

I. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Rome, July 1975

My dear confreres and sons,

I have just returned to Rome from the Latin-American Provincials' Meeting in Brazil. It consisted of eight days of intense work, with plenty of realism, fraternal charity and sincere community prayer. The object of the meeting was to check up on how far the recommendations of the Provincial Chapters, based on those of the Special General Chapter, had been implemented.

Meeting with the Provincials

The discussions were very practical, though, of course, the practical measures had solid thought behind them. The whole affair was conducted with great sincerity and calmness, and the temptation to churn out more paperwork was steadily resisted. Instead, the essential, urgent points were brought into focus and lines of action were thrashed out with an eye to getting concrete action under way and joining forces in unity of mind and heart for the time that remains before the next General Chapter.

There emerged three lines of operation vital to the life of every Province. Although distinct, they are nevertheless interdependent, the one presupposing and complementing the others; hence the importance of their harmonized activation. The alternative is a malfunctioning and non-action that will have a serious

snow-ball effect, when there *should* be reconstruction and expansion in the light of the experiences of the last few years.

To forestall objections, let me say here and now that these fully-elaborated lines of action are not going to push out the other recommendations and decisions of the Provincial Chapters. On the contrary, one could say that they subsume the existing decisions, draw out the essentials and so isolate what is urgently needed for our total renewal. This renewal, it should be noted, is well under way in many Provinces and much encouraging progress has been made, but it has not always and everywhere reached the objectives that have been repeatedly declared essential and therefore indispensable.

Further on in this number (pages) you will find the report on the meetings of the Provincials from Europe and the West, and of the Provincials of Latin America. You will find a common denominator that indicates a foundation of situations common to all parts of the Congregation; and also differences of emphasis and nuance that speak of differing situations.

However, everywhere there has been a realistic appreciation of the fact that we can no longer permit ourselves the luxury of further procrastination in getting things done. This much is clear from the courageous and faithful analyses made in the Regions.

Whilst taking decisive action is the immediate responsibility of the Provincials and their Councils, it also involves the Rectors, their Communities, and the confreres individually. Obviously this work will not be done by a little wand-waving on the part of the Rector Major and his Council; it demands the active, determined cooperation of everyone, if the findings of the Provincials' Meetings are to arouse an adequate response. And I don't have to rub in how urgent an obligation this is. In the sacred union of clear minds and strong wills, we shall be able to make up the time we may have lost over the years and take our decisive steps forward. The improved general situation gives us grounds for hope.

Looking forward with hopeful eyes

Our good confreres in the East, who will be holding their Provincials' Meeting at Bangalore in October, will be able to draw much profit from these conclusions, and I think many of them will be echoed in their final report.

As I have already told the Provincials at these meetings, I look forward to the morrow with every hope, especially since my return from the Americas. I found enthusiasm, hard work, achievement, creativity, splendid and original new developments for poor boys; fresh and lively modes of prayer among the young confreres; in many Provinces an influx of very mature young men trying their vocations; an interest in Don Bosco and the Congregation, and finally a generous offer to go on the missions from very many confreres, a high proportion of them being youngsters.

I must say that this is a source of great comfort and hope. The letters that I receive from these young confreres tell me that there are strong, healthy forces at work in the Congregation that remind me of the young men of our Golden Age. Surely we can look to the future with hopeful eyes?

The Missionary Centenary

In this Centenary Year, I repeat, each Province and Community should feel that it is really mobilized, so that it can inspire others with that sense of missionary fervour that is characteristic of our vocation. There is no lack of things to do: we offer a number of suggestions, and all you have to do is to make use of them. Your loving care and methodical application will generate enthusiasm, which will blossom into vocations.

And so in this number of the Acts you will find some useful indications of how to go about it. In particular, I recommend that you take great pains to prepare for 11th November, the Day of Spirituality. It must be a day when the whole Congregation,

and each Community, should be united, without fuss or triumphalism, in prayer, reflection, fraternal remembrance of our deceased missionaries, and in thanksgiving to the Lord for all the good the Congregation has done through them in this hundred years of mission work.

The commemoration strikes me as being a singular grace in this year 1975-6, which is likely to see a decided recovery after the years of trial. It is the business of each one of us to make his own contribution to this work of spiritual recuperation and apostolic rebirth.

MISSIONARIES OF YOUTH

Let me now illustrate the first of the three conclusions I mentioned above: it is about *our mission*. I shall discuss, then, our *raison d'être*, our vocation in the Church generally, and our vocation in the Church of today.

We have been described as 'Missionaries of Youth', a pregnant and compelling description at this moment of history when youth holds the stage and we, for that very reason, are called into action.

Missionaries, that is, those sent to bear the Good News; *of youth*, the people chosen by Don Bosco for himself and his sons as recipients of the Good News.

So the young constitute the whole point of our missionary presence 'in the Church and in society'.

We have a considerable literature in Don Bosco, the evangelizer who worked with the most original catechetical methods. Just page through the *Biographical Memoirs* or any of the better-known studies, and you will see him successively as the Sunday juggler to the adults, the yokel to the boys of his own age, the young priest roaming the meadows in the middle of a noisy crowd of his 'little brats', the good shepherd recognizing the lost sheep and bringing it home to the Father there at the road-side or up

on the box of the mail-coach, then the apologist of the *Letture Cattoliche* or the *Storia dei Papi*, the zealous strategist waging the war of the religious tracts with his fecund imagination and tenacious will, the apostle of the South American missions, the inspired dreamer... all in Don Bosco. His whole life is the expression of the urge to evangelize. Such was his profound sense of particular mission that the words of St. Paul could appropriately be applied to him: 'For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!' (*I Cor.*, 9, 16).

1st. Our mission: taking the Good News to the young

Coming back to the times we are living in, we are constrained to ask at once: where precisely does our mission lie if Don Bosco's mantle has fallen on us, as obviously it has? Here the Church provides sure guidance with its teaching and its policies: today 'mission' means essentially proclaiming the Good News and educating in the Faith (*Direttorio Catechistico Generale*, No. 6). And the realities of the religious and social situation set us in the same direction.

Evangelization is still just starting

'Old Europe', as we all know, has become a true mission land, a territory to be evangelized. And not only in certain social enclaves or cultural coteries, as might have appeared to be the case thirty or forty years ago; but in the widest and deepest sense.

Then, the phenomenon of neo-paganism affected the Church as a place or moment of religious and cultural life; now, it strikes down at the inner being of the Church as a living, vital body. And the situation on the other continents is, unfortunately, no better, though for different reasons. So the terms are reversed:

the enclaves and coteries are now islands of faith rising up from the sea of a social and cultural environment that, to put it mildly, is areligious (taking 'religious' in the sense of seeking a real relationship with God, and not a mere window-dressing for it).

The Church is one great catechesis

The Church, then, summons everyone to the task of spreading the Gospel. All its documents on catechesis are couched in terms, explicit or implicit, of evangelization or re-evangelization (e.g., v. No. 6 in the *Direttorio Catechistico Generale*). Further, I would say that the Church, at the recent Council, saw itself as a great work of evangelization and catechesis, and presented itself as such. A very special catechesis, since the Council Fathers were at the same time masters and pupils, apostles and faithful, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with his grace. This was a true evangelization and catechesis, that is, in the words of Pope John: 'a penetration of doctrine and a formation of consciences, corresponding more perfectly with fidelity to authentic doctrine, which is to be more thoroughly studied and explained at greater depth through the method of enquiry and of literary formulation developed by modern thought' (Opening address of the Council: 11-10-1962). And why could not the Council have been anything else but a vast catechesis? Because the Church herself is just that: the living transmission of one truth, the Word of God (cf. *A.G.* 35; *G.E.* 4; *D.H.* 14), the Word of Jesus Christ (cf. *L.G.* 3; *John* 20, 21; *Matt.* 28, 19).

The 'History of Salvation', that is, the ensemble of historically established acts by which God effected and continues to effect the salvation of His children, is itself a marvellous, divine catechesis, a transmission of religious truths (the God-man relationship). It is as though men were called to higher and higher realities until the Son of God, becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ, made

it possible for us to be grafted on to the same divine life through the life of grace won by the Redemption (S.C. 10).

The prime importance of evangelization/catechesis was underscored by the last Bishops' Synod (27th Sept.-26th Oct., 1974), which was devoted entirely to the theme.

Naught for your comfort

I have said above that, with the present situation, we have no alternative but to look around and see where we stand, 'we' being the Church, as individuals and as members of groups playing their part in the mission that Christ passed on to His Mystical Body. Let us look at our own situation; and we cannot get a proper grasp on our mission to evangelize the young unless we see it against the broad canvas of the general situation. I must say, more's the pity, that what the Church and her missionaries see around them could hardly be called encouraging.

First of all, and above all, there is an abysmal ignorance of religious truths in general, and of Christian and Catholic doctrine in particular, even with people who are professionally competent in their field and who therefore consider that they know quite enough, thank you, to find their way around the truths of religion (cf. G.S. 4). They are, in fact, very numerous, these recidivist unbelievers or pagans, just as there are recidivist illiterates.

Then there are the people whose religious knowledge is very skimpy and entirely inadequate for their age and the responsibilities they bear. It may even be distorted to the point where they confront the most serious problems of life, including family and social problems, with complete indifference and disastrous results.

The next stage is that religious truths are discredited to the point of being thrown out entirely as inadequate to face and solve the great questions of life. Sometimes the attitude is: 'I couldn't care less'; sometimes it is openly hostile, while at other times there is an *a priori* condemnation of the Church and its priests.

Interestingly enough, we find Tertullian in the 2nd-3rd century of our era addressing these words to his pagan fellow-citizens: 'The Church asks only to be heard and understood before being condemned'.

In the end there is an open denial of religion and of God Himself, atheism is erected into a system of life, and often becomes a system of political and social action, with the accompanying violence and strife, overt and covert, directed against the Church and the whole Christian ethic.

Young people with their faith at peril

And on to this rickety stage marches youth, the ones to whom we Salesians have been sent (cf. Const. 39). No longer are they in a situation where their faith is sheltered; on the contrary, it is menaced from all sides.

The statement of the recent Bishops' Synod spot-lights these dangers to the faith: 'In our discussions we have never closed our eyes to the difficulties and obstacles, some old, some new, that seem to be set up against evangelization. Indeed, we have given careful consideration to a number of the phenomena of our time. Secularisation, for instance, which does present some positive aspects, but is bent towards secularism. That means excluding God from human horizons and, with Him, there is lost a deepened sense of the meaning of existence. There is atheism, that many-headed hydra, which is widely spread in a number of countries. We have studied these things carefully and have examined their underlying causes to see if we can discover in them the call of God, Who calls us to a greater purity in the confession of our faith and in our witness to it. Neither did another great difficulty escape us, one that is often laced with cunning and violence: that is, the cutting-back of religious liberty, and restrictions on the life of the Church, with the object of muzzling her completely.

'Nor have we forgotten the oppressed, particularly all those who are being persecuted for the Gospel, bearing in themselves the Good News of the Cross, pressing on with an excellent work of evangelization, and making a very significant contribution to the fulfilment of the Church's mission' (Third Bishops' Synod, Statement, No. 8).

Ideological pluralism and freedom of conscience

Besides these attacks on the faith, we must take other aspects of our times into account. The most important is ideological pluralism in the field of religion, which exposes the young to a welter of contradictory ideas, convictions and life-ideals, offering a sharply opposed alternative to Christian concepts. It is plain that arguments based on authority and positions of privilege cut no ice at all with them; the only thing that works is the conviction behind the message and the way it is put across.

Today, especially since the Conciliar Declaration on freedom of conscience (*Dignitatis Humanae*: 1-12-1965), many think that personal religion is also a matter of choice. However that may be, the fact remains that, for many of our youngsters, the choice of Christ is by no means taken for granted; it is an object of suffering and laboured research, with ever-elusive final solutions.

Why have the evangelizers not been more successful?

'But just a minute', you may say, 'I thought you were telling us a little while ago to look at our world with the optimism of Don Bosco (cf. *A.S.C.*, No. 278, p. 11). Isn't this all rather contradictory?' Not at all!

I want to make sure that the optimism does not veer off into illusion and woolly-mindedness on such an important matter as evangelization.

The Pope has appealed explicitly to us Christians and religious to feel that we have been called personally to the cause: 'In these stormy, fateful days, what is evangelization's greatest need? *Men: it needs men.* And it is such a simple answer that it can elicit the disappointed response: "Tell us something we didn't know". But wait: if it was known, where are all the men? Or perhaps there were not enough of them?

'And today, now that our reflection on the common priesthood has made us all alive to the fact that every Christian, every baptised person carries within him a missionary vocation, a call to the apostolate, to the honour and responsibility of spreading the Gospel, just tell me how it is that evangelization is still crawling along painfully and laboriously? If we knew all the time that the economy of the Gospel was based on the freely-given service of every Christian, freely-given, but at the same time morally binding, does not the lack of men who have made the apostolate their way of life constitute an accusation of sloth and disloyalty against many of Christ's followers, who don't care about Christ, and are perhaps deserters?' (Address: 30-10-1974).

Our reply

With such a situation before us and such a plaintive cry ringing in our ears, our Congregation has already pledged its service: the S.G.C. has got down to the roots of the matter and produced some 'working guide-lines' that are precise and practical, courageous and right up-to-date. In particular, it made evangelization and catechesis the criteria of the genuineness of the will to renewal in our works and communities. This it did repeatedly and insistently.

Here's the proof:

'The XX General Chapter considers it desirable to endorse what the XIX Chapter authoritatively affirmed: "Salesians, consecrated as they are to the service of youth, especially the poorest, in

order to be amongst them the efficacious presence of the love of God, will consider the religious education of youth as the first apostolic activity of the Salesian apostolate; it asks therefore for a rethinking and for a reorganization of all Salesian works so that they may have as their main purpose the formation of the man of faith.” (No. 279).

But the S.G.C. goes further: ‘Every Salesian, besides being a catechist, must consider himself as one who forms catechists. *Every Salesian community must study how it can evangelize as a group* and become a centre for promoting catechetics.’ (No. 333) And to clinch the point: ‘It is necessary for it (the community) to respond to the new needs because the *extent to which it is evangelical will be the measure of its being Salesian.*’ (No. 339)

So we are dealing with something to which a serious obligation is attached, something that cannot be left to the resourcefulness or good will of some pioneers. It will be decisive for the future of the Congregation; we could say that its future is in the balance and that future will be conditional on its generous response to the ‘signs of the times’ as an expression of a providential work of education.

The post-capitular review

The Provincial Chapters of 1975 and the Continental Meetings, provided for in the S.G.C., have been reviewing the progress made — and the members are still at it — in the implementation of the Congregation’s commitments over the last three years.

The general verdict is that some headway has been made... but not much. There is a need to intensify and speed up the work on the more urgent items; in other sectors, it is a matter of rectifying defects and specifying improvements, but always with a mind to evangelizing. It is interesting to note how much was said at the conclusion of the meetings on this priority Salesian topic,

with a sense of responsibility, humble sincerity and vigorous decision. All very significant.

The European Provincials state: 'We are fully aware that the present situation makes an urgent demand on us to attend to the evangelization and religious education of youth... The religious education of the young cannot be considered simply as a sector of our work; rather, it is a permanent dimension of all our pastoral work, whatever the sector or structure (school, club, youth centre, parish...)' (Practical Conclusions of the Continental Meeting at Rome)

In their turn, the Provincials and Delegates of Latin America, referring to the analysis of the situation made at the meeting, declare that, with its help, they have been shown 'just how far our obligations go. These bind us to a strategy of combined planning' for the coming years... Realities in Latin America are pressing on us Salesians, especially in the field of the evangelization of youth. The urgency of the situation has been made clearer by our reflection together on how much we have to do... in the way of evangelization and catechetics. These are priority areas and determine our lines of action (restructuring of works, new presences, qualification of personnel, training programmes, etc. Cf. *S.G.C.* 279, 328, 361). (Practical Conclusions of the Continental Meeting, Latin America)

And this is our mission. It is desperately needed by the youngsters who have gone astray, duped and manipulated by a system that has fixed them psychologically and ideologically, no matter how. You can see clearly enough the lack of evangelization in the embittered, shrill 'demos' that are a common feature of the juvenile scene. And you cannot blame the young for that; it is the people whose duty it is, the educators, the counsellors, the apostles who are to blame for failing to evangelize.

There is a pressing need for our mission in the times and situations we are living in (we have already seen the Pope calling them 'these stormy, fateful days'). As the going gets tougher,

it becomes more demanding, more powerfully charged with developments and consequences and closely-spaced dead-lines.

But all this needs something more than a simple diagnosis leading to generalized proposals, which, of themselves, resolve nothing into practice. It is necessary to work out a series of well-coordinated practical measures and initiatives in catechetics that are nailed down to places, times, methods and means, and are related to the people being evangelized.

The Provincials were well aware of this necessity in reviewing the situation at their Continental Meetings and dealt with the practical consequences, as you will see from the report further on in this number.

The three obligations entered into by the S.G.C.

This complex subject cannot be treated exhaustively, but keep in mind that the S.G.C. had already worked out a general programme embodying the basic thinking without which methods and means are nothing more than a confidence trick.

The S.G.C. says in paragraph 339: 'Since the XX General Chapter emphasizes the renewal of Salesian communities, each one of these must develop a new mentality and outlook; it must adopt a new "community" style of thought and action and present itself to the world in a new guise.'

As you see, there are three items of capital importance:

- 1) to bring about a change of mentality;
- 2) to adopt a new style of community thought and action;
- 3) to present a new image to the world.

Let us think about these for a while.

1. To bring about a change of mentality

From the very beginning the capitular document ('*Evangelization and Catechesis*') shows an awareness to this necessity, de-

claring (para. 274.1): 'It is not concerned with giving an exhaustive list of principles but rather with pointing out the urgency of a change of mentality in the field of evangelization.'

This change of mentality is needed because today catechesis is not what it was before. I would like this reality to be sincerely and effectively acknowledged by everyone, especially those who are getting on in years. Many Salesians who are doing catechetical or pastoral work or teaching religion are today experiencing some dismay at finding that they can no longer do what perhaps they have been doing successfully for many years. Perhaps they have not realized the profound changes that, in the course of a few years, have changed society, youth, pastoral criteria and catechetical methods, because the new audio-visual society has created a new type of man, a new way of looking at the universe, a new language. We older men have to 'learn' this language so that we can use it for the Gospel message.

The *Direttorio Catechistico Generale* echoes these anxieties: 'This (catechetical) renewal seems to be in danger today from those who fail to grasp how deep the renewal has to be, as if all that was needed was to remedy religious ignorance. For them, the remedy is more and more catechesis. This solution obviously does not measure up to reality. The catechesis itself has to be renewed, and not only for children either, but also for the continuous education of adults in the faith' (No. 9).

There has to be a change of mentality, then, a change that demands a true conversion, in the sense of a radical recasting and resetting of one's range of pastoral thinking and pastoral action. It is a law of life, and we know that life can impose some very drastic mutations on nature, which is hard on nature, but necessary.

2. To adopt a new style of community thought and action

The community dimension of pastoral catechetics is seen today to be of prime importance. The *Direttorio* again: 'Catechesis

necessarily depends on the support of the witness given by the ecclesial community. It is more compelling when seen against the back-drop of what the community is and does, visibly. The catechist is in a way the interpreter between the Church and those who are being catechized' (No. 35).

What has been said above of the community of the Church applies also (indeed, more trenchantly) to a religious community. Each of our Communities plies its catechesis much more effectively by what it is than by what it says. The days are long past when catechesis was off-loaded on to some member of the Community, whilst the others, their duty done, went happily about their lawful pursuits.

In this way, catechesis goes beyond the religion class: the entire activity of the Community is part of an organic work of Christian education undertaken as a common effort. Rectors, organizers of group activities, teachers of any subject, assistants and confreres, are all responsible for a united action in catechetics. The whole Community of Salesian educators is therefore a living witness to what is announced in the catechesis (cf. *S.G.C.* 318-321).

They become the verification of their own words, which otherwise lose their credibility and become so much hot air. According to the Italian Bishops' Conference, 'Just as it is impossible to conceive of a Christian community without a good catechesis, so it is impossible to have a good catechesis without the participation of the entire community' (*Il rinnovamento della catechesi*, No. 200).

So the work of catechising requires from the religious community a constant commitment to progressive *conversion* through a living witness of faith and love. This acquires greater depth and urgency these days with the accent of the catechetics-apostolate falling heavily on evangelisation. It is a matter not only of increasing factual knowledge, but also of rediscovering the vital values of the Christian choice. The question is: will our Communities become so convincing that they will persuade the young

that it is worth their while to remain Christians? And it is a question that needs a constructive answer.

3. *To present a new image to the world*

Here is another endlessly thought-provoking theme to sharpen our sense of commitment. Catechetical action nowadays seems to have more to do with a total relationship with the world than with modernizing methods and techniques. Again, the temptation to over-simplify is avoided and stress is laid on the close relationship between the commitment to evangelization and the attitude of service to the world: 'The Gospel would lack credibility if the Christian did not attempt to face up to and resolve the great problems of the world today by coming to close grips with them.' (S.G.C. 315).

We all know the famous saying of Gandhi's: 'For many men, the idea of God is expressed as a piece of bread'. Our Communities will not be able to evangelize if they turn in on themselves and on their work, even though they manage to organize a plush catechetical set-up. It is the contrary that happens: the more they get out of themselves, the more they go out of their way to meet the needs of the people (as Don Bosco and the great missionaries did), the more effective their evangelization will be and the greater its credibility.

So it is that our S.G.C. summons us to do our duty as a 'dedication to justice' for the liberation of the oppressed, and to renew our social and political commitment to work for a society that is less inhuman (cf. S.G.C. 67-77). Again, the Bishops' Synod of 1971 tells us: 'It seems clear that working for justice and helping to transform the world forms part of the task of preaching the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every form of oppression' (*La giudizia nel mondo*, Introduction, and also cf. the

Synod 1974, No. 14). In this matter, the Latin-American Provincials were quite right to refer to Don Bosco, who worked for justice rather than thresh about denouncing people here and confronting people there, which is all too often the cause of deep divisions and negative chain-reactions.

2. Our problem: how to evangelize today

Let us now get down to more detailed considerations. The catechesis of evangelization, in its method, assumes the presence of three essentials if the Divine Word and the mystery of salvation are to be transmitted coherently and effectively as a body of truths. These three fundamentals can be worded in this way:

- above all, personal conviction; and with it
- personal conversion;
- personal superabundance of truth and grace.

In short, what the catechist will give to others, whoever they may be, but especially the young, will be only what he has himself in superabundance: the richness of truth and grace that fill his mind and soul, his convictions and his love for Christ, the Redeemer.

This is what the Council says about it, speaking to all the children of the Church: 'Yet let all realize that their first and most important obligation toward the spread of the faith is this: to lead a profoundly Christian life' (*A.G.* 36)... 'lest any of them become "an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly"' (*D.V.* 25, quoting St. Augustine, Sermon 179,1). Without this listening, any method we care to try will be useless, or downright dangerous, certainly not according to the mind of Christ and the Church.

These are all statements based on a profound reality, and should lead us to a serious examination of conscience.

Leading them to friendship with the Risen Christ

The obligation to catechize is therefore a permanent feature of all our educational work, and not of just one specific sector. Catechesis goes with the liturgy, with religious and secular culture, with group activities, with all our educational action in any form, and, of course, with the living witness of the Community and of its individual members.

The target area that all our evangelizing and catechetical action is converging on, with everything that goes with it, all our love, thinking, expertise, is not an abstraction, but a reality — indeed, a Person, the radiant figure of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, harmonizing in Himself all the work of salvation.

Article 21 of the New Constitutions says this: 'Education to the faith means above all leading people to the person of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. Our highest knowledge is to know Him, our deepest joy to reveal the unsearchable riches of His grace, so that men may be renewed by discovering the supreme meaning of their lives in Him and in His gospel. As they accept Christ, He draws them into union with the Father, to adore Him in spirit and in truth as servants of His kingdom'. And it is precisely to this friendship, this intimacy with Christ, our Redeemer, that we have to direct our efforts in catechetical evangelization, whether it is instruction as such or the action of witness; a witness that will be given through conduct so thoroughly illuminated by the *Truth* that is Christ, so deeply nourished by His *Life* that anyone listening to us or watching us, or just seeing and judging us, will easily find the *Way* that is Christ Jesus. (Cf. S.G.C. 22; Pope Paul: Address, 3-2-1965).

Encounter in the Eucharist

The supreme moment of this encounter, the fulfilment of all true catechesis, is the Eucharist, the mystery of thanksgiving un-

derstood as far as comprehension goes, accepted fully in faith, lived personally in generous participation with the pascal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, our Redeemer. Again it is the Council that gives the lead: 'Hence the Eucharist shows itself to be the source and apex of the whole work of preaching the gospel. Those under instruction are introduced by stages to a sharing in the Eucharist. The faithful, already marked with the sacred seal of baptism and confirmation, are, through the reception of the Eucharist, fully joined to the Body of Christ' (P.O. 5).

And we are led on straight away to consider the strategy of Christian education adopted by our Father, which hinged on the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our whole mission of education is affected.

There remains the question of what part the Eucharist plays in the life of the educational community, and the initiation of the young into a full, conscious and active experience of the liturgical life. Two questions remain to be looked into: first, the part played by the Eucharist in the life of the educational community; and second, the introduction of the young to a full, active experience of the liturgical life. Article 23 of the Constitutions says: 'Our aim must be to encourage all people to "full, conscious and active participation" in the liturgy. Frequent encounter with Christ in the sacraments of penance and the eucharist are invaluable aids to educating Christians to liberty, to persevering conversion and to generosity and love within the Christian Community.'

Wanted: well-prepared Salesians

Obviously, there is no place here for do-it-yourself methods, either for the individual or the Community: preparation is needed. And it has to be specific to a place and its work, not a vague, generalized affair.

The preparation of personnel properly qualified in the catechetics apostolate is a key factor in the Congregation's plans for

catechetics. Without it, all the dedicated paper-work and inspired planning stay as dead as Marley undoubtedly was.

If we have enough experts, it will be possible to revise the methods for teaching religion, instruct and help the confreres in the difficult job of passing on the Word of God to the youngsters of today, organize the training of catechists and parents, and so on.

In short: an imaginative scheme for preparing our men in catechetics at all levels seems to me to be a priority for renewing the Congregation.

Plenty of scope for experts

It is absolutely necessary for each Province to have fully-qualified men working full-time at catechetics:

a) for teaching catechetics in the studentates, many of which have nothing or next to nothing in this line. This is a very serious state of affairs. The important thing is not so much to have it down on the time-table as a subject (perhaps in the form of a crash-course lasting a few weeks and given by outsiders!), but that, for the whole of the period of formation, catechetics should be there as an ingredient educationally active in the whole training programme, so that the right environment is created for those aspiring to become teachers and catechists (cf. S.G.C. 341);

b) for working with the staff of the Catechetical Institute at the Università Pontificia Salesiana on the theology and methodology of catechetics, and at the Salesian Catechetical Centres (e.g., Leumann, Turin; Madrid, and any of the national centres) for research, publications, study courses, etc. I am very pleased with the decision taken by Provincials at the Latin-American Meeting to establish two important centres for the Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking areas respectively;

c) for working *at Provincial level* on formulating schemes for catechetics and the Youth Apostolate;

d) for *collaboration with the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians*, and the Salesian Family in arranging catechetical courses and refresher courses;

e) to meet the great demand for help *at diocesan and national level*. Teams of experts in catechetics will enable us to put on adequate training and up-dating facilities for the confreres at these levels:

— *intermediate* (between the academics and the men in the field): preparation of organizers and experts to work in the parishes, schools and youth centres within the field of planning and structuring for the catechetics apostolate at Provincial and Interprovincial level;

— *ordinary training* of all Salesians, specially (as stated above) in philosophy, theology and pastoral work;

— on-going formation for all Salesians carrying out their mission as evangelizers in our various works;

— *advisors, consultants and collaborators* for the whole Salesian Family: Salesians, Salesian Sisters, Volontarie di Don Bosco, Co-operators, Past Pupils, etc. in their educational and catechetical mission.

Catechesis in the liturgy and in life

Let us make it more practical still. In the evangelization through catechesis that goes on in our groups and associations (v. S.G.C. 321-326), there is a close interworking with the liturgical action of the people concerned and with their lives, right down to the arranging of their timetables and the organizing of their activities. The Kingdom of God proclaimed in catechesis needs to be *celebrated* in the liturgy and *shared* in the com-

mon life. With us, then, a balanced creativity and inventiveness is encouraged in preparing our Masses, celebrating the sacraments and in discovering and understanding the 'liturgical signs.'

This is the place and field of action, after the best Salesian tradition, of the associations with their groups, including the informal ones. These constitute a 'privileged place', where the Word of God is welcomed, assimilated and set against the day-to-day problems of the Christian life. The Salesian catechist-educator should guide his youngsters to accept the Word of God 'as a key to their problems, an answer to their questions, a broadening of their values and, at the same time, the satisfaction of their aspirations' (Italian Bishops' Conference, *op. cit.*, No. 52).

In the Christocentric vision mentioned above, there is a confluence of the traditional Salesian values of sacramental, and particularly Eucharistic piety, devotion to Mary and a strong attachment to the Pope as the centre of the Church. It is in this synthesis that such values fall into place and into gear.

I hardly need to say that this work, demanding intelligence, study, self-sacrifice and sublimation to the supernatural, is like the action of grace: intimately personal. Forget mass-production; it is absolutely essential at any given moment to address the individual to the highest degree possible. The young people to whom we direct our apostolate must have ready access to a service of personal spiritual guidance.

Salesian style and atmosphere

Much of what has been said above is of general application to education and evangelization. We cannot claim to lay down any immutable laws or to pull out anything new in this field, which is as vast as the Church and as old as the Gospel itself. But, as I said at the beginning, our outstanding rôle in the Church is that of working for youth. We can therefore talk about a 'Salesian atmosphere' in which our pastoral and apostolic action

takes place (and, I might say, we are not the only ones to recognize this; see the Holy Father's address to the General Chapter XIX, 21st May 1965: v. Acts of the Chapter, pp. 295-300). The friendly presence, the lucidity of Christian doctrine, educating to liberty: there must be something distinctive about it, and that is the 'Salesian style.'

Educating to liberty

I really must add something on educating to liberty. It is more than ever necessary today, and it is an extremely important part of any deliberately formulated and soundly based attempt at Christian formation of the young. But education to liberty, where the young person chooses what he wants, should not be confused with agnosticism or — worse still — the abandonment, on the part of the Salesian educator, of any attempt to make positive suggestions to the boys, or to give them religious guidance and motivation. But, from the very nature of the case, they have *need* of this help, and can claim it from us by right, because we have a strict obligation to provide effective guidance.

I am not speaking here of the abnormal case where an educator gives the boys doctrines or rules of conduct that are clean against the ideology or the pastoral teaching of the Church; this would be a betrayal of our Salesian vocation and mission. The young will accept education to liberty, but they do demand that their educators should prepare them to make proper use of it with guidance that is realistic, intelligent and methodical, culturally adequate and sharpened by insight.

Don Bosco fully accepted the reasonable demands of youth — he gave full rein to good sense in his system of education — and went further. He did not hesitate to have some of his boys undertaking to help him give a Christian education to the others. If this would appear to us, who are witnessing the increasing infiltration of politics into our lives, as an excursion into political

manipulation, it should come as no surprise to find it creeping into the economy of evangelization. At least the growth was a benign one and not a cankerous erosion; and it did answer a keenly-felt need.

The liturgy, the theatre, singing, sport

Turning to the Salesian atmosphere, we have to be able to infuse something eminently characteristic of this atmosphere into our liturgy, while retaining all the formative power that Don Bosco could pack into it (cf. Const. § 23). Also the new forms and the new means of communication, emptied of anything that is unbecoming or slovenly, can become things of dignity when used for the liturgy, rich in signs and values.

And together with the liturgy, we should exploit the present common-places of our Salesian repertoire, singing, theatre, sport and so on, and they should once more be made to reach out beyond themselves and contribute to the work of helping people to become more mature.

A friendly presence

This represents one of the Salesian values, established by Don Bosco and valid everywhere and at any time: the friendly presence of the Salesian among the boys.

Just recently I heard this remark from our Co-operators (these brothers of ours often give us something serious to think about): '*Ma come!* The Salesians were founded to look after the abandoned, and yet they are the ones who are doing the abandoning. Why aren't they in the midst of the boys any more?'

Our friendly presence among the boys is the moment *par excellence* for us Salesians to do our evangelizing (taking the term in its wider sense, but still incisive and still valid), it is the Salesian

educational system: it is what Don Bosco did. Listen to the plea of the collaborator of the Abbé Pierre: 'All right, close a hundred houses, give up any work you like, but for heaven's sake don't abandon Don Bosco and his way!' And the key to Don Bosco's way was the presence of the Salesian among the boys.

I would like you to heighten your awareness of this Salesian characteristic that bears such a high efficiency-rating in the Christian formation of the young. It is all there in our Constitutions (§ 16, 25) and the Acts of S.G.C. (299-300), set down with force and clarity; please give it your serious thought.

'Associationism'

The recent Synod fully recognized the need for the presence of the young wherever evangelization is actually going on: 'We turn in a special way to the young, whom we regard not only as an objects of evangelization, but also as evangelizers, above all of their own age-group. And, what is more, we are firmly convinced that it is the young who must arouse us adults and spur us on incessantly to renew our commitment to evangelization.

'This the young people are well able to do, with their earnest search for the fundamental Gospel values, never satisfied with anything less than the authentic message and honest witness to it' (Statement of the Synod, No. 5).

This involvement of the young today labours under the name of 'associationism', which covers all youth movements and group activities: sport, the arts, the press and the other forms of mass media, social work and religious activities, right up to actual apostolic and missionary work. Let me say a few words on this highly interesting development of our times.

We all know about the difficulties being experienced by the big youth organizations. This constitutes the crisis of associationism. Our own organizations are similarly afflicted. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that we have let them lapse without

putting anything in their place. The phenomenon is part of, and symbolical of, something bigger and deeper that has violently convulsed many institutions in the 70s.

However, from the ashes of the old organizations have arisen new groups, movements and associations, along new lines and with new sensibilities: all shapes and sizes and sorts, many of them doing real spiritual and apostolic work. One thing stands out: the young are not averse to getting together to do something that interests them. But it has to interest them, and here lies the difference that needs to be taken into account.

For instance, the youngsters today are not at all indifferent, given the right handling, to forming a group and doing something of a strictly spiritual nature. They need plenty of time, they go all out, and straight for the essential, and are impatient of too many structures. However, they accept the adult, the priest that understands them, that is an unpretentious and honest witness, and is willing to put himself out for them. And they are open to contact with Christ. They love prayer, including prolonged meditation, their generosity in the service of others, especially the down and out, is often astounding.

These are the positive things on which to build the dialogue with the 'associationists', where externals and formalities come to mean less and less.

Behind the committed youngsters, there is always the Salesian

Don Bosco would not have held back from these young people, but, driven on by love, he would have found some way of bringing them together and taking them to Christ. And here's the point: the man must be there, the priest, the Salesian, the Don Bosco man, who can take an interest in them and win them over. In fact, if you look carefully, you will find that, behind these young neo-Christians, or 'full-time Christians', as one journalist styled them with much more admiration than irony, behind them is the

priest. And how does he do it? By living his priesthood intensely. He prays, he studies, he loves the Church with all its kinks and human miseries, he keeps clear of sterile wrangling; and he passes on to the young the riches of sound doctrine. To be in his presence is to experience the assurance and joy of his own interior life; and that in turn rests on a living faith and the love of a heart in tune with the love of Christ and with His Vicar on earth. Isn't that how Don Bosco was? *E non faceva così Don Bosco*, from his famous Joy Society to his many associations created to bring his boys to Jesus and to His law of love?

Well now, dear Confreres, we have thousands and thousands of young people on our hands. Surely there must be some among us who can stimulate and train flocks of them to acquire this faith, this personal fibre. The import of the question must be examined, and I think it will prove to be something of a nettle. The prickly bit, perhaps, will be the answer in terms of the actual consequences, of the remedies that will have to be applied.

By way of consolation, even partial, you should know that, in the last few years, a start has been made in some places in getting some youth movements going with the new-style associationism and aiming at evangelization. This is happening in both Europe and the New World, and, here and there, there have been some comforting results, some of them on the missions.

Then there are a number of magnificent Brothers who are promoting these movements, in the fullest sense of the word 'promote', and we have already had some first-class vocations from them.

I like to think of how much good will soon be radiating from these groups of young people once they have become men, solidly prepared, strong-willed, generous and well-grounded in doctrine.

3. Situations and stages in our mission

What has been said so far is true of our evangelizing and catechizing mission to youth. The individual stages of our pastoral action vary with the different situations. Some of them we have seen already; let us take another brief look at them.

Club and Youth Centre

In the club and youth centre, we see catechesis under its primary aspect, that is, the passing on of the Gospel message of salvation, because the youngsters come entirely of their own accord and enjoy an experience of Church that is part of a very effective and valuable character-training process. The General Chapter insisted on infusing new life into this activity, which is typical of Don Bosco's work. He popularized the boys' club and with it won the hearts of thousands of boys and the goodwill of the world.

Whatever name it goes under in different parts of the world, the boys' club is still a very popular and simple way of evangelizing, particularly for the pre-adolescents. It is flexible and teeming with possibilities for new ideas, its structures are minimal, it opens up new horizons for boys without subjecting them to means' tests or rigid discipline, and it all happens in a climate of freedom, spontaneity and friendship where a boy can really expand his chest.

A few generous Salesians, full of apostolic zeal, with the help of lay people who have been enthused by the idea (they are often the products of that same club or centre), can change the face of a whole district by stretching out to the parents and other adults through the children.

All this is history, plain facts that we can see for ourselves; but there is another fact, and it is this: to keep the story as it is, we need men with strong faith and sincere love to work in

these areas, which, in some ways, I would call privileged. With faith and love, the rest will materialize, without fail.

The Salesian school

The Salesian school fits naturally into the larger context of the evangelizing mission of Catholic education. The conception of a school completely immersed in work that is broadly evangelizing and involves everyone, Salesians, lay staff, pupils and parents, is no Castle in Spain. I recall the words of a Provincial, who was talking about certain schools organized in this way: 'As far as their activities go, and the spirit that pervades them, they are large parishes brimming with life and activity.' Of course, you have to have the right men to do this sort of thing, patient, steady types.

When the school is genuinely Christian

Brother Buttimer, the Superior General of the De la Salle Brothers, who organized an enquiry into all their schools throughout the world, gave his report to the recent Synod. There follows a summary of this report; you can find the complete text among the documents of the Synod. I would like anyone interested in schools to pay attention to what he says and think about it.

'The Catholic school has the responsibility of introducing a spiritual dimension into today's pluralistic society and developing it. This can be done:

- through teaching that is inspired by the Gospel values;
- through moral attitudes that pervade every act of the life of the individual and of the community, attitudes that have as their point of departure a Christian anthropology inspired by the

Gospels and cognizant of the findings of the human sciences so much in vogue today;

— through the direct transmission of the message.

'The Catholic school must be able to satisfy the pupils in its answers to their questions on the ultimate meanings of existence. Catechesis, then, is an integral part of the school apostolate. If the responsibilities outlined above are met, every genuinely Christian school represents an outstanding service to the men of today in procuring their salvation.' So much for Bro. Buttimer's paper at the Synod. It is clear that a school in this sense of the term is performing a very valuable function. Don Bosco would certainly have underwritten this proposition, and we fully agree with it.

The next question, of course, is: do our schools measure up to these criteria? Do they render an outstanding service to the young for the salvation of their souls?

The big questions

We have to answer these questions:

— What are the reasons for the negligible impact of Christian formation on the pupils?

— Why are the numbers of those so affected disproportionately large?

— Why are schools reduced to learning factories, to so many hours of teaching without any other contacts during or after school?

— Why is there such a large number of lay teachers who are not working in harmony with the Salesian apostolate?

— Whatever happened to the educational community as an effective instrument?

— Why are our catechetical and evangelizing operations suffering from a shortage of qualified personnel?

— Have the Salesians, because of the social class of the pupils or the low snob-value of the school, allowed themselves to desert the people they ought to be serving by reason of their vocation?

— Can we eliminate the blank-wall situations?

— How?

— In those cases where we have to give up certain schools, what else do we propose doing as our pastoral commitment?

The answers to these questions may make the next one relevant:

— if there are serious gaps in a work that compromise the reasons for its existence, and if the gaps cannot be filled or adequate adjustments be made to meet the needs of the present work of evangelization or pastoral care, what is the point of keeping a work going that, as far as our mission is concerned, is having negative results?

The S.G.C. urgently invites us to make a serious examination of the state of things, to carry out 'a constant check on syllabuses, on methods, on the culture transmitted, on the values entailed, on relations with the social system, on the image of man which is formed, on religious education and on pastoral vocational guidance.' (No. 384). And it places before us the drastic alternative of EITHER a courageous renewal OR a closure, if it should happen that the work does not answer to the requirements of our basic objectives (cf. S.G.C. 385).

Co-education

This seems to be the right place to deal with the viability of mixed schools. Some of these have been set up on the strength of an interpretation of Reg. No. 12 that, to say the least of it, is

very questionable indeed. Reg. 12 opens: 'When circumstances so require...' According to the thinking behind the article, the 'circumstances' cannot include expediency or opportunity-snatching; nor the desire, nor even the need, real though it may be, of families or friends or past-pupils; and it certainly does not include the desire to give a shot in the arm to a work that has outlived its original purpose.

But we cannot slough these situations off. The question to be faced is this: how will these co-ed. schools get round the requirement that the indisputable object of our mission should be the evangelization of BOYS? How is our catechetics/evangelizing service going to fare in these schools? How is the Salesian method — our presence, our contacts with the pupils, our working with them — going to look once it has been adapted to these conditions, of, indeed, it is possible to adapt it at all? What sort of people in these schools have had sufficient teaching preparation to undertake a delicate task such as this? And how many of them are there? This is a special educational situation with its own requirements, which are recognized as such even by non-religious educators: how will our men react to these requirements?

In fine — and this is a most important question — with all the pressures of the vocations crisis and of qualifying personnel, who are already thin on the ground and completely extended on urgent work, surely the strains imposed by these new obligations will only hold back the vital process of renewal in the Provinces?

I put these questions, to which you yourselves might like to add at some time, as an invitation to all to examine and re-examine similar initiatives with your usual circumspection, so as to avoid creating situations that, sooner or later, can cause serious difficulties.

When there is a plethora of schools

In these times of profound changes, we must have the courage

to look at the individual situations with objectivity and foresight to see where they are taking us. This, after all, is what our boys require of us. It is a bad mistake, for example, to wait for the death-rattle before closing a work, since it only prolongs and aggravates the confreres' frustration and lack of confidence. These are distressing problems, but they must be faced.

For now, I shall make five statements that seem to me to be beyond question, and you must draw the appropriate conclusions.

1. In some parts, the schools are over-developed, especially in the middle/upper-school range, which creates all sorts of critical situations.

2. One consequence of this plethora has been an under-development of the youth centres, clubs and suchlike activities; and it is the quality that is lacking, besides the quantity.

3. Another effect is to put the wrong face on the work as a whole, or at least a face that is not always typically Salesian. It has limited the resources we can throw into the work for the poor and needy, the people who should rank first in our preferences. At the same time, with the way some of the schools are functioning, there has been a flattening of the community profile and a drift towards the bourgeois among the confreres.

4. This commitment to schools is out of all proportion to our available man-power, hobbling and paralysing, or at any rate slowing down, even the qualification of personnel and on-going formation, which are of overriding urgency in the renewal of the Provincial Communities. In plain language, it is holding back the renewal programme to an unwarranted extent.

5. Therefore a serious examination is badly needed to see how the individual situations stand against the state of the Province as a whole, keeping in mind alternative lines of development that are purely Salesian and easier to set going (we were pleased to see that the Provincial Chapters '75 had already moved in that direction with solutions that were well thought-out and courageous).

I wish to lay particularly heavy stress on the following sectors:

a) *technical courses* for apprentices, including evening classes;

b) youth centres, clubs and youth groups, not so much the starting of new ones (although this is not excluded) as the overhaul and refit of existing ones to make them efficient in the context of today's pastoral needs;

c) *hostels* for young apprentices, workers and orphans, but there is no need to abandon the ones we have if they are doing a socially acceptable job;

d) *leaders and organizers for pastoral work at Provincial level*, especially in the field of catechetics and of the mass media. In this latter area there is serious shortage of men, while the needs are mountainous.

It all adds up to an inspection of the workings, carried out without premature judgements in order to see that our work is attaining the end for which it exists, and *that* is evangelization.

Redimensioning takes courage

There are three very important problems here.

First there is the famous redimensioning of the works. Contrary to the image that seems to have formed in some places, it is not a matter of applying a suitable anaesthetic and following it up with a decent burial (for example, the average cadaver would hardly feel the urgent need for training catechists, spirituality teams and prayer-group leaders, which we have noted above). It has to be seen as an action of courage and foresight coupled with the realistic, dynamic assessment of the situation that precedes the assault operation. There follows a period of bold and vigorous adjustment to the changed circumstances. When all is said and done, it is not the bricks and mortar that count, but the persons who live among them. This is work for men who can adapt them-

selves to a juvenile world that is changing fast and will not wait.

It is a great mistake to persist in dragging out the life of a work that, for all its meritorious record, has long lost its apostolic effectiveness. Creeping paralysis overtakes whatever is moving ahead: the interesting opportunities for renewal that could have made the Province a much livelier place, the attraction of vocations struggling to survive the emptiness and boredom of life in the urban jungle. Everything stagnates.

This reshaping operation, then, is a complex but vital one, and the Provincial and his Council needs the direct collaboration of everyone. Remember that, the longer we leave it, the more difficult it is likely to be, and the less effective.

Laymen in the educational community

One important development we have in mind for our evangelization apostolate is to bring the parents into the circle of the educational community, since they have the primary responsibility for the education of their children. It is our duty to help them to shoulder that responsibility and to collaborate in a fuller work of evangelization in which everyone both bears and receives the message of the Gospel.

There is the further problem: it is not only in the schools that lay people have close ties with us, but in the other sectors as well. This duty was clearly indicated by the S.G.C., and we are coming to see the whole thing as of extraordinary importance to our present situation. We recognize that we need lay people, not simply or even primarily out of necessity, but for obvious ecclesiological and educational reasons; lay people who can become capable co-workers with us to accomplish an efficient integration of our work in education, evangelization and pastoral care. There are youth centres, for instance, clubs, parishes, group activities and any number of other activities where lay people are in their element.

The lay people are the first to say to us: 'Leave to us the things that are not part of a priest's ministry, and you get on with the work that no one else can do.'

Obviously, this cannot be done without preparation, which means that ideas, plans, schemes have to be rounded up and considered. Moreover, the Salesian, particularly the Communities, need to be persuaded that the problem exists and has to be solved.

There is no alternative but to have the lay people working alongside us. Some Provinces, and groups of Provinces, have already made a good start in this. For instance, a group of Latin-American Provinces recently held a study-week at Córdoba, where laymen and Salesians met to study the problems of collaboration in teaching and pastoral work. I hear that everyone came away fired with the idea and determined to continue and improve on what they had started.

In the interesting scheme started by the German and Flemish Provinces, the matter was tackled with sensitivity and the will to get things done. I know of other enterprises in this line, where systems are steadily being hammered out and made to work.

But we must not waste any more time. So *avanti*, without letting the difficulties get the better of you. Set your sights accurately on what you intend to do, and then do it systematically. The fruits will appear.

If we prepare laymen for collaboration understood in this way, and not as mere employment for a salary, we shall have some very well-qualified people who can become real Co-operators. It is for us to take the appropriate steps to make them realize what it means to belong to the third branch of our Family, with obvious advantages to our common mission. Clearly, however, our contact with the Co-operators does not end there; they have a much wider scope. But I want to call your attention to the importance of having these people at our side in our work of education. And that wider scope I mentioned above is really

wide. They can work in parishes, with immigrants and social rejects, in boys' clubs and youth centres and other apostolic works. Given the right help and properly integrated, they can perform a valuable service for us, which is already happening in some places.

Our contribution to the catechetical movement

The *Direttorio Catechistico Generale*, in part VI, earnestly recommends collaboration among those who work in the catechetics apostolate. Now, the mission that we have in the Church of carrying the Gospel message to the young obliges us to make our contribution to the progress of the general catechetical movement in fraternal union with those engaged in it: diocesan priests, religious, lay people, etc. Further, a number of circumstances that we regard as providential have already placed our Congregation in the happy position of being able to offer our services to the Local Churches.

By the very fact that we are Salesians we should see the responsibility we have in the Church today to provide an efficient catechetical service. The Provinces must see where they stand in this and organize the training of as many men as are required to meet the actual needs. And don't leave it too long before things start to happen.

Conclusion: tomorrow may be too late

We have dealt with some serious matters regarding our work of evangelization, which is a vital factor in the renewal of the Salesian Congregation, the incarnation in the Church of the charism of Don Bosco.

And here I want to say this: we must seize the providential moment in which we are called to live. Tomorrow it may be too

late to do anything in some local situations for which, at the moment, we are unprepared or undermanned. We must perform our task in the Church and for the Church with conviction and determination, knowing what we have to do and the way we are going to do it. We must have, individually and communally, a nice sense of the hierarchy of values that are current today.

Two exhortations from the Pope

To finish off, I think we should do well to take the words of the Holy Father to the last Synod and apply them to this fundamental problem of our existence as a congregation: 'Our duty is to make a choice, which stands guard over the beginning of the roads the Church must follow in her search for an ever more incisive expression of her doctrine. We cannot afford to take wrong turnings; if we do, we shall fail in our fundamental obligation of confirming our brethren.

'One fact stands out here, and that is the unanimous will to give the Church a new, generous and world-wide impulse towards evangelization. The Church has perhaps never before realized this basic duty to such an extent or so clearly. It seems a worthy chapter indeed of the recent Council: in keeping with the essential action of the Church, meeting the needs of the world, resolving certain countervalent phenomena that we know so well...

'We must do the will of God, Who has sent us on our mission. This whole marvellous world is waiting to hear the message of the liberation from sin and from the evils caused by sin, the message of salvation in the Cross of Christ... And for this we trust solely in the help of the Lord.

'The difficulties are enormous, the expectations manifold, the responsibilities formidable. "But be brave!" says the Lord, "I have defeated the world" (*Jn.* 16, 33). Christ is with us and in us, He speaks in us and through us, and will see that we do not lack the help we need.'

Again, speaking directly to our Family, the Holy Father said with patent sincerity: 'This is no time for the timorous, or the lazy, or the absentees, but for the generous, the strong, the pure, the convinced; for the people who believe, hope and love, who are ready to pay in person for the expansion of Christ's Kingdom and for the dawning of better times' (Audience given in St. Peter's for the boys of the Roman Province, 11-5-1966).

And, dear Confreres, may our beloved Father give us all the light and strength to translate the words of the Vicar of Christ into a fruitful work of evangelization.

Fr. LUIGI RICCERI

Rector Major