

## 1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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### **"THE DON BOSCO CENTENARY AND OUR RENEWAL"**

Introduction - A rapid look back over the celebrations: The Jubilee Year; enthusiastic participation by young people; Appreciation on the part of civil authorities; Studies and publications; Artistic cultural and sporting manifestations; Lived experiences in the Congregation; Vitality of the Salesian Family; Interest of the Bishops and of so many diocesan and parochial communities; Wholehearted participation of the Holy Father. - Some priorities to be fostered: Our ecclesial dimension; The urgent need for the christian education of youth; The careful and competent development of a "Laity-project"; A more modern use of the means of social communication as a means of evangelization. - The overriding impression: "an event of grace". - The primacy of an internal apostolic conviction. - The surprising vitality of the Salesian Family. - The Youth Movement. - Lay involvement. - the Marian dimension. - Devotion to Don Bosco, the Saint. - The two great commitments before us: the 1989 Strenna; the GC23. - Conclusion.

Turin-Valdocco:  
Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians  
24 May 1989

My dear confreres,

Some months have now passed since the conclusion of the Don Bosco Centenary Year. It was a very demanding event both for us and for our Family.

I invite you to look back and reflect on its vital significance and on the future activity it implies. I do not think it is too early to attempt a first assessment which will serve to strengthen our salesian identity among the People of God and our missionary thrust in the world. Without any doubt the Centenary has had a decisive influence on every aspect of our renewal process. We can consider it as an important historical stage coming at the end of the long post-conciliar period of redefining our vocation as sons of Don Bosco through the three

great General Chapters (20, 21 and 22); it marks the transition from an era of research and crisis to a phase of renewed vocational awareness and of more courageous pastoral and missionary effectiveness. This seems to follow logically from the facts, the many hopes to which they have given rise, and the plans that have been made.

It is true, of course, that one cannot consider the Centenary as a watershed at a precise moment in time, but it certainly appears as the time and space in which came to fruition the fruits of the delicate preceding work shared by the Congregation and the whole Salesian Family: if the perennial values left to us by Don Bosco and tradition had not been more deeply analyzed and expressed in a form suited to the present day, they would in fact have been no longer understood.

In this sense we are bound to say that the Centenary has truly been a "year of grace" in which Don Bosco has endorsed the present-day relevance of his charisma, and has in a sense put his personal signature to our post-conciliar identity card.

We have to admit in fact that the great Saints preserve the youthfulness of the Church: they lived in the past but are men of the future, bearing witness to the novelty-filled transforming activity which is proper to the Holy Spirit.

### **A rapid look back over the celebrations**

It is impossible, and indeed it would be out of place in a letter of spiritual reflection, to list everything that took place in the Houses, the Provinces, the different countries and Regions, and at a central level in the Salesian Family and the Church.

But I think it may be useful to refer briefly at the outset to the main facts, because they form the basis of the reflections which follow.

— *Preparation of the Centenary.* Planning of the celebrations began immediately after the GC22 ended in 1984. Even before that there had been suggestions and initiatives, but we had to await the election of the Rector Major and his Council by the General Chapter. The objectives to be attained were immediately decided on, and special commissions were set up with representatives of the various Groups of the Salesian Family in the Provinces; a Central Coordinating Commission was also established in Rome under the presidency of the Vicar General, Fr Gaetano Scrivo. The latter commission drew up in good time some fundamental guidelines and laid down the general programme to be followed, choosing at the same time those to be responsible for the various sectors. The work was strenuous, especially for the President of the Central Commission who undermined his own health to ensure a happy outcome to the celebrations. As we know, Fr Scrivo suffered a serious heart attack almost at the end of the Centenary: we owe him a great debt of gratitude.

The main steps taken at central level in this period can be recalled by reading again the Acts of the General Council, some of the Rector Major's letters,<sup>1</sup> and various communications of the Vicar General.<sup>2</sup>

We intended commemoration and commitment to go hand in hand, avoiding "two attitudes, opposite indeed in tendency but both equally misleading: a triumphalism which is out of date and therefore no longer understood, difficult to accept and of short lived impact at the present day; and a re-

<sup>1</sup> AGC 313, "*Don Bosco 88*"; AGC 319, "*1988: An invitation to a special renewal of profession*"; AGC 323, "*From Peking towards 88*".

<sup>2</sup> AGC 317, "*To all those responsible for the various Groups of the Salesian Family*", with the attached General Theme and scheme for reflection; AGC 321, "*14 May 1988: Day of Salesian Profession*"; AGC 325, "*A glance forward to 'Appraisal DB88'*".

ductive minimization incapable of living the centenary as an outstanding event through which the Holy Spirit, who 'through the motherly intervention of Mary raised up St John Bosco', asks us to intensify our commitment to the 'living Don Bosco' in our own time."

There was also a detailed logistical plan for the necessary (and costly) adaptation of the places particularly associated with Don Bosco: at Valdocco, and especially at the Hill of the Becchi, so as to render them apt and meaningful for pilgrimage purposes.

And here special thanks are due to the Economist General, Fr Omero Paron, and those who gave him their generous collaboration.

— *The Jubilee Year*. With an "Apostolic Brief" the Holy Father declared the centenary year a year of jubilee, enriching it with graces and indulgences, to celebrate Don Bosco's witness of holiness and obtain special helps through his intercession.<sup>3</sup> To the seven churches originally indicated in the Brief, the Apostolic Penitentiary subsequently agreed to add numerous others in every continent (and even in the Soviet Union: in White Russia, Georgia, Lithuania and the Ukraine), so as to extend the jubilee advantages to many young people and the faithful in general in every region of the earth.

<sup>3</sup> cf. AGC 321, pp. 73-75

This gave rise to an extraordinary variety of spiritual initiatives and pilgrimages which characterized every month of the centenary year. Without prejudice to the many popular manifestations that took place elsewhere, and particularly in the Basilica of Don Bosco at Panama and in his church at Leon in Mexico, those on the largest scale took place at Turin-Valdocco and at the Becchi — "Hill of the Youth Beatitudes".

The impact of the places especially associated with Don Bosco and a sound theology of pilgrimages and sanctuaries have helped to give these events a transcendental character. Pilgrimages in fact not only recall the mystery of Christ's own pilgrim path, endorsed by the rich experience of the faithful down the centuries, but they also have the characteristics of a "sacramental" of the Church, an expert in humanity and the teacher of the Gospel, and lead to a dynamic practice of the pedagogy of conversion.

Among the more significant pilgrimages to the places of Don Bosco must be included those of all the parish oratories of Milan, those of many Italian and European dioceses led by their Bishops, those of several European groups with salesian connections, and many others representing other continents. Deserving of special mention are those from Poland, Yugoslavia and Hungary, those from the Middle and Far East and from America, the numerous groups of the Salesian Family of Spain with the branches of the Association of Mary Help of Christians and the national "Camp Bosco".

At Colle Don Bosco more than a million pilgrims, very many of them young people, came to pray.

In this way a new value has been given, especially among the young, to the traditional practice of the christian pilgrimage, and this in an era of consumerism and tourist activities; it has reactivated the sense of prayer, of the historical and geographical presence of the sacred, of the frequenting of the sacraments and, in this case, of the model of apostolic holiness that was particularly Don Bosco's, and of his powerful intercession especially in the work of education.

— *Enthusiastic participation of the young.* Among the specific objectives kept in mind in drawing up the overall programme was the full involvement of youth, through the convergence of the various pastoral and educational forces of our Family. Of this the "Appraisal DB88" function at Turin was to be the culminating expression.

The theme to be investigated more deeply was "*Youth in the Church for the world*", following the great signposts of Vatican II. The Centenary found every Province committed to this common task with positive results. There were numerous initiatives at various local levels; lively national youth meetings, conventions or congresses took place, especially in the different countries of Latin America (Argentina, Antilles, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, etc.), in Spain and elsewhere. Special days of communal living and reflection were organized, as also were specific spiritual retreats, study meetings and contests of various kinds; there were festive youth celebrations and sporting tournaments. Every Province and region can be said to have prepared manifestations of a high formative content. The success of the "Appraisal DB88" put the crown on all the rest; it was like a proclamation by the young people themselves of a future path to be followed with creative imagination and ecclesial depth.

Expectations that followed the two-year period of preparation were far surpassed. The young people showed themselves the foremost promoters of a renewal of awareness of faith in Christ, of their ability to make serious commitments, of their practical and courageous apostolic possibilities. The kind of holiness fostered by Don Bosco attracted

and inspired them; his spirituality was shown to be up to date and auspicious, like a fruitful experience to be cultivated in the new cultural conditions. Contributing to this wonderful result were well prepared animators belonging to the various Groups of the Salesian Family.

Other large-scale and festive youth manifestations, rich in reflection and prayer, took place at Colle Don Bosco, the city stadium of Turin, in the Verona Arena, in the cities of Manila and Queretaro, to mention only a few, and in very many other places too.

— *Appreciation on the part of civil authorities.*

At central level two significant events of a social kind had been planned: one at the Regio Theatre of Turin for the official opening of the Centenary, and another in Rome at the Capitol for its closing. But in fact very many others took place all over the world: manifestations promoted by States, Parliaments, Towns, Universities, Associations, Clubs, Groups from the sectors of culture and work, and even by trade unions and political parties; churches and monuments were erected; streets and squares were given significant new names; special postage stamps were issued; honorary citizenships were conferred on Don Bosco's Successor; gold and silver medals were presented in recognition of educational merit, and the centenary found widespread commemoration in television and radio programmes and in the press; etc.

One need only recall as examples the celebration promoted by the Governor at Brasilia; in Portugal the presence of the President of the Republic at the inauguration of the Centenary and of the Minister of Justice at the closing ceremony; in Argentina the initiative of the President of the Republic

who declared the central events of the celebrations to be matters of national interest; in Uruguay the homage given to Don Bosco in Parliament; in India the intervention of the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, on the occasion of the issue of the commemorative postage stamp; in Italy the visit of the President of the Republic to Valdocco, the warm and grateful participation of the former President Sandro Pertini, the commemorative address by the Foreign Minister at the Capitol, the Rotary Club's initiative at the New Theatre of Turin, and the celebrations in various cities: at the Scala at Milan in the presence of the President of the Senate (the Hon. Spadolini), the San Carlo Theatre at Naples, the Palazzo dei Normanni at Palermo, the Teatro Comunale at Bologna, and finally the interesting activities and study days organized by various Universities.

We may say that a vision of Don Bosco's personality has been consolidated in the humanitarian and social aspects of his work and mission: a Saint who is at the same time a well-deserving citizen because he committed his many personal qualities and his pedagogical brilliance to fostering the good of society.

— *Studies and publications.* Everywhere, to some extent, studies have been organized and works published in many different languages on Don Bosco's personality, his works, his spiritual, pastoral, pedagogical and social aspects. It is not possible to list them all, ranging as they do from works aimed at simply making him known to the general public, to accounts of historical research and assessments of his place in the Church and the cultural field.

Among them we may recall: the two volumes



of "*Don Bosco nel Mondo*" by Marco Bongioanni (translated into other languages); "*Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*", edited by Francesco Traniello; "*L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco*" by Pietro Braido (in various languages); "*Don Bosco e la musica*" by Mario Rigoldi; "*Don Bosco nella fotografia dell'800*" by Giuseppe Soldà; "*Giovanni Bosco studente*" by Secondo Caselle; "*Scritti pedagogici spirituali*", published by LAS; "*Scritti spirituali*" by Joseph Aubry (new edition); "*Don Bosco, attualità di un magistero pedagogico*", edited by Robert Giannatelli; "*Pensiero e prassi di Don Bosco nel primo Centenario della morte*", special edition of the review "Salesianum" (of some 300 pages); "*Parola di Dio e carisma salesiano*" of the International Congress of our Biblical scholars; "*Studi su San Giovanni Bosco*" of the first high academic level International Congress on Don Bosco held at the UPS; the work "*Torino e Don Bosco*" in three volumes of the Turin municipal historical archives, edited by Giuseppe Bracco; "*Don Bosco Fondatore*" papers given at the Symposium which took place at the Generalate, Rome; the new biography "*Don Bosco, storia di un prete*" by Tere-sio Bosco, with numerous translations including one in Russian; the whole of the LDC catalogue on Don Bosco, full of texts and audiovisual aids; some contributions from the Salesian Historical Institute, etc. (Apologies to the numerous authors who have not been mentioned!).

The "Auxilium" Faculty of Educational Sciences, of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, has also made various contributions with studies and other papers in their own Review of the Educational Sciences, as for instance on the project of Fatherliness in Don Bosco<sup>4</sup> and on Don Bosco as

<sup>4</sup> Gertrud Stickler,  
n. 25/1987

the master of the new method of education;<sup>5</sup> and especially through two interesting books: one by Maria Piera Manello, "*Madre ed educatrice. Contributi sull'identità mariana della Figlia di Maria Ausiliatrice, per una pedagogia mariana nell'anno centenario*"; and the other by Antonia Colombo, "*Verso l'educazione della donna oggi*" — the Acts of the international congress organized as part of the centenary celebrations.

<sup>5</sup> Piera Cavaglia,  
n. 26/1988

I am glad also to record with gratitude the courageous efforts of Fr Basilio Bustillo (Madrid) to complete the long desired translation of the Biographical Memoirs into Spanish.

Side by side with the spreading of knowledge, there has also been a patient and painstaking work of research and deeper analysis which has opened up new lines of study. There have also been one or two publications of a caustic or deriding nature, based on doubtful premises, which however have helped in various ways to greater objectivity and more serious reflection.

— *Artistic and cultural manifestations.* In this connection we must recall in the first place the film "*Don Bosco*" of Leandro Castellani and other films and documentaries, including in particular "*Giovanni, il ragazzo del sogno*", made by the Salesian Film Unit of Turin. And two musical works of special artistic value must also be mentioned: the symphonic concert of Marek Kopelent (of Czechoslovakia) performed at the Regio Theatre of Turin, and the musical oratorio of William Rabolini SDB at the San Carlo Theatre of Naples.

There was also an abundance of musical productions, recitals, choral concerts etc. in Argentina, Chile, Italy, the Philippines, Spain and other countries.

Songs, exhibitions, theatrical productions, contests, sporting events and a host of other youthful and popular manifestations have made evident the fascination Don Bosco can still arouse, especially among young people, and this was brought to the notice of the public in a thousand and one different ways. How could we ever forget the ascent of the Aconcagua, the highest peak of the Americas and the placing there of a commemorative plaque; and the stage of the Tour of Italy for professional and amateur cyclists which had Colle Don Bosco as its finishing point in honour of the centenary.

Special mention must be made of the blessing of the foundation stone of the new "*Don Bosco Library*" at the UPS in Rome, popularly known as "*Don Bosco's University for the young*"; it will help to foster a serious cultural development among the people of the area, especially the younger ones, as well as among those frequenting the University itself.

— *Lived experiences in the Congregation.* All the provincial and local communities have fostered specialized activities, particularly for improving fidelity to the Founder's spirit, for a better implementation of our mission among the young and the poor, for an intensification of communion and collaboration between the constituent Groups of the Salesian Family, and for launching a youth movement of ecclesial depth. Two very meaningful events, prepared for by a lengthy period of reflection and prayer, were the renewal of their salesian Profession by all confreres on 14 May, and the perpetual profession of 126 young SDBs and FMAs in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco on 8 September. These spiritual events bore witness to the close adherence of all to their Father and

Founder and to the relevance of his spirit and mission to the present times. Today we want, as did those first 22 young men in 1862, to remain with Don Bosco to share his experience of the Holy Spirit permeated by "da mihi animas", his evangelical style of acting and his pedagogical and pastoral method of kindness.

Special retreats were organized with a view to a better knowledge and living out of Don Bosco's charism. The Rector Major himself undertook the preaching of various courses and retreats to many Rectors in Latin America, India and the Far East on the theme of "Interior apostolic conviction", or in other words of the "Grace of unity" which characterizes the whole of our consecrated life.

There were many study-days and meetings; handbooks of formation, liturgical aids, meditations and prayers etc. were published. In many places a relaunching of the oratories was undertaken; commitments were made to ensure a new manner of presence among needy youth, to intensify our missionary thrust, to improve our catechetical and evangelizing activities, to foster the Marian dimension, and to make sure that our pastoral work among youth should bring about a dynamic Movement of christian faith.

The principal organizers and animators of many of the events that took place were evidently the confreres themselves; and it must be added that the Provinces contributed, according to their possibilities, to the so-called "88 Fund" to help to meet the economic problems associated with the celebrations. The desire has grown in the Congregation to return to the deep motivations of each one's vocational choice, and there has been a reawakening of the awareness of the fascination which Don Bosco

continues to exert.

We seemed to enter a spring-like climate of renewed enthusiasm which helps us to meet with hope the difficulties of the present day, as for instance certain ideological mirages and the falling off in vocations in some places.

— *Vitality of the Salesian Family.* One of the truly wonderful aspects of the Centenary has been the participation of the Salesian Family, both within the individual Groups and in the common collaboration of all working together. Of great significance was the symposium on Don Bosco the Founder, with the involvement of responsible leaders of each Group.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians promoted a wealth of initiatives of particular spiritual, apostolic and pedagogical depth. They were enthusiastic promoters of the participation of girls and young women, and saw their work culminate in the beatification of Laura Vicuña at the Hill of the Becchi.

The Cooperators held regional and national meetings; they grew in number and intensified their commitment to formation, which was studied in detail in the meeting of their World Consulting Body in Rome. They are taking up with hope the guidelines of Vatican II, so enriching for the application of their Regulations of Apostolic Life. Positive results have followed from the meetings of SDB and FMA Delegates for the Cooperators in various countries and regions. Worthy of note too was the 1st Spanish National Congress of the "Hogares Don Bosco" for the christian animation of young couples and their families, which brought together at Madrid nearly a thousand couples.

The Past Pupils organized and celebrated their

first combined World Congress as an indication of greater communion. They too organized other congresses and meetings at various levels. They promoted exhibitions and contests; in particular they set up an international art exhibition in Rome, and promoted interventions in the mass media; they showed creativity and great gratitude. It must be said that a cause for wonder and surprise was the adherence and collaboration of many past pupils who, though not officially on the Associations' lists, felt themselves actively challenged by the Centenary.

Each of the other Groups too, and in particular the Don Bosco Volunteers, deepened and strengthened with joy their vocational bonds in the common spirit. Especially fruitful was the meeting with the Superiors General of institutes of consecrated life founded by Salesians.

But in addition to the initiatives of each Group one cannot fail to note the extraordinarily efficacious quality of their mutual communion as a Family. The incisive nature of this was evident especially in the Turin celebrations in the presence of the Holy Father (at Colle Don Bosco, Valdocco, and the City Stadium), and in those, for example, at Queretaro in Mexico jointly organized by the four Provinces (two SDB and two FMA) in an admirable sharing of effort. The Salesian Family also celebrated the Marian dimension of our charisma and proclaimed its importance.

What a tremendous amount has been done, and what a lot can be done everywhere in time to come through this union of purpose, in line with our slogan "forward together"! The Centenary has seen the growth in the Salesian Family of a mentality and attitude which is more active and practical.

— *Interest of the Bishops and of many diocesan and parochial communities.* The Centenary has also had extraordinary ecclesial repercussions: Cardinals, bishops, apostolic nuncios, parish priests and others with the care of souls, communities of the faithful, lay associations, men and women religious of many Institutes, all celebrated Don Bosco as a providential gift of God for the good of the young, especially of the poorer classes.

Pride of place among these must go to the Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero, whose great pastoral heart and keen spiritual wisdom led him to suggest the Don Bosco jubilee year, and whose efficacious interest was largely responsible for the Pope's visit to Turin and its neighbourhood. His deep and guiding influence was expressed at first hand throughout the various stages of the celebrations: the opening and closing of the Centenary with all the Bishops of Piedmont, his homilies and appropriate interventions during the visit of the Holy Father; his unparalleled reflections on the salesian identity, the urgent need of pastoral work for the young, the relaunching of the Oratory, and the original and exemplary nature of Don Bosco's priestly ministry.

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini too, of Milan, wrote some very significant pastoral letters about Don Bosco and his pastoral work of education, and agreed to accept the Doctorate in Educational Sciences of our University in Rome in his honour.

Not without significance also is the fact that the Commission of the Italian Bishops Conference decided to celebrate at Valdocco the national day of pastoral work, dedicating it to the youth sector.

It is not possible to list all the Cardinals, archbishops and bishops who took part in celebrations

all over the world; in some cases entire national or regional bishops conferences took part together. Their pastoral letters and addresses on Don Bosco are innumerable. In Spain, for example, they were so numerous and meaningful that it has been suggested that they be collected and published in a special volume by the BAC (Library of Christian Authors). Many bishops too led big diocesan pilgrimages to the Don Bosco holy places or to the churches designated for the gaining of the jubilee indulgences.

Many of our Provinces made available biblical, biographical, pastoral and educational material to priests and animators of community apostolates for such things as prayer vigils, study days, celebration purposes, festive liturgies, and for information and reflection in seminars, formation centres of various kinds and in youth gatherings.

We cannot forget the presence of more than 60 salesian bishops and cardinals at the opening of the Centenary, their solemn concelebration with the Rector Major at Colle on 1 February and the intimate and fraternal dialogue they had with him on the same occasion. It was clearly seen that Don Bosco and his charism are not our private property but a true gift of Christ and Our Lady for all the People of God in their demanding mission for the education and evangelization of the young.

— *Active participation of the Holy Father.* This was a gift that we had not foreseen when making the first draft of the programme, but one which was welcomed with great joy and which sparked off very careful preparation. It was the Pope himself who decided on it as a mark of gratitude and personal conviction: "Don Bosco is one of the great Saints of the Church", he had said to me; "we must



highlight his unique character and his prophetic mission". The participation of Peter's Successor was certainly the culmination and most memorable point of the celebrations; it gave them an authentic ecclesial slant and the highest possible enlightened endorsement of their spiritual, pastoral, educational and social message.

Let us recall the more outstanding and eloquent interventions of the Holy Father:

- the Brief for the proclamation of the Jubilee Year;
- the precious Letter "Iuvenum Patris";
- the pilgrimage of two and a half days to the places of Don Bosco;
- the solemn beatification of Laura Vicuña at the Becchi;
- the numerous addresses and homilies;
- the special audiences;
- the official conferring on Don Bosco of the universal title: "*Iuventutis Pater et Magister*";
- the encouraging concluding address to the Rector Major and his Council on 4 February 1989.

The Pope loves the Salesian Family, and in turn the Salesian Family continues its tradition of convinced and active adherence to Peter's ministry.

We have reason to be deeply grateful to Pope John Paul II for what he did to foster the Centenary and throughout the year of its celebration. He gave an authoritative explanation of the singular stature of Don Bosco in the Church and enthusiastically launched his charisma towards the third millennium. We must treasure his witness and the enlightenment he has given us.

### **Some priorities to be fostered**

I want to emphasize the point that the Centenary has revealed the incisive nature of the presence of our confreres and of the members of the Salesian Family. If Don Bosco's sons and daughters of the present day were not thoroughly imbued with his passion for education and apostolic work, with his anxiety for the salvation of the young and with a strong attachment to his person as Father and Teacher, the Centenary would not have touched the heights I have spoken of. Without a living Family there might not have been a living Don Bosco, at least in the desired degree; but this is an observation open to many questions and challenges to which each one must face up in all honesty.

A deeper analysis and closer attention to the promptings of the Spirit leads us to recognize the fact that the centenary celebrations have led us to single out some points of a spiritual, pastoral, cultural and pedagogical nature which are lacking. They have served as a motive for verification to enable us to raise the quality of our life and activity. We are strongly stimulated to overcome the danger of stopping at "things" and "structures", certainly indispensable in themselves, so as to reach with serious awareness the deeper points of our charisma. We have experienced a strong thrust forward, a time for gaining a true and peaceful consciousness of the true salesian spirit, of the permanent fascination of our Founder, of trust and appreciation of his evangelical plan, of the enthusiasm to feel ourselves partakers in his mission, of greater brotherly communion, of greater hope in the overall process of renewal.

But we are also aware of our shortcomings, and it seems useful to point out some of them with a view to our renewal.

Among other things, Don Bosco asks us to improve the following aspects: our ecclesial dimension; the realization of the urgency of the christian education of youth; attentive and competent commitment to a "Laity-project"; and a more updated evangelizing presence in the mass media.

— First of all, *our ecclesial dimension*. If there is one aspect that has emerged strongly during the centenary year it is that of the ecclesial character of Don Bosco and of his work. The sense of the universal Church and concrete commitment in the particular Church have come to be seen as two inseparable dimensions which must be fostered in their complementary aspects.

Vatican II emphasized the mystery of the Church; it asked that we feel and live our shared responsibility for the great common mission, and work to make our charism incisive in our local areas. This implies the adopting of a whole new manner of pastoral planning in order to correct defects; it calls for creative renewal in our works, sensitivity to the urgent need for our presence in new places, and coordination and collaboration with other workers in the local environment.

The centenary year should prompt us to make everyone understand that in practice and despite our limitations we are a true gift of God for the local Church, in line with the values and objectives of the characteristics proper to Don Bosco's apostolic plan.

— *The urgent need for the christian education of youth* has without any doubt been one of the

clearest and most disturbing challenges raised by the centenary celebrations and reflections.

The Pope and the Bishops have been repeating this for years with worried insistence. Young people themselves show that they are thirsting for the great ideals proclaimed by Christ, who is unfortunately tragically absent in a civilization pervaded in a thousand ways by a subtle materialism. The Centenary has prompted us to choose this urgent problem for the work of our coming General Chapter.

We have come to understand that Don Bosco would know no rest if his educational method were no longer to be a "pedagogy of holiness" in which Jesus and Mary were the great friends of present-day youth. A renewed and deeper understanding of the importance of "prevention" must continue to enrich salesian educational practice.

What a great deal we have to recover and find anew in this vast sector! There is the quality of educators, the inspiration behind planning, the christian structure of our method, courageous down-to-earth traits in our projects, the fostering of a family and pastoral atmosphere. We need to root out from among us a spiritual and pedagogical superficiality which would stand in the way of true fidelity to the Founder.

— *The careful and competent development of a "Laity-project"*. Another of the points clearly emerging from the Centenary has been the importance of the active presence of the laity in our Family. The recent Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici", the fruit of the 1987 Synod, has confirmed the pastoral priority of this aspect in the process of ecclesial renewal. Don Bosco supported with growing conviction the salesian commitment to the animation and the spiritual and apostolic in-

volvement of the laity. In our great General Chapters of the post-conciliar period we have clearly confirmed our will to continue our Founder's plans in this field. We have set out on this path, but not everywhere. There are more than a few confreres who lack an adequate mentality in this regard. We must urgently intensify the construction of our framework, dedicate to this sector convinced and able confreres, better organize and stimulate the provincial organisms of animation, especially of the Cooperators' Association and of the Past Pupils.

— *A more modern use of the means of social communication as a means of evangelization.* During the Centenary I was invited by the civil authorities of Mathi to visit the famous paper factory bought by Don Bosco: it still exists and now belongs to a Finnish company, greatly improved from a technical point of view but still permeated by lively memories of our Founder. He had wanted to get into this sector of communication through the press, so as to be (as he put it) "in the vanguard of progress".

The social communication initiatives of our Family have played a noteworthy role in the success of the Centenary; the preparation of appropriate aids, coordination between our Press Office and other centres in Italy and overseas, an international congress of salesian publishers, the first meeting of the Provincial Delegates of Europe and Latin America, various consultations, and the launching of the Institute for Social Communication (ISCOS) of our University. We have also been able to get a better idea of the very influential role of this sector in the education of the young and of people in general. The last General Chapter (GC22) and the Constitutions and Regulations<sup>6</sup> have insisted on a

<sup>6</sup> C 6, 43; R 31, 33

reconsideration of our presence in this field.

Many Provinces have already taken positive steps in this direction, but the Centenary calls on us to give greater consistency to these new evangelizing presences, as regards both the content of the material to be communicated and the new means that most appeal to us for passing it on. There is an apostolic urgency in this sector which can give fresh life to a great many initiatives launched by our Father, but which with the passing of time and natural development have been forgotten or gone out of fashion: music, the theatre, group communication, etc.

This too is a priority which must be followed up by overcoming the many shortcomings which exist.

### **The overriding impression: an event of grace.**

But the most widely held feeling is that the Centenary has been an extraordinary gift that we have received from on high.

I have heard it said repeatedly by many confreres in all parts of the world that the first Centenary of the death of Don Bosco has shown us that our Father and Founder is more alive than ever! The forecasts and expectations are now things of the past; the objectives we had in mind have been attained in ways that were more than just satisfactory; it has been a period of intense rethinking which has set us on the road with more conviction towards the great goals of renewal indicated by Vatican II. If there had been anyone who had foreseen an atmosphere of triumphalism, or whose thinking was conditioned in some way by ideologies, and in consequence did not bother to put himself in harmony

with these celebrations, he would have found himself disappointed or out on a limb.

We can say in fact that the positive results were due to Don Bosco himself! His brand of holiness, the dynamic activity of his spirit, his pastoral criteria, his educational experience, his kindness expressed in the phrase "make yourself loved", his practical organizing ability, his oratorian heart and understanding of people, his realism in getting down to brass tacks and his universal missionary outlook, his sense of Church, his priestly attitude to politics, and especially his genial predilection for the young — all these things combined to render consideration of him both fascinating and prophetic.

No one could have foreseen the great benefits which accompanied this event: memories that led to discoveries, to challenges, to prospects for the future. Objective knowledge of our Founder has increased and it has been made very clear that any reductive attempt to interpret his educational methods using purely horizontal and humanistic criteria are doomed to failure.

It has been a "Year of grace" in which his charisma has been celebrated as though it had just been discovered; the lights of Vatican II have enhanced its relevance to the present day. This has led not only to the overcoming of any ingenuous triumphalist mentality, but also of that exclusively domestic perspective, too much turned in on itself, which could make us appear as an enclosed and exclusive domain; we have directed our gaze more to the mystery of Christ and his Church.

The centenary year has been for us a kind of living, precious and prophetic synthesis (in organic continuity with our tradition) of 25 years of post-

conciliar work: the SGC, the GC21, the GC22, the renewed text of our *Rule of Life*, the "*Ratio Institutionis*", the two *Books of government* (the Provincial's and Rector's Manuals), the *Regulations of Apostolic Life* of the Cooperators, the many aids for renewal, the fundamental *Identity Documents* of the other Groups of the Family, have found organic and existential expression in the figure of Don Bosco the Founder, the model given us by God "as father and teacher".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> C 21

This overall view of our redefined identity thus becomes the true launching-pad for our commitments to a new evangelization and a new education: a "Year of grace" which takes us into the "Advent" preceding the Third Millennium.

The "Salesian" of the new age, described in our renewal documents, always finds his point of reference in Don Bosco, and the Centenary has provided an ecclesial, social and Family endorsement of the fact. After hardly a hundred years our Father's dreams have become reality, even though unfortunately we still have so many shortcomings and there are still vast horizons opening out before us. It is as though Providence had settled on the year 1988 to bring the process of research to a happy conclusion and project the salesian mission in all its fidelity into new phases of history. The Centenary was a commemorative event, but for us it was above all a new springtime.

The Pope declared at Turin that Don Bosco's charisma is indeed "great" and that at the present day it is particularly "necessary" to the Church and society. I think that this "Year of grace" is an invitation to us to concentrate our attention on the charismatic aspect of our Family; with Don Bosco we form a "charism" in the Church! Or in other



words, our Family is vitally involved in that "privileged moment of the Spirit" to which Paul VI referred in "Evangelii nuntiandi".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> cf. EN 75

If the "experience of the Holy Spirit" is inherent in the nature of a charism,<sup>9</sup> we can say that historically the greatest and most vital charism of our century was the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council; it was the main initiative in the revitalization of the Church by the Holy Spirit: a kind of pentecostal event. And around the Council the Spirit has given rise to many other charisms which stir up a new vitality among the People of God, and among them have emerged some ecclesial Movements of which our Family is surely one!

<sup>9</sup> cf. MR 11

The presence of the Spirit indeed has touched, and deeply so, the renewal of charismata already existing. In this sense we must feel ourselves challenged; our Family is a living gift for the People of God: a youthful and popular charism, marked by educational concern and practical common-sense activity, without either sensationalism or polemics, but alive and creative in its courageous sharing in ecclesial renewal following the lofty and noble principles of the Founder. The Centenary has provided us with the great grace of recognizing the way we must follow, the renewed "charismatic" path we must travel with enthusiasm and creativity for a long time to come.

### **The primacy of Internal apostolic conviction**

Central to this our gift from above I would place the struggle against spiritual superficiality. In every part of the Congregation we dedicated ourselves with living interest to the great act of renewal of

our salesian profession on 14 May 1988. Ongoing formation initiatives in this regard have been many and well prepared. For a whole year that we looked on as a kind of general novitiate we analyzed more deeply our vocational identity in the Church. A very useful aid to this end was the commentary on the Constitutions.<sup>10</sup>

The great fundamental theme, explained and studied more deeply in numerous retreats, formation groups and study days, was that of our internal apostolic conviction, a result of the "grace of unity" which characterizes salesian pastoral charity. The path followed in the General Chapters after Vatican II has led us to a synthetic perspective of our "apostolic consecration". The interior assimilation of this reality has been one of our spiritual tasks during the Centenary.

The "grace of unity"<sup>11</sup> gives organic vigour and energy to the pastoral charity which is the driving force behind the salesian spirit.<sup>12</sup> It implies a mutually inseparable intercommunication between the elements indicated in the happily worded art.3 of the Constitutions: the special "covenant" with the Lord, the "mission" to the young and the poor, the fraternal "community" to whom the mission is entrusted, and the radical "practice of the evangelical counsels" guided by a filial attitude of obedience. It is a matter of an original style of reading the Gospel which shone so brightly in Don Bosco's experience of holiness lived in "a closely-knit life project".<sup>13</sup> It is precisely in this effort at deeper study that we have sought the surest and most radical remedy to the spiritual superficiality we have denounced.<sup>14</sup>

Our consecration in an active life of education is not something that it is easy to live up to. It requires a special initial preparation and a continual

<sup>10</sup> *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco - A Guide to the Salesian Constitutions* - Ed. SDB, Rome 1986

<sup>11</sup> cf. SGC 127

<sup>12</sup> C 10

<sup>13</sup> C 21

<sup>14</sup> cf. *Interioridad apostólica* - Ed. Salesiana, Buenos Ayres 1988 - Reflection themes of the Spiritual Exercises of the Rector Major

and appropriate ongoing formation. Everything is powerfully concentrated on pastoral charity with its two interconnected points of reference: God and those to whom our work is directed. Between the two there is an unmistakable and original dynamic linkage. Love of God is the source and cause of everything; love of our neighbour is the practical demonstration and sure yardstick for measuring true love of God, and the indispensable path along which the love of charity proceeds. There is a kind of common circulation between the two, a mutual causal relationship at different levels, in which union with God has the interior priority while in the practice of our system priority is given to service to our neighbour. The true God is inconceivable without his love for man, and our neighbour cannot be authentically thought of except as an image of God. And so no dedication to the young is genuine unless it proceeds from the love of God, but it is equally true that for us there is no true love of God that prescind from a predilection for the young, and especially those in need.<sup>15</sup> The craving for God is inseparable from a preoccupation for man: we live the great commandment of the Gospel in a single movement of charity. There is no disjunction between the two reference points of our pastoral charity.

<sup>15</sup> cf. Mt 25, 34ff.; 1 Jn 2, 9-11; 3, 14-15 etc.

And it is here that the “grace of unity” comes in; it proceeds from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and constitutes the primary richness of the “grace of consecration”<sup>16</sup> inherent in our religious Profession. It generates the vital synthesis and interior unity between Covenant, Mission, Community and the Evangelical Counsels which are at the foundation of our salesian identity. Through this grace of unity each of the four aspects

<sup>16</sup> C 195

indicated is vitally connected with each of the others and is authentic only if witnessed to within the context of the others. To want to foster one without the others would only do harm to the charismatic nature of our Profession.

The Centenary has helped us to meditate in a salesian fashion on the fundamental option of the religious Profession: the *Covenant* as the unquenchable source of "da mihi animas"; the *Mission* as the characterizing trait of our identity in the Church; the *Community* as the setting from which stems the communion which constitutes the subject and style of our life and activity; the *practice of the Evangelical Counsels* as the framework which gives life to the true donation of ourselves as disciples of Christ. The unity and inseparable nature of the four elements is a wonder of grace given daily life in us by the sanctifying power of the Spirit.

The event of May 14 was intended precisely to avoid in us a harmful separation between "religious life" and "salesian charism". Our apostolic consecration constitutes us as "charismatic". This has compelled us to rethink, with a dynamic view to the future, the meaning of some other classic terms in frequent use and which could become, almost unconsciously, the expression of a certain static attitude which is the cause of division between "religious life" and "charism"; examples of such terms are: "observance", "primary and secondary objectives", "community life", and "vows".

If by "*observance*" we mean fidelity to the Founder, it will demand from us a spirit of initiative, creative enthusiasm in pastoral charity, adaptability to the situation of those for whom we work, and versatility in meeting the demands imposed by the renewal of the Church and the conditions of the

times. The renewed Constitutions are courageously centred on Don Bosco's "charism", going beyond an external legality which would not promote apostolic flexibility. They do indeed contain wise and renewed norms to be put into practice, but the principle that guides life and activity proceeds from a strong interior conviction and from that spiritual and pedagogical experience which is the soul and source of those very norms and transcends them.

If *instead of "primary and secondary objectives"*, we speak of "*mission*", it means that we are rethinking matters in an evangelical and theological form as an active participation in the deep mystery of the Church and its evangelizing duty, living a special Covenant with God.

If in speaking of "*community*" we put the emphasis on "*brotherly communion*", it means that our living together must be characterized by the placing in common of the values of Don Bosco's evangelical project, of the Covenant, of the Mission and of the radical characteristics of the Counsels as vital aspects of our charism. The community must consciously become the "subject" of the mission.

And when we speak of the "*vows*" we must have in mind the *overall implications of "Profession"* which interpret the evangelical counsels in more organic and apostolic form, meaning that each of them must be thought of and lived in harmony with the whole salesian plan. We renewed our profession and not merely our vows.

The Centenary therefore has implied also for the other Groups of the Family an effort to make an interior assimilation of the salesian vocation in its substantial aspect of charisma and of life in the Spirit.

It is certainly a far cry from a renewed aware-

ness of one's own proper identity to the putting into practice of what is implied in these new horizons of fidelity. The road from one to the other is never-ending, but it is the only way that leads to the true goal.

### **The surprising vitality of the salesian family**

The central coordinating commission which drew up the programme for the Centenary was made up, as I said earlier, of representatives of the various Groups of the Salesian Family; and the same was true in general of similar committees in the different countries and regions. Collaboration was practical and universally felt. Reference to Don Bosco easily produced a convergence of the interests of all.

This union of purpose has shown that *together* we can do great things for the young, the poor, the Church and society. The world has seen that this Family is in no way closed in on itself but is evangelically open; that it has a real love for the Pope and the Bishops and is faithful to their Magisterium; that it commits itself to collaborate with the local Church to the best of its ability; that it is a force at the service of the common good. It is able to involve everyone to some extent in doing good: civil and ecclesiastical authorities, different social groups (even when they hold very disparate views, adherents of different religions, educators with different cultural backgrounds. The Centenary has in fact provided a great spur for the relaunching of our Family. An invitation was felt to aim at goals higher than those of the past in both the social and ecclesial spheres.

In addition to the attraction which Don Bosco

continues to exercise, we have noted with joy the efficacious results of the convergence of salesian forces in areas where they are to be found in association. This led to the spontaneous proposal to plan and work together in a more coordinated form, overcoming resistance and with a fraternal approach to the difficulties that are bound to arise. It is also a question of intensifying among the various Groups the central concept of *communion*, which is one of the corner-stones of the ecclesiology of Vatican II.

The evocative meeting of representatives of the various Groups in Don Bosco's rooms early in the morning of 31 January, almost at the very hour of the death of our Father and Founder, enabled us to meditate with filial affection on the common legacy he left us, and thus inaugurate in a humble and familiar manner as grateful sons and daughters the many celebrations that were to follow. There we pronounced once again the password for everyone: "forward together!"

It is difficult indeed to enumerate here the initiatives put in hand in the different sectors.

Looking at the dynamism of this Family during the Centenary, one can see very clearly that there have grown up a more flexible and practical mentality and attitude of communion both at central level and in many of the Provinces. And this happy experience has led to a more conscious and communal adherence to our salesian patrimony, with more effective attention to the common spirit, the common mission and the common method; and this in turn has strengthened the conviction and desire for "going ahead together".

The commitment and initiatives of the lay members belonging to the various Groups in the Family

have been particularly significant; often indeed the laity have appeared the most dynamic and exuberant in celebrating Don Bosco's greatness and emphasizing the validity of his message, as though to remind us that from this standpoint we must bring about a greater and better convergence of the efforts of all.

The Centenary has called the Salesian Family to transform itself into a true "ecclesial Movement" renewed by the Spirit for the benefit of today's youth.

### The youth movement

The best and most promising result of the re-launching of our Family is the growth of a corresponding Youth Movement. It can be said to arise quite naturally from the vitality of the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Cooperators, the Don Bosco Volunteers, the Past Pupils and the other Groups. It was almost tangible in the "Appraisal DB88".

For several years there has been talk of such a Movement and efforts were made to realize it, starting in Latin America. It marks the beginning of a new kind of youth association.<sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II himself gave us an authentic reminder of "the urgent need to revive in well-nigh every part of the world valid models for Catholic youth associations. The Pope exhorts you to be faithful, alert and skilful in an effort to develop such sodalities on an ever wider scale. This is a pressing invitation that I make to all who are responsible in any way for the christian education of youth".<sup>18</sup>

Without any doubt the starting up of the Movement must be included among the best and most

<sup>17</sup> cf. AGC 294 "Youth groups and movements"

<sup>18</sup> Oss. Rom. 8.5.79, cf. also GE 4, AA 18, 19, 21



<sup>19</sup> cf. GC21 156-159

urgent "new kinds of salesian presence".<sup>19</sup> The Centenary assures us that group activity among the young is a requirement of the preventive system and of the oratorian criterion of renewal; it recalls to our mind the leadership of Dominic Savio, a young person seeking after an ideal, and challenges us to better acceptance of such an educational and pastoral inspiration, which is by now a living reality in our Family.

At the "Appraisal 88" event there were 2,500 youngsters present, mainly from the European Provinces, and they represented a real commitment on the part of nearly every province: a world initiative, carefully prepared by two years of work through aids drawn up with patient competence. The meeting was the culmination reached after a process that had included the direct involvement of so many young people. At Turin, with Don Bosco, the threads marking the rebirth of our group activity were brought together: listening in faith, efforts at assimilation, joyful and festive celebrations, the sharing of problems and ideals, stimulating dialogue, prayer and the sacraments, pilgrimages with reverent memories, perspectives of christian witness, and proposals for growth.

Don Bosco, the "Father and Teacher of Youth", has come to be the living inspiration for today and tomorrow of an authentic youth spirituality, the fruit of his "realistic pedagogy of holiness" which does not disappoint "the deep aspirations of the young (the need for life, love expansiveness, joy freedom, future prospects), but at the same time leads them gradually and realistically to discover for themselves that only in the 'life of grace', i.e. in friendship with Christ, does one fully attain the most authentic ideals."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> IP 16

His mission among the young is a prophecy which still resounds at the present day. His reading of the Gospel for youth becomes translated into a spirituality which generates a convinced and tenacious attachment to him as a Teacher, even though with evident need for further interpretation in line with Vatican II.

I invite you to read again from this point of view the "Reflections following 'Appraisal DB88'" of the Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work, Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, in the Acts of the General Council.<sup>21</sup> I call your attention to two points he emphasizes: one concerning the Salesian Family, and the other young people.

<sup>21</sup> AGC 328, pp. 31-40

The 'Appraisal' reminds our Family of the "value of organisms of animation and intercommunication". The new era of salesian group activity will flourish if the sector is given good Delegates and Youth Pastoral Teams really capable of animation and possessing a well worked out collection of plans, guidelines, incentives, suggestions, spiritual enticements and apostolic creativity. The Centenary has proved to be a successful test of such organisms.

Furthermore the 'Appraisal' has highlighted "the new youthful subject". In the first place it has pointed out the lengthening of the period of youth itself which requires us to commit ourselves with special ability also to the age group ranging from 18 to at least 25 years. Adolescents and young adults are a privileged group in the Church; they are living through a period which is strategically important for their awareness of the faith and the building of a proper cultural synthesis. Living with them in an educational capacity, pastoral skill in approaching them, the original salesian interaction between

<sup>22</sup> Oss.Rom. 5.2.89

evangelization and human advancement, all invite us (as the Pope said) "not so much to dedicate ourselves haphazardly to the young, but to 'educate according to a plan'"<sup>22</sup> — a plan designed to make them the main agents in the maturing of their own personalities and of their active participation in the Church and Society.

We have accepted this moving scenario as a panorama of the future: to dedicate ourselves with greater conviction and competence to youth spirituality as the moving spirit in the new era of group activity. The beatification of Laura Vicuña and the inauguration of the "House of the young Saint" at Murialdo have drawn attention to Don Bosco's school of youthful sanctity, already proven by many adolescents around the world. The Salesian Youth Movement is now a reality, and it must be consolidated with intelligent and courageous perseverance.

The 'Appraisal' has provided a happy endorsement for a project which was already being talked about and has pushed it forward, requiring on our part the ability to carry out with the young an educational experience of greater evangelical consistency. And this is certainly one of the main lines along which our charisma must be launched anew.

### **Lay involvement**

I have already said that lay people played a significant part in the Centenary, and especially those belonging to the various Groups of our Salesian Family. If to this fact we add the special efforts (though still far from perfect) that have been made by the Congregation in recent years to bring about

their growth in both quantity and quality,<sup>23</sup> and if we recall that in the Church the last Synod of Bishops<sup>24</sup> studied this very theme, subsequently dealt with by the Holy Father in his Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici", we find before us a vast horizon open to our spiritual and apostolic vitality.

<sup>23</sup> AGC 317, 318, 321

<sup>24</sup> 1987

In the characteristic traits proper to the two Associations of Salesian Cooperators and the Past-Pupils, Don Bosco has called on us to be more ecclesial and more outward-looking. We have seen for ourselves that his spirit, founded on realism and a gift for synthesis in the midst of living experience, responds to the evangelical preoccupations of so many of the lay faithful. He himself has given us a prophetic example by involving them in his mission and forming them in the faith. The collaboration and christian common sense of Mamma Margaret is at the origin of this promising involvement. We cannot be faithful to Don Bosco at the present day unless we have a growing number of committed lay people working with us.

The Regulations of Apostolic Life for the Cooperators remind us that the Association was founded, as Don Bosco tells us himself, "to shake up christians from the apathy in which so many of them live, and to spread the driving force of charity."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> RAL 50

The Association of Past Pupils too, while providing a yardstick for the effectiveness of our educational methods, has the task of bringing to families and society those educational values which foster the dignity of the individual and improve social conditions.

If we want to live the salesian identity in our new times we must give much importance to the guidelines and directives of the Apostolic Exhortation on the vocation and mission of the Laity. In

<sup>26</sup> cf. CL 57  
<sup>27</sup> cf. *ibid.* 36-44

particular, while we commit ourselves to their formation — which is one of the great pastoral priorities in today's Church<sup>26</sup> from the standpoint of the "new evangelization"<sup>27</sup> — we shall involve them with us as leaders in the great pedagogical and pastoral mission the Lord has given to the Salesian Family.

We must recognize the fact that the Centenary has served to deepen also the secular dimension of our charism and reawaken in us an apostolic interest that had become dormant to some extent for various reasons, and which now we must be able to overcome. Here too, as in the case of the Youth Movement, we must give our attention to the organisms of animation by choosing Delegates who are able and competent. The Centenary has put the bellows to the smouldering embers and has whipped up the fire of a vast "charismatic" movement inspired by Don Bosco.

### **The Marian dimension**

For more than six months the Centenary coincided with the extraordinary Marian Holy Year proclaimed by the Pope (Pentecost '87 — the Assumption '88) in preparation for the great Jubilee of the year 2,000. A happy coincidence!

On the one hand this has led us to discover the sense of looking to the future in our centenary celebrations, and on the other it has emphasized the constituent and original Marian dimension of Don Bosco's charism and work. The Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco, the sacred place of the birth and centre of radiation of the salesian vocation and mission, where are venerated the mortal

remains of Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello and Dominic Savio, was the goal of a huge number of pilgrimages and the centre of many of our celebrations.

The encyclical "Redemptoris Mater" has prompted appropriate Marian reflections in the Congregation; the "theology of the image" which it develops<sup>28</sup> has led us to look with greater attention at the stimulating ecclesial significance of some aspects of Lorenzoni's painting of the Help of Christians which he produced in accordance with Don Bosco's wishes. The pedagogical, catechetical and "sacramental" functions of the sacred image have in fact combined to enhance the original Marian aspect of the heart of our Father.

The advent of the third millennium must be interpreted in the spirit of Mary of Nazareth, as the "magnificat" of the pilgrim Church. "Mary preceded the entry of Christ the Lord into the history of the human family which, when the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished, entered the fullness of time... Similarly by means of this Marian Year the Church is called ... on her own part to prepare for the future the paths of this cooperation; for the end of the Second Christian Millennium opens up as a new prospect".<sup>29</sup>

The Salesian Marian Academy, animated by the late lamented and worthy Fr Domenico Bertetto, a tireless apostle of Mary, dedicated a plenary session of particular solemnity to a commentary and deep analysis of the encyclical's message.<sup>30</sup> And in this way the Marian dimension came, and I would say quite naturally, to form a constituent part of the atmosphere of our centenary initiatives.

Emphasis was placed on the intimate link between Mary and the Holy Spirit, the source of all

<sup>28</sup> cf. *Red. Mater* 33-34

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* 49

<sup>30</sup> f. AMS. Boll. di Colleg. n. 3, *Maria Ausiliatrice Madre della Chiesa* - UPS Rome, 1987

charismata, and on what she has done for our Founder and our apostolic Family; in fact, "through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth".<sup>31</sup>

We contemplated too with particular depth the Marian heart of our Father and the historical and ecclesial realism that lay behind his predilection for Mary as the "Helper and Mother of the Church".<sup>32</sup> In this important connection we have admired the harmony between this choice of Don Bosco and the conciliar guidelines of Vatican II: an ecclesial vision of the figure and role of Mary in the history of salvation, her prerogatives as Queen of the Apostles, and her motherly interventions, especially in times of difficulty. Turin, which was already the city of the Comforter of the Afflicted, has become also the city of the Help of Christians; and the Basilica of Valdocco has become the living centre of a world-wide spreading of this so relevant devotion to the Mother of God and of the Church. Many pilgrimages, which included a visit also to the interesting Marian museum that has been set up in the precincts of the Sanctuary itself, have confirmed that this vitality exists.

Of particular significance was the first International Congress of the Associations of Mary Help of Christians held at Valdocco with close on a thousand participants, of whom a very large number came from Spain.

The words of the Pope at the Angelus on Sunday, 4 September, in the square at Valdocco, packed with the faithful, resound like a great appeal of the Centenary: "We are here at Turin-Valdocco before the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians, created by the love and courage of a saint.... The

<sup>31</sup> C 1; cf. Adriaan Van Luyn, *Maria nel carisma salesiano*, LAS Rome, 1987

<sup>32</sup> cf. G. BOSCO, *Le meraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Turin 1868

Second Vatican Council presents Mary to us as a model of the Church... in her maternity and her solicitude for the salvation of all people. From this Marian shrine that is so significant for young people I would like to appeal to parents, priests, consecrated persons and all educators, reminding them of their vocation to represent with generous self-giving the Church's maternity in the birth and growth of faith in the hearts of the young. How many difficulties young people are faced with in this area today! It is a demanding challenge, one of the most urgent, and yet one that is delicate and complex. It is not an easy task, but it is more than necessary. I invite you therefore to look at Mary, powerful help and maternal guide of educators in the faith... Guided by her 'who has believed', we will be led to feel more intensely the task of educating in the faith, and to see more clearly that the Church's activity in the world is like an extension of the motherhood of the Virgin 'full of grace'."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> The Pope's Angelus, 4.9.88

The Marian dimension therefore, interpreted and lived in line with Don Bosco's ecclesial and apostolic vision, belongs to the very soul of the rich experiences of this jubilee year of grace, which will also inspire the work of the coming General Chapter.

### **Devotion to Don Bosco, the saint**

All I have said so far has been centred on Don Bosco and the enlightenment we get from him. But there is still another aspect that I would not like to omit, because of the moving manifestations to which it gave rise all through the Centenary: I am speaking of the prayers which went up to the Saint



from all over the world, from a multitude of youngsters and members of the faithful and even from non-Christians. Our charism has a permanent intercessor in heaven! The figure of St John Bosco is fascinating because of his rich personality and the undertakings which have made him great in history. But he is no less efficacious in his role as a Saint, which makes him a powerful intercessor before God, able to obtain through insistent and loving petition a host of graces and favours, both spiritual and temporal, of which we all feel the need.

Even Pope John Paul II, at the end of his homily on 4 September 1988 in the Square of Mary Help of Christians, joined the immense chorus who pray to him, with this lofty invocation: "Dear Saint! How much we need your great charism! How necessary it is for you to accompany and assist us in understanding the mystery of the child, the mystery of the human person, particularly the young person. Dear Saint John! Although you left us one hundred years ago, we feel your presence in our 'today' and in our 'tomorrow'. Dear Saint John! Pray for us. Amen!"<sup>34</sup>

I am sure that every member of the Salesian Family prays frequently to St John Bosco; but I invite everyone to intensify that prayer, to be faithful to him, to propagate devotion to him, especially among the young and people in general. The salesian charisma is not something separate from him, who remains always its intercessor and guide. Harmony of spirit and communion of prayer with St John Bosco not only assimilates us to him more closely but also intensifies our participation in the mystery of the "Communion of Saints" that we profess in the Creed. This too is an aspect of the ecclesial character which animates our spirit.

<sup>34</sup> *Nella Terra di Don Bosco*, p. 123 - LDC Turin 1988

We must never forget that Vatican II exhorts all the faithful to "honour the memory of the saints", not only for their example but especially because "our communion with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom as from its fountain and head issues all grace and the life of the People of God itself." And it adds that: "It is most fitting that we love those friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ who are also our brothers and outstanding benefactors... and that we have recourse to their prayers and their powerful help."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> LG 50

Devotion to St John Bosco therefore unites us to the cult of the Church in heaven, as we communicate with its members and venerate especially the memory of the Virgin Mary Help of Christians, of St Joseph, the Apostles and Martyrs and all the Saints, especially St Francis de Sales and those of our Family.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*; C 9, 24

Those with other new charismas envy us this wonderful point of reference on which a whole new Movement can be based. We on the other hand can sing with the Church's liturgy our joy at celebrating the feast of St John Bosco; he strengthens us by his example, guides us by his teaching and protects us by his intercession.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> cf. Missal:  
Preface of Pastors

### **The two great commitments before us**

Among the vital consequences of the Centenary and the many intended courses of action to which it has given rise, I want to mention two in particular which impose on us a serious obligation: the 1989 Strenna for the whole Salesian Family, and the theme of the coming General Chapters of the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

*The Strenna* asks us for a renewed and more intense and carefully prepared work for vocations. For Don Bosco's precious charism to be living and active at the present day, there is need for new generations of sons and daughters who will assimilate its specific values and make them the source of growth in every continent. Renewed pastoral work for vocations will be the most authentic expression of both the fidelity of those already consecrated and the apostolic fruitfulness of their work. I think that the surest yardstick for measuring the "return of Don Bosco" and the "return to Don Bosco"<sup>38</sup> will be precisely the daily educational work carried out by individuals and communities in seeking out and fostering vocations.

On the occasion of the 'Appraisal DB88' at Turin, some of us met young people who were seeking information and advice about becoming Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. And in addition, the celebrations led us to meditate more than once on Don Bosco's own constant and fruitful work for vocations: it was recalled especially at the Cathedral of Chieri, filled as it was with young people with a "calling". Cardinal Ballestrero, in his pastoral letter: "*Saint John Bosco, priest of Christ and of the Church*",<sup>39</sup> dwelt explicitly on his great dedication to pastoral work for vocations; to this end he faced up to countless difficulties of his day, he was bold and enterprising in caring for "late" vocations (as they were once called), even though in the climate of the archdiocese it was a new initiative and little understood, creating for them special environments and formation programmes.

At the present day some parts of the world are experiencing a frightening fall in the number of

<sup>38</sup> IP 13<sup>39</sup> 5.6.88

vocations, and it has become urgent to find new means for identifying and taking care of them. The Centenary, in proclaiming the relevance of Don Bosco's charism to the present day, prompts us to seek out many and qualified people who will continue that charism in both consecrated and lay life. In consequence we are led to intensify our daily prayer for vocations, this mysterious gift of God which must first be asked for and then educated to maturity.

And then there is the *theme of the coming General Chapters* of both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, which refers to our educational practice, so that it may become an integral and incisive part of the "new evangelization". A more objective awareness of the world of youth, and a consideration of its influence on the texture of social life, demand the ability to carry out the christian formation of the young in a pluralist and secularized society. This is what lies at the foundation of pastoral work for vocations.

The "upright citizen", of whom Don Bosco spoke, is such if he is formed as a "good christian". And there you have one of the biggest challenges of our present period in history. Cultural transformations require a "new education", but without faith it will be neither consistent nor permanent. Don Bosco was raised up to "establish a synthesis between evangelizing activity and educational work. His concern for evangelization ... formed part of the whole process of human formation... Since the young people are living through a period of particular importance for their education... faith must become the unifying and enlightening element of their personality."<sup>40</sup>

The Holy Father recalled, in the audience granted

<sup>40</sup> IP 15

to the Rector Major and Members of the General Council, that "it is a theme which touches deeply the entire Church. It has implications which do not depend entirely on particular characteristics of the prevailing youth condition, but stem from a cultural situation which is passing through a period of great changes as the third millennium of christianity draws near. It is a time of great ecclesial responsibility and of a captivating commitment in the process of evangelization."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Oss.Rom., 5.2.89

This certainly is the central objective of all our activity and also the most daunting challenge of the present cultural changes. To be able to respond it is essential that we make a careful revision of our methods. But even before that — and the order is of great importance — there needs to be an adequate interior renewal of every son and daughter of Don Bosco and of the genuinely salesian atmosphere in every community. With apostolic fire in the heart of each member and an evangelical environment in every house, there will not be lacking the understanding and strength needed to renew methods of action: faith, in fact, is a gift of God which can come also through the witness and communication of the life of the educators. (We must not deceive ourselves on this point — this is not a magic method which works automatically; you have only to look at the Apostles, the Saints, at a Cure of Ars, at Don Bosco, at Mother Mazzarello. Remember the authoritative declaration of Vatican II: "Religious life is ordered to the following of Christ by its members and to their becoming united with God by the profession of the evangelical counsels. For this reason, it must be seriously and carefully considered that even the best-contrived adaptations to the needs of our time will be of no avail

unless they are animated by a spiritual renewal, which must always be assigned primary importance even in the active ministry.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> PC 2

## Conclusion

Dear confreres, each one of you certainly has his own overall opinion of the values of the Centenary and has made his own personal assessment. To write this circular letter I first spoke with many confreres and asked the opinion of the members of the General Council. The reflections I have put before you are based on lived experience and, although not pretending to be complete, help in the formation of a positive overall judgement, which will be a stimulus to our renewal and give us constancy in carrying it out.

I want to repeat yet again that a hundred years after his death Don Bosco is still personally concerned about the relaunching of his charisma: it is as though he had said to us during the work of the post-conciliar period that we had been faithful in what we had done, and that now, while congratulating us on the “fair copy” of our newly elaborated identity documents, he exhorts us to bear witness to that identity in the practice, launching his mission and spirit towards new centuries in every part of the world.

During the last years of Don Bosco’s life he was very concerned about the future of our spiritual Family: we only have to recall the dream of the personage with the ten diamonds<sup>43</sup> and his direct interventions in the first General Chapters. He wanted to ensure the continuing of the main characteristics of his spirit, the unique nature of his mission, the

<sup>43</sup> 1881

apostolic mentality and the formation of the members, the practice of the preventive system, the fostering of vocations, the purifying of communities ("the Congregation", said the third General Chapter, "needs a good cleansing"!)." <sup>44</sup> When we remember that Card. Ferrieri, Prefect of the Vatican Congregation concerned with Religious, had suggested to the Pope that there be an Apostolic Visitation of the salesian houses (which in fact never took place), and that there was a move in the Vatican to aggregate our Congregation after Don Bosco's death to a similar one already in existence, <sup>45</sup> we can understand the concern in our Father's heart during the '80s and how Providence responded — a response we have been celebrating all over the world during this Centenary.

We must indeed express our gratitude to Don Bosco and show him still greater love, honouring the title the Church has given him by proclaiming him the universal "Father and Teacher of Youth". And with him we thank Mary Help of Christians for the motherly guidance she gave him in his singular experience of the Holy Spirit. And above all we praise the good Lord himself and his Spirit. We are deeply grateful to God for the gift of predilection for the young and the poor which made of our Founder one of the great trail blazers of the future for the Church and society.

And so, with immense gratitude in our hearts, we are happy to have been called by God by name, to be in these new times industrious disciples of Christ in following with the young the way pointed out by Don Bosco "which leads to Love". <sup>46</sup>

The DB88 celebrations have set us on the road to the commitments of the next Centenary. May we be creative and faithful protagonists.

<sup>44</sup> MB 16, 414-415

<sup>45</sup> cf. CERIA, *Annali* 2, p. 446. C 196

<sup>46</sup> *Cost* 196

My cordial greetings to you all from the Basilica at Valdocco, the centre from which what the Pope called a "great Charisma" has spread throughout the world.

May the Lord enrich us with the light and strength of his Spirit!

My best wishes for your continued growth.

Don F. Viganò