condition suffered by millions of men and women in every corner of the earth, as a consequence of injustice. Poverty embraced for the kingdom of heaven does not enjoy the same publicity; it is chosen by only a few, seems almost hidden, and is often exposed to misunder-

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

standing and critical interpretations. There are those who do not believe in our profession of poverty, but attribute to us only motives of self-interest and profit and, all things considered, a life that is safeguarded in every sense.

At the present day, how can we make our public option for poverty visible in an intelligible way and its harmony with the Gospel?

Intelligent responsibility

In the first place I remind you of the attitude of **vigilance**, in the face of the necessary comparison between the professed ideal and the daily manifestations of poverty. It is easy to slip into compromises, not individually serious, but which combine to undermine the effective expression of consecration.

In recent years we have often recommended the “scrutinium paupertatis” included in the Regulations: “The community, whether local or provincial, should examine at intervals it considers opportune its own state of poverty, both as regards its collective witness and the services it renders, and should study the means to ensure a constant renewal”.⁶⁰

We may ask ourselves: at community level, are we really willing to submit our tenor of life to evaluation, our habits and our options? Do we help ourselves to face with sincerity our infidelities, our adaptations? I encourage every single confrere, as well as communities and those who exercise the service of authority to live the “scrutinium” not so much as an examination of conscience as an experience of the Spirit, as an entrustment to his purifying fire and power of regeneration.

The scrutinium cannot evade an assessment of some tendencies which may be dictated to some extent by circumstances but which, if neglected, can become destructive, such as the individual management of money and resources which becomes a

kind of parallel economy, tends to avoid any control and gives rise to clear inequalities to the detriment of fraternal spirit and the quality of religious life itself.

There is in fact in the very make-up of our consecration a dynamism which we must have the courage to let loose, so that through our collaboration the Spirit can bring about at the present day the salvation of the young. It is the choice of a "prophetic austerity" which challenges possession as an end in itself and rejects the temptation to consider oneself important and secure, because of what one has and has acquired. Showing weakness or leniency in the face of more evident abuses (personal accounts, unauthorized costly journeys, an easy life-style, seeking the most modern comforts, exclusively personal means of transport, etc.) leads to the gradual emptying of the significance and witness of both our consecration and our mission.

In some provinces the local communities are helped, through appropriate aids, not to lose the overall view of the demands stemming from poverty made in line with the Constitutions and the indications of the Church: austerity in life-style, sharing of goods, work, commitment for justice, preferential concern for the poor.

The scrutiny, in addition to promoting among us a responsible and fraternal exchange, will prove useful for a growth in the understanding and practice of poverty. In this regard too there is need for an "ongoing formation" which leads to a deepening awareness of its gospel meaning, overcomes routine observance which has become a habit, and opens us to new experiences.

Apostolic application of goods

We have already emphasized that Providence, in widely differing ways, puts financial resources at our disposal. From this derive some points which call for our attention.

The first regards their scrupulous **application** to educa-

tion and to the evangelization of the young and of ordinary people, to the advancement of the very poor, and to the formation of educators, leaders and catechists. In my journeys I have been impressed to see that in many places the Salesians have indeed thought first of all of the young in putting up new buildings. The salesian residence is often modest and limited to the essentials while the apostolic work has been fitted out with welcoming premises and suitable equipment.

It is perhaps necessary at the present day to emphasize that we need to work especially for the development of individuals and groups. Let the structures be simple, worthy, sufficient for the present purpose and that of the immediate future, not costly from the standpoint of management and maintenance, and decided on after careful consideration. Let us rather devote further expenditure to the formation of personnel, to promoting groups, to the education of young people of the poorest classes, to initiatives of evangelization and human advancement. And similar remarks apply to the use of our time, which is the equivalent of money.

Nowadays, to "apostolic" application can be added what can be described as "charitable", i.e. which tends to relieve such primary and pressing needs as hunger, health and basic services, and the reception of the homeless or refugees. The command: "Give the money to the poor"⁶¹ is addressed also to us, especially with regard to goods that are not necessary, including structures and money. Many of the charitable donations we receive are motivated and offered for the alleviation of such needs. It would be unjust to use them for management expenses or in superfluous building.

A second point calling for our attention concerns the **criteria of the safeguarding** of the goods we have available. Everywhere to some extent we are bound by multiple requirements of civil and social legislation, heavy financial burdens

⁶¹ Mt 19, 21

linked with structures and their maintenance, and possibilities of investment and capitalization vary a great deal. On the other hand we have in hand the redimensioning of our works and the organization of our resources. I will not dwell now on details concerning specific points on which guidelines will soon be given by the competent Department.

I want rather to point out, in the spirit of our poverty, the principle of keeping our resources readily available for the apostolate; and hence of not investing in buildings or possessions or making money an end in itself. Even amongst us a mentality and a practice can creep in which is directed to the accumulation of funds to ensure a profit linked only indirectly or tenuously with the mission.

The combination of trust in Providence with wise foresight is difficult and not always obvious at first sight. Nevertheless this point must not be overlooked so as not to run the risk of incompetent management, and to avoid losing through highly speculative planning goods and property that with more creativity and courage could have been used at once for the benefit of the people. We must remember Don Bosco's assertion: "Our goods and money belong to the poor".⁶²

Solidarity.

We have already spoken of **solidarity**, as a decisive element in the normative framework of salesian poverty. It is not something optional but a constitutional duty, which touches on our common identity as consecrated persons and sons of Don Bosco.

I will not conceal from you that in this area, together with exemplary situations of the sharing of goods in the Congregation there are others of evident inequality: in the same province there are works with notable financial means at their disposal and abundant reserves, while others are suffering a scarcity of re-

⁶² BM 5, 450

sources and find themselves limited in their possibilities for the mission. These situations should be faced calmly but with determination, and set right without further delay by those competent: house council, provincial council, provincial chapter. In particular the provincial administration must provide precise guidelines for the financial conduct of the local communities and of the province according to what is stated in art.197 of the Regulations: "The provincial with the consent of his council will decide on and inform the houses of the contributions required from them for the needs of the province, and will likewise withdraw surplus funds that may be available in certain houses. He will draw up a periodic plan of financial solidarity among all the houses of the province, in order to help those in greater need..."⁶³

Solidarity between the communities is a norm for the province and is organized at provincial level, at which there is a wider and more objective view of the mission of the local communities.

I realize that in some cases this will require a real conversion, a complete change of both mentality and practice. But it must be done, with a spirit of availability and detachment, in the certainty that a kind of management based on solidarity builds fellowship, provides unhoped for possibilities for the mission, guarantees greater fidelity and clarity in the personal witness of the confreres, and allows for resources to be directed to the urgent needs of the Church and the people.

Educating to the use of goods

Education takes place through testimony, teachings and appropriate experiences. There is a myth that needs to be exploded, almost an idolatry from which young people are not exempt. They too want to possess so as to cut a good figure: money, clothing, motor-cycle, computer, holidays. They are often completely ignorant of the needs of their neighbour. This can happen even

⁶³ R 197

in our own environments, though in more recent times there has been an evident effort to sensitize youngsters to solidarity and it has met with a gratifying response from them.

There is a way of life that can be suggested, which is attentive to all the needs of the person but without going to extremes of consumerism and waste. An example could be the organization of families which propose to live on what is necessary and to limit superfluous expenditure.

There is a respect and care for common goods which is necessary and needs emphasis: environment, nature, vegetation and living space.

There is above all a Christian vision of an ordering and application of goods and their individual and social management. The dominant tendency in today's society does not project this kind of vision. Additional specific experiences are needed to make them understood and assimilated. Under this heading come the various forms of volunteer work, collaboration in humanitarian causes, information about such grave problems as hunger and famine, the exploitation of the weak and endemic unemployment, topics which only occasionally find expression in the mass media. To invitations to works of charity and the organization of voluntary service must be added a correct social view of situations which reveals how these phenomena come to be, and suggest possible lines of solution, even of a structural kind.

The GC23 emphasized the urgent need of forming young people to the social dimension of charity in the context of education to the faith.⁶⁴ In fact they could not fail to be involved, according to what John Paul II said in his message for Lent: "There are situations of persistent misery which cannot but impinge upon the conscience of Christians, reminding them of their duty to address these situations both as individuals and as a community".⁶⁵

⁶⁴ cf. GC23 209-214

⁶⁵ John Paul II, Message for Lent 1999

Loving the poor in Christ.

Loving the poor means feeling oneself poor among the poor. Our cultural preparation and our profession of priests and educators places us naturally in a condition of security, of prestige, of sufficiency, of rapport with a certain social class. For some this can become something to be sought after and enjoyed. From this standpoint through charitable initiatives, we open our hand and our gaze towards those who are in want.

Often, however, we remain psychologically at a distance, without sharing in the sufferings of the poor nor receiving anything of their rich humanity. A direct exposure to poverty cannot be other than a wholesome experience for the community. For further points of meditation on the implications of our preferential option for the poor, I refer you to the letter "He had compassion on them".⁶⁶

A welcoming reception, help and sharing, cannot be expressed in all our works in one and the same manner, but what is important is that in none of them should be lacking the awareness of the kinds of poverty which are around us or further away, the knowledge of its roots in those afflicted by it, and in our own attitude; it is important that such poverty be assured of finding a place in the heart and initiatives of the community. A Church capable of compassion is one of the pressing requirements of the present day, when these problems of which we are speaking are disturbing public opinion.

Of this we are reminded by the Constitutions: "The spirit of poverty leads us to be one with the poor and to love them in Christ. For this reason we make every effort to stay close to them, to alleviate their needs, making our own their lawful aspirations for a more human society".⁶⁷

⁶⁶ AGC 359

⁶⁷ C 79

Conclusion.

“He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty”.⁶⁸ Mary’s canticle is the first of a human being that Luke places in the Gospel. It introduces and interprets the story of Jesus in the key of the history of salvation as its paradigm and definitive moment.

Mary recounts not only her personal experience of election and exultation, but also provides a vision of human history, and acknowledges the forces that move her: God is the protagonist with his love manifested in power placed at the service of mercy. The poor in the biblical tradition are its first recipients, chosen as the setting for the revelation of such power and compassion and as the moving force in history. The riches and power associated with human pride move irrevocably towards the consummation and, left to themselves, also towards decay and destruction.

History begins again always from the poor and opens to the future in the measure of their hope.

At the eve of the third millennium the themes of poverty and riches, of power and human dignity have become the prevalent ones. The conversion from self-sufficient secularism to the living God, must at this juncture be placed in close rapport with the possession, application, ordering and use of goods, both material and cultural. The *Magnificat* seems to resound as a program for our times.

May Mary help us to believe, to hope and to love according to the vision of her Canticle.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Juan Tucki". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" that loops under the rest of the name.

⁶⁸ Lk 1, 53