



acts

of the general council

year LXXV january-march 1994

N. 347

official organ
of animation
and communication
for the
salesian congregation

**Roma
Direzione Generale
Opere Don Bosco**

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

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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The Congress of Superiors General on "CONSECRATED LIFE AT THE PRESENT DAY"

Introduction - Relevance of the Congress - Original arrangement of the themes - Method of working - Central nuclei of consecrated life - Mission - Communion - Identity - Formation and vocations - What will the Bishops say in the coming Synod? - The run-up to the Synod

Rome, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
8 December 1993

My dear confreres,

We are in the liturgical climate that precedes the coming of the Lord. We look forward to Christmas and the beginning of a new year of life and work, and naturally I send you my best wishes for growth in the newness of Christ and for fruitful work in a further stage of your commitment. Let us offer our combined thanks to the good Lord for all he has given us in the year now passing away, and let us ask him for light and strength throughout 1994.

It will be the year of the long-desired Bishops Synod on consecrated life – a Synod destined to become historic in the Church's annals.

To us it will be of particular interest for the purpose of confirming and developing the process of renewal on which we have been engaged for many years.

As a step leading to the Synod and as a contribution to it, there took place at Rome from 22 to 27

November 1993 an international Congress on "*Consecrated Life at the present day. Charisms in the Church for the world*", organized by the Union of Superiors General. I took part in it myself with six other confreres and a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians.

I think it will be useful if I offer for your consideration some facts and reflections that emerged during the Congress, in the hope that they may serve to intensify the climate of preparation for the ninth ordinary Synod next October.

Relevance of the Congress

In a previous circular which bore the significant title: "*An invitation to bear greater witness to our consecration*",¹ I drew attention to the importance in the Church that will attach to the coming Synod on consecrated life.

¹ AGC 342, Oct.-Dic. 1992

Aware of this importance, the Union of Superiors General (USG) decided to prepare a congress, which would provide an occasion for a broad and realistic reflection and lead to the formulation of some practical and relevant proposals to be offered to the Synod. Although the Congress set out from the experience of specifically "religious" Institutes, it purposely left itself open to reflection on the whole of "consecrated" life, because of the strong convergence attaching to the latter, despite the differences, in the communion of the Church.

More than 500 persons took part from some 150 countries: 200 of them were Superiors General, many accompanied by members of their councils, together with 50 presidents or representatives of

national and international Conferences of men and women religious, and about a hundred theologians. Present too were various members of the Roman congregations and some cardinals, bishops and lay people. To these must be added a substantial group of women Superiors General and theologians of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG). It should be noted that the UISG had already held a similar congress, because the large numbers and differences in approach had seemed to them to render impossible and inopportune the holding of a single combined event.

The celebration of a Congress of such dimensions on consecrated life in the post-conciliar era provided an opportunity for a happy stocktaking of our charisms in the Church and opened up horizons of hope in the face of the challenges of the present day.

It was a deep experience of communion, dialogue and comparison between different charisms, traditions, continents and cultures.

Among elements emerging were the worldwide factors involved, the great plurality of cultures, the diversity of charisms, the sense of the particular Churches, positive experiences, future perspectives, the essential nature of consecration, the theological value attaching to the mission, the richness of the community dimension, and the flame of enthusiasm to be kindled among the new generations.

The Holy Father received all the participants on Friday, 26 November, and spoke to them on specific themes which bring hope to the consecrated persons themselves and for the whole Church.

The overall result of the Congress was positive, not only because of the numerous and consistent participation, but also for the quality of the study

contributions, the intensity of dialogue and the observations and proposals that were drawn up.

After the Congress the proposals were assessed by the Superiors General alone on two successive days (1 and 2 December) before being sent officially to the Secretary of the Synod.

I think that this must surely prove to have been the greatest commitment of the male Institutes in preparation for the meetings of the Bishops in October next.

Original arrangement of the themes

An interesting aspect that deserves emphasis was the originality and realism that accompanied the arrangement of the Congress' work.

It was decided to start from the present situation and what had been done in the postconciliar period, pointing out the constitutive values of consecrated life as the present responses, even though not without certain weaknesses, to the challenges of the epoch-making changes we are now experiencing.

And so a path was followed that differs from that of the "Lineamenta", a path to some extent complementary, offering a more experimental vision based on the concrete situations of the past ten years and on the situation at the present day, which is far different from that in which Vatican II ordered and spurred on the "updating" of religious Institutes.

The "Lineamenta" start from the doctrinal patrimony of the Magisterium, outlining in the first place the nature and identity of consecrated life

and its charismatic variety, and then passing on to the commitment to renewal realized since Vatican II, even though not without certain ambiguities and unfinished elements; and finally they present consecrated life in its vital participation in the Church as communion and in the Church's mission, with the demands of the new evangelization.

The fact that the Congress had followed a different path to reach the same goal turned out to have had positive results. The two lines of approach, in fact, are substantially convergent in their conclusions, mutually reinforcing each other in a deeper analysis and shaping of consecrated life at the present day.

The method adopted by the Congress certainly presupposes a basic and clear awareness of the particular identity, lived out through the experiences of the postconciliar efforts at renewal.

The presentation at the outset of the results of a sociological investigation of consecrated life in the USA (where some consecrated persons are in particular difficulty), and of a scientific study made by the Loyola Centre of Spain on some 200,000 men and women religious of western countries, served to provide a stimulus for gaining a more objective mental picture of the reality of the present situation.

The two sociological studies, limited as they were to certain areas and hence of diminished application, were not offered as an overall presentation of the reality of consecrated life which would have to take note also of other parameters. But they highlighted the usefulness of sociological mediation when an effort is made, from the standpoint of faith, to discover what God is saying through observed facts, both positive and negative, with a

view to an evangelical discernment of the process of renewal in a difficult time of change and transformation.

This decision to "start from the reality" was also an invitation to the participants to adopt the same perspective in their reflections and contributions, especially since the Superiors present are daily involved in the complex responsibilities of a process of renewal and hence able to speak against a background of lived experience.

After the two sociological presentations, and the enrichments provided by the experience of the participants, the Congress went on to analyze consecrated life under the three fundamental aspects of *mission, communion, identity*, in that order.

In practice it was a matter of a kind of research into the personal understanding of the identity of the "consecrated vocation" in the face of the many challenges raised by cultural and ecclesial changes; of an attempt to answer the question; "What image of consecrated life can be passed on at the present day?", in the knowledge that the identity needs not only a doctrinal presentation but also a description in narrative form in theological language which will pay due attention to the fact that consecrated life is both "life" and "part of history".

During the discussion of the themes indicated and at the time of summing up, emphasis was laid as an aspect of particular urgency on the question of "*formation and vocations*", which was also given special attention later by the assembly of Superiors General in their two-day meeting that followed the Congress.

In this assembly, with its worldwide dimension, in the exchange of experiences and the intervention of people of diverse mentalities and cultures, some

debatable statements were made and then sifted in lively and interesting group discussions. On the other hand some contributions had been well thought out with a view to providing stimulus and information leading to an accurate understanding of situations and existing mentalities. Not everything that was stated in reports and round-tables is representative of the concluding thoughts of the assembly.

It can certainly be said nonetheless, that through dialogue and in the diversity of situations, the multiplicity of charisms, the differences in spirituality, the richness of the experience of God, a clear and fundamental convergence emerged together with a rich perspective of theological plurality.

Method of working

It will be useful to refer briefly to the way the work was organized, to see how so many participants could take an active part.

The mornings saw the presentation of the lengthy main reports, summing up the work of two years on the part of the USG; these were followed by four "round tables", referring to the theme concerned, for the offering of various stimuli from different geographical and cultural or "charismatic" points of view.

Thus, for example, on the day dedicated to the theme of *mission*, there were interventions amongst others from Fr Giovanni E. Vecchi, our Vicar General, with a contribution of a geographical and cultural kind on the *mission* in Latin Amer-

ica during these years of change; and by our confrere Fr Ricardo Ezzati (who works for the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life, Section for Religious) with a contribution of a "charismatic" type on the challenges to the *mission* in the charisms of apostolic life in the light of experience since the Council.

Each afternoon there were two periods of work: the first consisted of group meetings (with no fewer than 27 linguistic groups), for a deeper examination of what had been set out during the morning, with respect to four particular aspects or perspectives: "culture", "charism", "formation", and "future", distributed among the same group.

In the second afternoon period the members of the linguistic groups came together in wider "constellations" (of which there were five) to concentrate the reflections made in the earlier groups into two categories: "doctrinal aspects" and practical "proposals". Two different secretaries in each group brought a synthesis of the group-work to the constellation, and from there a previously designated competent secretary took the fruits of the day's work to the central secretariat.

The work was both intense and complex, and in it all the participants took part. It highlighted the ability for collaboration and for the attaining of visions shared to a sufficient degree between persons with a great variety of charisms and coming from many deeply different situations.

Considering the large number of participants, it is safe to say that the method of working fostered interchange and participation, and was judged to be positive.

Central nuclei of consecrated life

For two years the USG in its periodic meetings (two each year, each of three days duration) had taken up themes considered and experienced as fundamental in the lived reality of the present day: mission, communion and identity. It had been a combined effort to specify the practical problems arising in these times of change; to identify the fundamental points to be ensured, the positive steps for renewal, the ambiguities and deviations that could arise. It was a reflection on the practice as lived in the Institutes in fidelity to the Founders, following the guidelines of Vatican II and subsequent indications of the Magisterium so as to meet as consecrated persons the practical demands of present-day situations.

It was a matter, therefore, tackled originally from the standpoint of the responsibility for animation and guidance of Superiors General.

In its meetings the USG had gathered a multiplicity of theological interpretations concerning the ecclesial nature of consecrated life, prompted perhaps by the variety of charisms: each one tends in fact to interpret everything from the standpoint of the charismatic experience of his own Institute. Reference was made to the radical nature of the following of Christ, to the practice and public profession of the evangelical counsels, to the search for and absolute adherence to God, to the eschatological dimension of christian life, to the various forms of service (*diakonia*) in the Church's mission, to the ascetic obligation of tending to sanctity, etc.

All these interpretations are no doubt true in themselves, but maybe none of them hit exactly

upon the nucleus and fount of the identity of consecrated life in the form in which it should be presented to the coming Synod. It was not a case of giving a theological definition – that was not the province of the Superiors General – but of determining what was truly the root of everything and for everything.

The recent Congress, starting from the verifications and reflections already made, decided to take further steps along the same path.

Later we shall indicate the results achieved; what we want to emphasize at this point is that a great deal of progress has been made by reflecting on the lived experience of religious Institutes in these years of transformation that have followed Vatican II.

But let us first look at the themes dealt with in the Congress. On each of them I offer only some brief remarks as a stimulus.

Mission

The first theme dealt with was that of *mission*. It emerges with greater force in the process of change because it gives rise to the most urgent challenges. We have experienced this ourselves in the intense and prolonged discussions in the Special General Chapter and in the redrafting and restructuring of the Constitutions: “Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life; it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families”.²

The mission refers in the first place to the Kingdom of God and its values, which Jesus proclaimed

² C 3

³ Red. missio 18

and of which the Church is the sacrament and leaven ("seed, sign and instrument").³

The concept of mission depends on the way we think of the action of God the Father, of Christ and of the Spirit on humanity and in history. On our concept of ecclesial mission depends the manner in which we see our own specific mission and our vocation as apostles. Mission is at one and the same time commitment and prophecy, incarnation and eschatology; it means travelling in history with humanity, helping in the discovery and welcoming of the presence of God who saves.

It was pointed out repeatedly that mission is of the Church and that we take part in it, according to our specific vocation, in virtue of our baptism.

Mission comes from God and is a sharing in the mystery.

It is not simply an external activity stuck on to the Church's being, but something absolutely intrinsic to it and a constitutive element of its nature. It must not be confused with services offered, works, beneficiaries, etc., though all these form a not indifferent aspect of the Church. To understand the import of this one must rise in faith to the very mystery of the Trinity, where the Word is sent by the Father, and the Spirit by the Father and the Son in mission in human history. The Word takes flesh and as man is consecrated by the Father with the Spirit for the great mission of salvation which directs the pilgrimage of mankind towards the Kingdom of Christ and of God.

The Spirit, the gift of the Father and the Son, is the fruitful and tireless source of those communal charisms which oblige the different Institutes to take part in different ways in the complex mission passed on by Christ to the Church.

At the first beginnings of everything there is the initiative of God: the love of the Father who sends the Son into human history, and together with him sends the Holy Spirit; a wholly ineffable story of love. A God who wants to make man's response both possible and genuine. In fact the task of the Holy Spirit is that of incorporating men into Christ to bring them back with him to the Father; it is the great circle of the reciprocity of love.

Consecrated life is totally immersed in this great mystery which constitutes "life and holiness" in the Church.

As the Fathers explained it: from the Father's love for man through the incarnation of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit; and, for men, from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to become "sons" in the Son (or in other words "Christ's faithful") and so follow a sure path to the Father.

The deeper understanding of the true nature of consecrated life brings us to the very essence of Christianity as regards mission and also both communion and identity. Hence the indispensable need for the contemplative dimension in every charism of consecrated life: the central place of prayer and contemplation, because of being "sons" in the Son.

The transformation at present in progress often takes consecrated life into the front lines of social life, in the midst of all its new problems and numerous areas void of any transcendent element. If consecrated persons do not cultivate prayer and contemplation as elements propelling towards the mystery, they run the risk of losing sight of the prime reality and becoming dangerously close to the adopting of a secularized mentality and style of life.

Rather is it necessary to keep constantly in

mind that at the basis of everything lies the fascinating mystery of the Trinity; in the words of the renewed Constitutions: "We live as disciples of the Lord by the grace of the Father, who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and send us out to be apostles of the young".⁴

⁴ C 3

We see at once that from a deeper understanding of the mystic aspect of the mission (as also of communion and identity) there emerge on the part of God, as mutually inseparable, *vocation, consecration and mission*. This is a breakthrough of the Council which has thrown light on the identity of consecrated life. The famous verb "*consecratur*" of *Lumen gentium* has shifted the attention of Religious to "consecration" and given their specific name to Institutes of "Consecrated Life". In this term are concentrated the lights of the mystery, which bring to mind, in particular, the vital relationship between mission and consecration.

The Holy Father too, in his address to the members of the Congress, presented Christ as "*the consecrated one par excellence*", and hence the one "sent" by the Father for the salvation of the world. In the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus had applied to himself the prophecy of Isaiah;⁵ in this regard the Pope comments: "the Spirit is not simply 'upon' the Messiah, but he 'fills' him, penetrating every part of him and reaching to the very depths of all that he is and does. Indeed, the Spirit is the principle of the 'consecration' and 'mission' of the Messiah⁶ ... Every consecration in the Church is intrinsically linked to *a radical and vital synthesis of consecration and mission*".⁷

⁵ Lk 4, 16-19

⁶ PDV 19

⁷ Oss. Romano (Eng. edtn.), 8 Dec. 1993

In this way the fact is highlighted that the mission of consecrated persons is measured not only by their direct commitment to the apostolate and

work of advancement, but by their very life of consecration, the total gift of themselves to God in Christ, through the power of the grace of the Spirit which translates the gift of self into practical charity towards others.

Then an indication was given of the greater challenges posed to the Church's mission at the present day; every charismatic Institute must pay heed to them and intervene in line with its particular characteristics and with due regard to the contexts in which it is working.

The main urgent needs to be considered today are:

- the requirements of the new evangelization;
- the preferential option for the poor;
- non-violence as a style of life and activity in the pursuit of justice;
- inter-religious and intercultural dialogue which helps to break the abuses of fundamentalism and totalitarianism;
- the various new areopagi deprived of the light of the Gospel.

Reference was also made, and more than once, to an aspect presented under a name that is coming into use, that of "liminality"; it is a concept that indicates how consecrated life is sited in a "frontier situation". It can be linked with the "originality" and "creativity" proper to Founders and passed on to their followers, of which Paul VI spoke in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*: through the grace of their consecration religious "are enterprising and their apostolate is often marked by an originality, by a genius that demands admiration. They are generous: often they are found at the outposts of the mission, and they take the

⁸ EN 69

greatest of risks for their health and their very lives".⁷

The mission, therefore, is a powerful stimulus for transformation which comes from the same source of vocation and consecration: in other words, from the Spirit of the Lord.

Communion

Another aspect in which consecrated life has experienced a strong thrust towards transformation is that of the renewal of the community – from the traditional type of community, based for the most part on regularity of observance, to one in which the tendency is towards the making of a true "communion" in a life of greater fraternity.

Here too the deeper analysis of the ecclesial concept of communion (strongly emphasized by Vatican II and the extraordinary Synod of 1985) has led to reflection on its mysteric dimension. Here we have to return once again to the trinitarian life in God, with its distinction of persons and unity of communion in an inexhaustible reciprocal exchange of gifts.

But it was not intended to make of the Mystery the measure of the lived experiences, even though it remains their great guiding light; the experience of life does not lead indeed to the mythologizing of the religious community, nor of communion in the Church. In the Church's pilgrimage through the centuries and in the existential experience in religious houses there has never been a perfect community, nor will there be one in future: it is an eschatological goal.

This hard fact, nonetheless, does not discourage

us from looking at the mystery of the Trinity for encouragement in building communion, either in the fraternal life of Institutes or in the living unity of life together in the Church at large.

Hence the need to include in this theme education to self-giving, to dialogue and listening, to forgiveness and the revision of life, to the practice of mercy and constant growth in kindness, to patience and reciprocal emulation, etc., not simply as a way of tackling a difficult task but as a constituent element of the human condition in time, and consequently an essential element in the realistic concept of communion itself.

Although lived in an imperfect way – more as a task to be fulfilled than a goal already achieved – communion is essential in the Church and in consecrated life, as witness the redeeming presence of Christ and the unifying role of the Holy Spirit.

Today the world raises numerous challenges to the ecclesial ideal of bringing all humanity into one great family: it seems a utopian ideal which is unattainable. And yet it is the Church's task to work towards this end. And consecrated "religious" are called upon to manifest in the Church a strong experience of communion in living communities, according to the various modalities of their respective charisms.

Among the points indicated for ensuring the authenticity of renewal, we may recall the following in particular:

a. religious Institutes must "*believe in the value of communion*"; and hence commit themselves to a real life of communion in their houses, for a more active participation in communal projects, for a greater effort to achieve the "one heart and one soul" as at the origins of Christianity. In practice

this means that there must also be a certain consistency in the community, so as to avoid the danger of the kind of fragmentation which imperils the particular mission; and all this in conformity with the characteristic nature of each Institute;

b. the communion of consecrated persons is inserted in a vital manner in the "*organic communion*" of the People of God, and indeed should contribute to a more lively ecclesial communion: they should be experts in making communion! Emphasis has been laid both on the commitment of consecrated persons to be genuinely inserted in the local Church to which they bring the riches of their particular charism, and on the attention that Pastors must give to the possibility of the contribution of the individual charisms, of which the Bishops themselves are required to be guarantors;⁹

c. *communion between the charisms* of the various Institutes, especially of those which are more homogeneous: an "exchange of gifts" which renders the mission of each more incisive;

d. especially emphasized was *communion between consecrated persons and the lay faithful*; this is a promising sector of the future in which to commit oneself with hope.

The "breakthrough of the laity" in the Church was spoken of as a fact characteristic of our time – another phenomenon which poses a challenge to the charisms of consecrated persons.

Among the proposals which the Superiors General have sent to the Synod is the following: "*we are of the opinion that it is necessary to animate the laity who share in their own way in the same charism of religious, by creating various forms of association and collaboration, preserving*

⁹ cf. *Mutuae Relationes*
8-9

their autonomy for birth and development in line with the lay state”.

The Holy Father too in his address, speaking of the commitment of Religious in the new evangelization, made special reference to this kind of greater communion: it will be necessary, he said, “to deepen and clarify the spiritual and apostolic relations that exist between religious and lay people, *promoting new methods and new expressions of cooperation*, to facilitate the proclamation of Christ in our time”.¹⁰

¹⁰ Oss. Romano (Eng. edtn.), 8 Dec. 1993

In connection with communion reference was also made to the innovation it brings to the exercise of charismatic authority, centred especially on the animation and development of a charism by fostering a greater degree of shared responsibility, a renewed spirituality and a new apostolic sense.¹¹

¹¹ cf *Mutuae Relat.* 13

Identity

In discussing identity, the Congress began from the starting point of the lived experience of recent decades in response to the profound social and cultural changes that have taken place, keeping in mind the variety of charisms and of the problems inherent in various inculturation processes that have already begun.

There is here an identity on the move and not yet fully realized; it is still in the process of becoming, and probably has as yet no already proven model.

The efforts made since Vatican II were recalled: the celebration of the special General Chapters, the return to the Founder, the redrafting of the Constitutions, the greater weight given to mission, open-

ness to new experiences, renewed missionary courage, dialogue between different Institutes, increase in the number of national and international Conferences, etc.

It was possible to relate consecrated life – in the perspective of Religions – to similar external phenomena; in this way due attention was given to the current historical and cultural situation as well as to religious and anthropological circumstances.

But then was singled out the linkage between its supreme originality and the unique nature of the mystery of the Incarnation. Against the background of the sacramental character of the whole Church, so much emphasized by the Council, the discussion moved to the *symbolic and transforming function* of consecrated life in its widely different charismatic forms, as though it were an “eschatological parable” for the faith of all the People of God. Its *significance*, in this symbolic and prophetic role, does not raise it above the life of the other members of the Church as though it were of greater dignity, but distinguishes it and makes it ancillary to it because destined for a particular service. It proclaims some of the aspects of the multi-form mystery of Christ, making the rich contents of salvation perceptible to people of the present day.

Its identity is linked at one and the same time, therefore, to Christ and to the Spirit: to Christ, as the incarnate presence of God and the many-faceted sign of salvation; and to the Spirit as the divine power which animates the entire mission of salvation and fills it with grace.

The description of a similar identity can be expressed in various ways indicating one or other aspect of special disciples of Christ animated by his Spirit.

In the document submitted to the Secretary of the Synod, the Superiors General were agreed in stating that "at the present day the prevailing theological category in the magisterium is that of '*consecration*' expressed in the Church through the public profession of the evangelical counsels. Another broad theological category, which would seem capable of unifying the variety of perspectives, is that of '*charism*'. Every Institute arises through the impulse of the Spirit offered to the Founders, and by them transmitted to the members. The charism implies a specific manner of being, of mission, of spirituality and of the manner in which the Institute is structured".

We could say that these two categories (consecration and charism) are superimposed and mutually interchangeable. Each time, in fact, it is a matter not of a generic consecration but of a particular one, specified by a mission and an evangelical project which constitutes the experience of the Holy Spirit which is the substance of every charism. On the other hand a charism arises precisely from a particular consecration in the Spirit of the Lord as its first source.

From the reflections made in the Congress we can pick out some requirements:

a. The first requirement is the one recalled by the Pope in his address: "*spirituality*": "The first basic value to foster therefore is that of 'spirituality', in accordance with the typical charism of each Institute. In religious consecration, the intimacy, richness and stability of a special link with the Holy Spirit are at the root of all things. Indeed the Church does not need religious who are dazzled by secularism and the appeals of the contemporary world but courageous witnesses and tireless

¹² Oss. Romano (Eng. edtn.), 8 Dec. 1993

apostles of the kingdom".¹² A renewed spirituality renders the charism 'significant' as a living testimony to newness of life;

b. The *prophetic and eschatological testimony* which manifests the christological characteristics of the new Man, and the pneumatological witness of holiness, through the fervour of charity. This implies that in order to be significant in view of the kingdom, one must question oneself on the aspect of inculturation in the testimony of one's own spirituality;

c. The identity of consecrated life is mutually related to other forms of life in the Church: all of them coincide in a fundamental identity: being disciples of Christ (*Christifideles*). Among the People of God, the followers of the Lord can be: "lay disciples", "ordained disciples" or "consecrated disciples"; what is substantive for all of them is that they are "*Christifideles*". Consecrated life must be able to make clear some particular traits which confer on them a special significance of the spirit of the beatitudes for the good of all; that they be an existential parable narrated by the Holy Spirit: a stimulating symbol with prophetic force.

It was interesting to hear in our discussions the manner in which consecrated life is considered from different ecclesial standpoints: secular, feminine, historical, cultural, clerical; particularly penetrating (in view of the Synod) was the remark of the theologian Bruno Forte from the perspective of the ordained priest, to whom is entrusted in the Church as a sign of Christ its Head, the ministry of unity: "not a synthesis of all gifts and ministries, but the ministry of the synthesis".

Formation and vocations

This theme, which at the present day represents one of the most pressing practical problems for consecrated life, was not one on which the Congress planned an introductory report, but it was the standpoint from which many of the groups worked. The time of transition and crisis through which we are living made it felt with extraordinary urgency and it is closely linked with all the themes that were studied.

These must in fact become part of the living experience of each religious. They give rise to a question and a challenge: what kind of attitude to ongoing formation, what kind of process of initial formation, what methodological process can lead the religious to a vital identification with a specific charismatic project and to live and bear witness with renewed fidelity to the values of the kingdom, in harmony with the requirements of the times?

In the groups and constellations this question was frequently heard, and methods of responding to it were indicated. The same fundamental preoccupation also surfaced in a special intervention in the assembly on the final day.

Subsequently the Superiors General dealt with it directly in their document. They emphasized the need for continuity between initial and ongoing formation; the latter extends to all members of the Church who have been called in recent years to verify in depth their following of Christ from the standpoints of mission, communion, and rethought identity.

In their document the Superiors express certain *convictions* and proposals.

The *convictions* indicated are the following:

“a. We assert the importance of an integral formation, according to the particular charism. This formation, in the light of God’s Word, must be centred on the experience of God which finds its summit in the eucharistic liturgy. Following Christ and under the action of the Spirit, the formation must be human, progressive, and inculturated; it will provide ‘initiation’ to community, understood as communion in the Church; it will prepare candidates for mission, in contact with real life experiences.

b. Formation today will be awake to the following needs: the radical following of Christ (which has typical expressions in consecrated life), dialogue and the giving of reciprocal witness, education to affective and interpersonal relationships, communal and personal discernment, respect for persons and the understanding of social dynamics, the option for the poor and attention to oppressive mechanisms.

c. We need to prepare teams of formation personnel who will be at the same time teachers, educators and witnesses; they should come from and be rooted in local cultures, because we believe that as far as possible formation should take place at the field of work; but they should have a cross-cultural experience so that they can ‘transcend’ (purify, discern, challenge) the local culture.

d. An ongoing formation, which respects the individual and takes account of the different phases of life and different social, cultural and ecclesial contexts, is indispensable for the growth of persons and the inculturation of charisms.

e. We think it urgent to try new forms of the ‘initiation’ into consecrated life of young people from

ethnic minorities and marginalized groups.”

After setting out these convictions, the Superiors made some proposals. Of these I quote just two, which seem more significant for the Synod.

The first runs as follows: “Formation requires esteem for other ecclesial vocations; for this purpose we propose that there be greater collaboration between the Institutes of consecrated life and the Bishops in the formation of all vocations; in particular we propose the creation of Study Institutes and the holding of meetings in collaboration with members of different Institutes, the diocesan clergy and the laity”.

And the second: “We propose that in diocesan seminaries and in theological Faculties there be courses in the theology of consecrated life, and that in our centres of formation studies be promoted on the different Vocations”.

What will the Bishops say in the coming Synod?

We know that an ordinary Synod fulfils a specifically pastoral task in view of the good of the whole Church; it operates in an ecclesial context of communion and mutual complementarity among the different vocations. The attention of the Bishops is centred on: pastoral applications, universality and urgency.

It is evident that what this Congress has to offer, despite its worldwide representation, is in fact only partial: in the sense that it does not deal with the whole of consecrated life; secondly, its reflections stem fundamentally from the experience of only male religious Institutes; and finally, it represents

the sensitivities of the leaders of the Union of Superiors General, which of necessity may have had a perspective and method of study not fully shared by all those represented. The horizons of non-religious consecrated life have not been considered, and the delicate issue of feminism has been touched on only in passing.

It will also be necessary to analyze with greater care the so-called "fellowship rearrangement" in the Church with a vivid sense of "exchange of gifts" in an "organic communion": this is a field in which the Bishops have a particular responsibility and sensitivity and will speak in the context of their ministry of unity.

The Synod, therefore, will have to confront a much wider array of points, starting especially from the standpoint of Pastors. We have already spoken of this in part, in the circular of October '92.¹³

¹³ AGC 342

Encouraged by the Congress, we may here express the hope that the Bishops will have in mind some fundamental leading ideas that will ensure the authenticity and fertility of consecrated life in the Church, from the points of view of its pastoral nature, its universality and urgent need. I am thinking of the following:

— A deepening of the conciliar doctrine of consecrated life, in so far as it belongs to the life and holiness of the Church; recognizing also the fact that consecrated persons have shown forth its nature in history through the centuries in the most needy and difficult circumstances.

— That the different charisms be welcomed and fostered among the People of God in line with their pluriform and complementary nature, whether of the contemplative kind or the specifically apostolic or secular. May the Bishops help the

members to live in fidelity to their Founders, with the courage of the Spirit's creativity in response to the signs of the times and with a concrete effort at inculturation.

— That communion and fraternal dialogue be fostered between consecrated persons and Bishops, between those consecrated and the clergy, between the consecrated members of different Institutes, and in particular that there may be developed a more intense communion between the latter and the lay faithful in such a way that the laity may participate, according to their state, in the riches of the charism of the Founders.

— That the increase in communion may lead, in Institutes of specifically *religious* life, to a special fostering of the community dimension according to the spirit of the individual charisms. It will be a community life that ensures the specific significance of the particular vocation and shared responsibility in the particular mission project, to be rethought in the light of the challenges of the new evangelization.

— That the Synod may provide an opportunity for promoting the figure and role of the consecrated woman in the Church.

— That the urgent need to take care of vocations and the indispensability of a solid formation, both initial and ongoing, be accepted as a primary obligation.

— That the Synod may emphasize the insistence laid by the Holy Father on spirituality: "The first basic value to foster is that of spirituality, in accordance with the typical charism of each Institute. In religious consecration, the intimacy, richness and a stability of a special link with the Holy

¹⁴Oss. Romano (Eng. edtn.), 8 Dec. 1993

Spirit are at the root of everything... What need there is today for authentic spirituality!"¹⁴

The run-up to the Synod

It could be said that in this Congress we had in advance a "taste" of the Synod itself. But we can still bring an influence to bear on its preparation.

It is the common conviction that a movement of new Evangelization is already taking place, determined by various external and internal phenomena of the Church: the broadening of the geographic vision of the world, new frontiers to receive the light of the Gospel, the awareness of communion among all the People of God, and the complementary nature of vocations among them. All this has a strong incidence on the transformation of consecrated life. We are living in fact in a more advanced secular climate; one hears, for example, words like "modern" and "post-modern": it is a change of era. And from its tendencies arises a kind of provocation; we have to ask ourselves: does the presence of consecrated persons speak to people today as it did in christian times? What do they manage to communicate to others with any clarity? What practical significance do they have? What is expected, especially by young people, of those who call themselves radical disciples of Christ: a living sign of the Holy Spirit for men and women of the present day?

Our GC23 had already singled out four challenges to be faced in providing a witness that would be efficacious in an integral process of education: those at a distance, insignificance or irrelevance of faith, multiplicity of religions, and poverty.

The response to be given is still in process of elaboration. Some points are already solidly established, but around them research is still going on. The Congress offered no prefabricated models, but indicated the path to follow. Among the stronger indications it suggested I would record the following:

a. The fact of the uninterrupted presence of consecrated life in the Church's history, with its great variety of forms and constant creativity, makes us think that the Holy Spirit is vigorous in the animation of the Church, and will not leave it bereft of community charisms, even though this may not apply to the future of every individual Institute.

b. The change that is taking place in the geography of consecrated life is impressive; it is shifting towards the South and East. Among other things this raises the problem of inculturation. When this process is more advanced, consecrated life will take on a more multi-cultural appearance and will have to strengthen the unity of a communion that is more convinced and clearly defined.

c. Despite the crisis, we are living in a time of hope. It springs:

— from faith in the presence of the Holy Spirit, source of a variety of charisms, who never ceases, as we have just said, to stir the hearts of men and continually activate the Church;

— from the flourishing of the charism of Founders (some with more than 15 centuries of life) when the fire of the origins is rekindled;

— from the logic of the paschal mystery which throws light also on the flourishing of consecrated life: from everything that dies generously in the

Lord there are born new realities full of life. We cannot plan the future, even with our sophisticated techniques. It is vitally enclosed within our fidelity to the Founder and the signs of the times. We need the boldness and trust to create small genuine realities that may be fertile and constant in the face of obstacles which seem above our strength. Think, for instance, of our Project Africa, which was launched at a time of crisis.

d. The sum total of positive values gathered in the Congress strengthens the conviction that all hope for the future rests in our quality of witness and hard work; qualities that must be found in individuals, in communities, in our activities and works. Without these qualities, even though we may still be many, we shall follow a downward path towards decline. On the other hand, from a seed rich in vitality, be it ever so small, we can rise to great heights, even quantitatively.

Let us proceed, therefore, towards the Synod. With us on the way there is also Mary, the mother and guide of all consecrated life. The Pope has told us that she "will guide you and accompany you in this difficult and enormous task of renewal, and may she intercede for the successful outcome of the next Synod. I ask you, Immaculate Virgin, supreme model of faithful obedience, to revive in the Church the witness of the evangelical counsels, so that all may see the beauty of the christian countenance in the spirit of the beatitudes. Therefore, Mary most holy, help Pastors too, so that they may have a vision and appreciation of consecrated life that reinforces its presence and mission among God's People".¹⁵

I hope, dear confreres, that this rapid presentation of the Congress may prove to be a stimulus to

¹⁵Oss. Romano (Eng. edtn.), 8 Dec. 1993

all of us, in these months that precede the historic Synod, to intensify our prayers for this ecclesial event, to renew our awareness of our vocation and to live it in mission and communion, deepening the priority commitment to ongoing formation as indicated by the GC23.

During the assemblies there was frequent reference to the Founders, who were the first to receive and accept the charism and live it with the whole of their existence, embodying it in a determined historical and ecclesial context, and have passed it on in vital form as a seed to be cultivated so as to keep its fertility alive. Let us feel ourselves accompanied by our Founder and Father Don Bosco in a journey traced out and illumined by Mary who, by her motherly intervention, desired our charism for young people.

Once again I send you cordial good wishes for 1994.

Affectionately in the coming Lord,

Don F. Viganò

2.1 ENSURING CONDITIONS FOR A VALID FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Fr Giuseppe NICOLUSSI
Councillor for Formation

Every year some 600 young men (this year the number reached 700) enter our novitiates “to begin the salesian religious experience” (C 110). They come from all parts of the world, from widely differing cultures and salesian contexts and from far from uniform vocational development processes. Their number shows that “there is still good ground where the seed can fall” (AGC 339).

The *question* often arises: how should the ground be cultivated so that the seed may take root, develop and bear fruit?

The *answer* is found in a process “which will last all through life” (C 98) and which is of particular importance during the period of initial formation.

Responsibility for this answer is shared among various people:

- “each Salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation” (C 99);
- every local community is the “natural environment for vocational growth” (C 99);
- “the provincial community welcomes and follows up the vocation of every confrere” (C 101); the Provincial “with the help of his Council cares for the formation of the members, especially the novices and young confreres” (C 161).

As to *how the response is to be given*, we have practical guidance from the “Ratio” at world level and from the Provincial Directory at provincial level (cf. R 87), through which each province “lays down the method of formation according to the needs of its own cultural context” (C 101).

In past *Team Visits* and in other meetings a further question has arisen: how can the conditions for a valid formative experience be ensured at the present day?

"Ensuring the conditions". This indication of our Constitutions (cf. C 104) expresses the most concrete challenge in the field of formation. Documents indeed are not lacking and there have been repeated declarations concerning the importance and priority to be given to this task. In many provinces it is given proper commitment and concern. But not infrequently it happens that urgent needs, immediate requirements and the difficult task of government in making a balance between lack of personnel and the demands of the mission, lead in fact to the giving of less attention to what is laid down in programmes. There is the risk in practice of giving no special priority to the relevant indications and leaving at times gaps and deficiencies in the formation process.

These are facts that have become evident from the reflections and sharing of experiences during the *Team Visits* of 1993, and have led to the recognition of various conditions and circumstances which cannot be passed over in silence if we want to work responsibly in this delicate sector.

In this we are not saying something new – quite the opposite, but to emphasize it may prompt a practical verification at provincial level. I present to you three of these "*formational circumstances*": they refer to the formative process, to an examination of the cases of those leaving the Institute, and to the task of verification that is the duty of the provincial formation team.

1. During the formation process.

It is necessary that there be a good beginning, personal follow-up, and the presence of formation guides.

1.1 *Start well, by ensuring an adequate preparation for the novitiate.*

The period of preparation for the novitiate is the formational stage which has given rise to most concern, and which has been the object of greater attention and initiatives in recent years. It is a stage which is less officially structured and which depends to a greater extent on practical circumstances. Its “formational quality” can condition to a certain extent the entire process.

There is no point in repeating here what is already laid down in various normative texts (cf. Constitutions, Regulations, FSDB, Criteria and Norms for Discernment, ‘Potissimum Institutioni’ 42-44, ‘Pastores dabō vobis’ 62). Let us gather together some facts and statements from recent ecclesial documents on formation. They coincide with our own *formational experience* and are fully in harmony with the verification made earlier this year by the Directors of Novices gathered in Rome, and with the results of the *Team Visits*.

First fact: There is a big difference between the style of life and the basic preparation of young people of the present day, even if they are committed in the life of the Church, and the style of life of the seminary and its formative demands (cf. PDV 62).

Second fact: “Most of the difficulties encountered today in the formation of novices are usually due to the fact that when they were admitted they did not have the required maturity” (PI 42, which quotes ‘Renovationis causam’).

Hence the *insistence on the need* for “this preparatory stage, which can be prolonged without fear and which should aim at verifying and clarifying certain points which will permit superiors to determine the advisability of and the time for the candidate’s admission to the novitiate. Care should be taken not to hasten the time for this admission, nor to defer it unduly, provided that it is possible to arrive at a certain judgement on whether the person is a promising candidate” (Ibid 43; cf. also PDV 62).

Many provinces are addressing this task in a decisive manner. The point has been amply dealt with in the *Team Visits* and concrete practical conclusions have been reached. I quote one example; it is entitled: “Formational suitability for beginning salesian

life", and it runs as follows: "Diversity in earlier history and level of preparation of young candidates for the salesian life can condition the efficacy of formative activity. Hence, every province will give priority to pastoral work for vocations and to the prenovitiate stage, so as to guarantee that the candidates are suitable for the salesian religious life"; strategic details then follow.

Ensuring a good beginning: this therefore is one of the formational conditions to be verified in every province, and it involves those in charge of youth pastoral work, preparation for the novitiate, and the novitiate itself.

1.2 *During the formative process, ensure that there is personal follow-up and spiritual direction.*

If personalization of the formative process is to be ensured, interior motivations and acceptance of values seem ever more necessary, in addition to the community environment, *personal follow-up and spiritual direction*.

This is a "*formational condition*" that is insistently repeated in the Constitutions. The following are some examples: the work of education and vocational guidance is sustained by prayer and personal contact, and "above all in spiritual direction" (C 37); the salesian in initial formation is sustained by spiritual direction (C 105); in particular, a candidate preparing for the novitiate must be given "the help of a spiritual guide" (C 109); the novitiate begins when the candidate places himself under the spiritual guidance of the director of novices (C 110-112); in the period of temporary profession the confrere is helped by a spiritual guide (C 113) and during the practical training period should be given "the support of the rector" (C 115; cf. also FSDB ch. 4 and 5).

This aspect too has featured in the analysis and conclusions of the *Team Visits* as a weak point and as an indispensable condition for discernment, growth and perseverance in vocation. "In the formative process, it is stated in the conclusions, there is ever greater need to experience vocational values and make them a personal

conviction. It is therefore indispensable that the Provincial and those immediately in charge of the stages in the formative process ensure that the young confreres are personally followed up so that they will be led to a continuous and integral growth"; practical indications then follow.

In order that the *formative process*, which is sometimes fragmented and discontinuous in the succession of its various stages, may not become transformed into a simple passage from one stage to the next, but consist in the *progressive and continuous maturing of an internal experience*, fostered by the specific contribution of each stage, *it is essential that there be personal follow up and spiritual direction* by capable persons who are readily available and who work in harmony with the other formative elements.

1.3 *Ensure the presence of an adequate number of formation personnel.*

We read in the Provincial's Manual ("L'Ispettore salesiano. Un ministero..." = ISM): the selection, preparation and updating of formation personnel "is a *point considered both strategic and decisive* for the quality of the service of formation. If formation guides are lacking, directories, programmes and structures will count for little" (ISM 373). And it goes on: "The Provincial fulfils this task by drawing up programmes at agreed fixed intervals for the selection of personnel to be trained for various disciplines with an eye to the future, with due attention to their personal qualities and their aptitude for thinking and working together" (ibid.).

Selection is not easy when personnel is scarce and there are many urgent requirements to be met. And yet, as the Rector Major wrote in his report to the GC23 on this very point: "*Priority must be given to such selection*" (RRM 167). It means being convinced that this is the best form of investment if we want to cultivate the terrain so that seeds may be given vigorous growth and our charism be fruitful.

The commitment assumed by one Region in the *Team Visit*

may be valid for many others. It states: "A determining factor in formation is the role of the workers and teams involved. Limitations have come to light in the service of the formation personnel, in the uniformity of criteria for discernment and formation, and in the continuity of the formative process. Hence, let every province train its formation guides, promote uniformity in discernment and formation, and ensure an adequate continuity in formation teams" (indications follow).

2. Examination of the cases of those leaving the Institute, as a verification of formational conditions.

It may seem out of place to refer to this point. The problem is certainly a delicate and complex one, and we approach it now *in a specific and limited perspective*, to the extent that an analysis of perseverance and, more directly, of non-perseverance during initial formation (and we may recall that it is not a question of sporadic cases) can provide an *opportunity for a verification of the formative process* and prompt research into more adequate forms of follow up.

This topic has figured in various ways in all the *Team Visits*.

In his report to the GC23, the Rector Major made a detailed presentation of this phenomenon and put forward some valuable indications which could be considered with profit in Provincial Councils, in formation committees and in meetings of formation personnel (cf. RRM 157-160. 169. 174).

Several provinces are at present carrying out a serious examination of what has happened in recent years. Called to take part in such an *analysis in a formational perspective* are the Provincial with his Council and indirectly also the formation personnel, for the setting out of the information that is sent in with the communication that a confreres has left *at the expiry of temporary vows or with a request for dispensation*.

It may be useful to recall the indications given in the manual "Elementi giuridici e prassi amministrativa nel governo dell'Ispetto-

ria" (n.94-96) which, in addition to the juridical aspects, call for a *careful and responsible discernment*, including an analysis of the circumstances in which the applicant has lived and also a verification of the formative conditions associated with his experience.

Some of the obligations imposed on the Provincial in various cases run as follows:

- "When a temporary professed member leaves the Society *at the conclusion of a period of vows*, the Provincial will be careful to *inform* the Secretary General, indicating the facts concerning the withdrawal and the *principal reasons* that have led to it" (ibid. 94).
- When a *temporary professed member* asks for an indult to *leave the Institute*, "the Provincial will consider the request with his Council and will send to the Rector Major a report, emphasizing the *serious reasons* which lead to the request for an indult before the vows expire. It would be well for the Provincial's report to contain a brief '*curriculum vitae*' of the confrere concerned" (ibid. 95).
- When a *perpetually professed member* asks for an indult to *leave the Institute*, the Provincial will send in an adequate documentation which will enable the Rector Major and his Council to decide in conscience whether sufficient motives exist for granting the dispensation" (ibid. 96). The documentation required includes amongst other items:
 - *an accurate report* by the Provincial on the *origin and causes* of the vocational crisis and its *development*, and the *dialogue* that has taken place between the Provincial and/or other superiors and the confrere before the decision to ask for a dispensation;
 - the *concluding assessment* and the opinion of the Provincial and his Council regarding the granting of the dispensation (ibid. 96).

As is clear from these indications, it is certainly a question of communicating a decision, of giving an opinion about a request, of providing facts and a '*curriculum*'; but in addition to this it asks, as

far as possible, for an assessment, for help in understanding the origin and developments, the causes and serious reasons, the main motivations, the dialogue etc., which have preceded the request for a dispensation, or by analogy for not making a request for the renewal of vows, after years of a formative process with personal follow up which had clearly shown that the aptitudes of the confrere made him suitable for the salesian life.

These points must be kept in mind, both by the confrere making the request and by the Provincial who presents it.

From this evaluation, which cannot prescind from the formative environment in which the confrere has lived, indications can be drawn regarding the *formative conditions* to be ensured.

3. From the documents to formation in practice: the role of the Provincial Formation Team.

The conditions for a formative experience that must be ensured are clearly indicated by the FSDB and the Provincial Directories, and they come vividly to mind once again every time an analysis is made of the formation situation.

Generally speaking, the *difficulty* is experienced at a *practical level*, when it is a question of passing from documentation to the concrete details of programming and formative practice. In this area the CIF ('Commissione Ispettoriale per la Formazione'), to which are assigned the "*tasks* of programming, coordination, realization and verification" (ISM 369), has an *important role* to play. The CIF "has as part of its responsibilities that of coordinating the whole process of initial formation, of which it must ensure above all the continuity of the process. It is concerned with the unifying of criteria of vocational discernment and of admission, promoting meetings between the council of the formation community and the Provincial Council for clarifying the criteria for vocational verification" (ibid.).

Normally it belongs to the CIF to *verify* that formational practice in the province is in line with the documents, as is stated in the FSDB: "Every province should verify regularly that what is laid down in the formation sector of the directory is being carried out in practice. This will normally be done through the provincial formation commission, and less frequently by the provincial chapter which has it as one of its tasks. The Provincial will inform the Councillor General for Formation of the results" (FSDB 184).

If the CIF fulfils its task by a regular reference to the norms and guidelines of the FSDB and the Directory and by verifying that they are being followed in practice, it will help the province to ensure existence of the conditions which will permit of a positive response to the objectives, urgent requirements and priorities of formation (cf. ISM 366). On the other hand if the CIF is not systematic in its work or pays little attention to the guidance of documents, it will merely foster a dispersion of efforts and a weakening in practice of formational activity.

Conclusion.

How can we ensure the conditions for a valid formative experience? A concrete response emerges from the Team Visits.

By giving close attention to the "preparation for the novitiate", personal follow up and spiritual direction. By ensuring the presence of formation guides, and the regular fulfilment of the tasks of the provincial commission for formation. By using the analysis of the reasons for leaving as an occasion for a verification of formative activity and an incentive to make it more adequate.

To our vocational work carried out in trust and confidence, because "there is still good ground where the seed can fall" (AGC 339), and to our prayer that the Lord will scatter seed in abundance (AGC 341), we must add a concrete and persevering commitment to ensure that the seed may find the appropriate conditions for growth and bearing fruit.

2.2 PRAYING WITH THE YOUNG

Fr Luc VAN LOOY

Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work

Introduction

Young people and the laity in general are taking an ever more central role in the programming and realization of pastoral programmes at provincial and local level. In meetings between SDBs, FMAs and youngsters a common foundation of spirituality is created and lines of action are drawn up together for educational and pastoral activity.

And the question naturally arises: how should the salesian community communicate its spirituality to lay collaborators and to the young in such a way that they can share it?

The GC23 calls upon us to update our prayer: "Every generation has to find its own style of prayer in fidelity to tradition and a courageous relationship with culture and related problems. For this reason, salesian prayer is able to accept new styles which help youngsters to meet the Lord in daily life, i.e. it is flexible and creative, and attentive to the Church's guidelines for renewal" (GC23 176).

It is not possible to give fixed criteria that are universally valid for all times and cultures, because "salesian prayer is drawn from life experience and flows back into it" (C 86), but indications can be given regarding the directions in which we can move.

Efforts to pray with young people as a community will always be accompanied by inevitable tensions, as is stated in the Rector's Manual: "In our prayer we have to face up to the tension that exists between regularity and spontaneity, between improvisation and orderliness, freedom and law, free choice and duty. These are two

poles which pull in opposite directions and it is not easy to strike a balance.... It is a question of combining obedience and initiative, prudence and novelty, of discernment and patience" (*The Salesian Rector*, n. 182).

We can note at once that for a work to be well done there is need for prepared personnel, with a great sensitivity for what is going on in the hearts of the young and for their culture, united with a liturgical sense and attention to the needs and rhythms of the salesian community.

Let us remember as a starting point that "*salesian prayer had its source among young people and developed in communion with them*" (ibid. n. 182).

1. An urgent need at the present day

It is not difficult to find motives for such a commitment on our part:

— The GC23 has inaugurated a season of pastoral programming and has asked us to translate the journey of faith into concrete processes (cf. GC23 230); the provinces and local communities are thus engaged in a redefinition of their manner of presenting the faith to the young. The visible and comprehensible expression of the spirituality which is at the foundation of all salesian life and activity is an excellent way for guaranteeing the sense of a salesian presence.

— On the other hand the vocational crisis makes us ask ourselves what kind of model of religious life we are offering to young people. How do they see our life, and what sense does it make to them from their particular standpoint? And so we must be concerned not only about praying with the young as a community, but also about how we are to do it so as to pass on to them in an intelligible manner and in line with Don Bosco what Christ has commanded us.

— Often the commitment of the community is a response to an insistent request coming from the young people themselves. Youth animators and those dedicated to the salesian mission, and especially the older ones among them, ask to share in our spirituality and want to be clear about its basic inspiration.

— Youngsters who are at a distance, those with no religious notions at all, and even the ordinary rank and file who frequent our works, do not always have a religious background. In many localities the introduction to the mystery, contact with God and with the Church, is experienced for the first time in the salesian house. This requires on our part an approach which is careful, delicate and decisive.

2. It is part of our history

For Don Bosco prayer was the normal and constant linkage between God, life and his youngsters. For him being an educator was deeply tied in with being a priest. In the words of Don Ceria: "In Don Bosco the spirit of prayer was what the martial spirit was to an army officer, or the spirit of observation to a good artist or scientist: an habitual disposition of the soul, always ready and clearly willing to move into action" (Don Bosco con Dio, p. 107). He was able to remain in God's presence even when in the midst of his boys, and this enabled him to consult with God about anything he wanted to do for the youngsters. His dialogue with God and with Mary was a constant source of reference in carrying out the work the Lord had entrusted to him.

The adjectives we commonly find attached to salesian prayer are: humble, trusting, linked with life; and also joyful, creative, simple and deep. Article 86 of the Constitutions ends the list by saying that it is "drawn from life experience and flows back into it".

This means that in the prayer of the Salesian the young are present. "As was the case with Don Bosco, so also in the Salesian prayer is an indispensable factor which precedes, accompanies and

follows up activity" (*Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*, p. 674).

Don Bosco set about finding and composing prayers in line with the religious sensitivity of the boys; he adapted celebrations to their level; the practice of reciting the Rosary during Mass is to be understood as a pedagogical approach to prayer at a time when participation in the Eucharist was at a low ebb. The prayer of the youngsters was also the communal expression of prayer of the salesian community. The prayer of the community and of the boys were one and the same thing. The presence of the boys in community prayer made it easier for the Salesian to fulfil his task of speaking to God about the boys and to the boys about God.

In the preventive system prayer is an active, joyful and festive way of introducing young people to the spiritual life; it is performed at their level and not in a manner that is too elevated, intellectual and severe. At the same time it is a witness to our faith (cf. *Project of Life*, p. 675).

As with Don Bosco, so our own life among young people thus becomes automatically a communication of God, a revelation of our point of reference and of the fundamental motivation behind what we do.

In recent times unfortunately, Salesians often find themselves at a greater distance from the young, and this has led to a separation of the communal expression of spirituality from the active realization of the educative and pastoral mission. The community's places of prayer are often reserved to the confreres alone, and in the set-up of our work and the work itself with young people moments of celebration and prayer become reduced to the minimum.

On the other hand the youngsters, for historical and cultural reasons, find in their own environment little opportunity for the development of religious sensitivity. This makes all the more urgent our obligation to help them to make contact with God.

3. Characteristic elements of community prayer

3.1 *Its foundation in our charism*

The salesian community prays to express the sources of its spirituality, giving expression to a charism which the Lord has raised up. The charism is expressed in a common salesian mission and a common salesian spirituality. Communal prayer is not only an effect of the common mission, but is at the same time also its foundation: "Prayer builds the community", wrote Fr Ricceri (AGC 269, p. 27).

The community sets about creating communion with the young as an expression of salvation; it communicates its own spirituality as the method for involvement and participation in the rich values of the charism. The reason for being present among young people is dialogue with the Lord and Christ's concern to draw them to himself. The presence of the Salesian is a sign of the caring presence of the Lord as an expression of the Father's love, and it is personal prayer that makes such a task possible. "If you pray for and with the young", says Fr Viganò, "you will find it easier to make yourself loved". This communion in prayer leads to apostolic communion and then to a common pastoral project (cf. AGC 338, p. 32).

3.2 *Educative fertility*

All salesian life has an educative slant. Everything is directed to the organic growth of the young. The salesian community in prayer is an expression of the divine call to be witnesses in the world, especially among the young, to Christ who died and rose again, the only Saviour (cf. *In Dialogue with the Lord*, p. 1). And not only is our prayer an expression of our faith, but it is also a "*school of faith for the young*" (GC23 217). The Salesian and the community must keep in mind the task of teaching others to pray by offering suitable gradual experiences according to a programme, but also by the transparent simplicity of their own spiritual life. The community moves constantly between God and the work of education, and between the work of education and God, and "in this way the work

of education becomes the preeminent context in which to meet him" (GC23 95).

3.3 *Youth: a burning bush*

"The '*destinatari*' are for the Salesian a kind of 'burning bush' which throws light on his special Covenant: he sees in them the image of God; their material needs become his spiritual concern" (Fr Viganò, AGC 338, p.33). This burning bush is something all Salesians have in common in virtue of the common vocation and communal mission. The grace of the encounter with God comes through service given to the young: it is in them that the Lord is awaiting us (cf. GC23 95).

3.4 *The educative community and the Salesian Family*

The salesian mission is entrusted to the educative community which has the salesian community at its centre as the animating nucleus. All members of the educative community share in the mission which is the reason for their existence and work. To participate fully in this missionary aspect of the salesian community, the members of the educative community need to be introduced to the spirituality which gives it life and inspiration. It is impossible, in fact, to separate the salesian mission from its charismatic spiritual foundation, precisely because it is love for the young that unifies the educative community. And so the educative community cannot be disjoined from its spiritual expression, and hence the community of the Salesians has the task of being the leaven within the educative community, a task they cannot set aside.

In the same way the effort will be made to share the same spirituality with other groups and members of the Salesian Family. Common prayer, inspired by the same concern for the salvation of the young, becomes in this way a powerful form of adherence within both the educative community and the Salesian Family.

3.5 *Vocations*

"Pastoral work is essentially pedagogy carried out through per-

sonal contact, in such a way as to lead the young into the mystery which saves them more than any other experience" (*The Salesian Rector*, n. 194). This contact is brought about through the mediation of individuals and community. And so, writes Fr Viganò, "it is indispensable to involve in vocational prayer those youngsters who are more spiritually mature", and he adds that "in this task one must give due attention to the style of prayer; it should be lively and modern from an ecclesial standpoint, based on the joy of being friends of Christ, showing forth the indispensable historical mission of Christ in the world, and will lead to generosity and availability" (AGC 341, p. 14).

3.6 *Those furthest away*

Our mission is expressed in its clearest form when we share in the life of extreme cases among poor and abandoned youngsters. Our communal prayer, therefore, finds its most specific expression when said in unison with poor youngsters. "Salesian prayer is neither difficult nor complicated; it makes plain that the call to holiness is not intended for only a chosen few" (Fr Viganò, AGC 338, p. 36). The community which unites with poor youngsters, to whom our mission is primarily directed (cf. C 26), to express with them the desire to know and love God and to journey together towards the model of the new man in Christ, will find here the most powerful expression of its true significance.

4. Some concrete suggestions

It is not easy to make practical suggestions for a participation by Salesians in the prayer of youngsters and for a sharing by youngsters in the prayer of the salesian community. But we feel a great need to invite the community to *seek earnestly* a means for uniting the spiritual rhythm with that which is educative and pastoral, and to open their own spiritual "space" to the world of youth.

The following reflections can serve as starting points for community reflection.

4.1 *Develop a taste for praying with the young*

The principle of liking what the youngsters like should be applied also to their progress in prayer. In those communities which do not have the habit of praying with the young, times of prayer for them should be systematically organized in which the whole community will take part and consider this prayer their own practice of piety.

4.2 *Pray "as though youngsters were always present"*

The characteristics of joy, creativity, simplicity, drawn from life experience, referred to in article 86 of the Constitutions, are valid also for a community when it prays on its own. The community feels incomplete when no youngsters are present. For this reason signs and expressions should be chosen which young people like: hymns, prayers, symbols, manner of praying, etc. If we lose the ability for creativity at home, it will not be long before we lose it in the field of work

4.3 *Give systematic invitations to young people to pray with the community*

Speaking of vocational follow-up, the GC23 asks the Rector "to invite those who seem more disposed to share the more significant moments of our life" (GC23 252). This supposes that we also give them active space in our prayer, as we already do in educative environments.

4.4 *Give transparent expression to our spiritual life*

To bear witness to our faith, to make known to our collaborators, to members of the Salesian Family and to young people the foundation and inspiration of our life, they must know about our life of prayer. Every community should study how to make its life

of prayer transparent, by examining and trying out means, places, times and other factors so as to make of it an expression of communion and not a "closed shop".

4.5 *Teach how to pray*

Many provinces have set up schools of prayer in various areas where people can learn to pray well and in different ways. These schools of prayer bring young people close to the salesian community in a journey of prayer. In this way they have a double effect: the Salesians become skilled as prayer guides, and the young learn to pray. At this point it is important to mention the need to prepare competent confreres in this field in every province.

4.6 *Bear witness by personal prayer*

If we want our youngsters to learn to pray, it is imperative that they find models of prayer in us. The profile of the Salesian should be that of a "*man of prayer*". Our living example is much more powerful than any system for teaching how to pray. A youngster will pray if he sees the Salesian praying intensely; he will go to confession if he sees the Salesian doing likewise; he will visit the Blessed Sacrament if he sees the Salesian has the same custom; he will be in touch with God in his daily life, if the Salesian does the same.

Conclusion

At local level it will be easier to settle on practical ways of involving the community with young people so as to create a true community of prayer. Through close contact with God and spiritual communion between all the members of the educative community and of the Salesian Family, we become signs and bearers of the love of God towards all, and especially to those most in need. Our spiritual, educational and pastoral life will find expression and full significance in a practical union of apostolic prayer with everyone.

4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

On 3 October the Rector Major returned to Rome after a journey which, through visits to various countries in Central America and the Antilles and the Team Visit to the Pacific and Caribbean Region, had brought him into contact with a part of the Congregation "in growth and good health", as he said in a subsequent Good Night at the Generalate.

The days 8, 9 and 10 October he spent in Poland, where the annual feast of the Rector Major was celebrated this year at Lodz. It proved to be an intense communion of Provinces and of new and promising foundations in the territories of the former Soviet Union (special applause was given to the representatives from Georgia who had made a six-day journey to get there!), with the gaze of all turned to Don Bosco and a great deal of hope of vocational fertility. Before returning to Rome Fr Viganò called at Jachranka, near Warsaw, to greet the participants in a meeting of those involved in Youth Pastoral work from across Europe.

On 15 October he presided at the solemn inauguration of the academic year of our University.

From 18 to 27 October he was in Australia for the Team Visit to the English-speaking Region which took place at Lysterfield: a very positive week of revision and re-launching. On the 24th he went to Sydney to visit an interesting work for street children of the St Marys area, a work run jointly by a courageous and generous group of SDBs and FMAs.

In November began the intense work of the winter session of the General Council, during which the Rector Major was away from Rome for only one or two brief periods. The 13th and 14th found him in Perugia for the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the beginnings of salesian work there, and on the 16th he was at Sassone, near Rome, for an address to a congress of workers in parishes and oratories of Italy on "*Lay people alla Don Bosco*". On the 19th at Brescia he held a press conference in preparation for the Synod '94 on consecrated life. On the 20th he was at Nave for the inauguration of the academic year, and in the afternoon of the same day at Ospitaletto, Brescia, for the blessing of a fine diocesan Oratory dedicated to Don Bosco.

There was a pause in the plenary session of the Council in the fourth week of November (from 22 to 27) because of the Congress organized in Rome by the Union of Superiors General in preparation for the coming Synod of Bishops. The Rector Major took part with some members of the General Council; he was the moderator of one of the study-groups and one of the 'constellations'. He writes about this Congress in the present issue of the Acts. On 1 and 2 December he attended the subsequent meeting of the USG which followed the Congress.

On 5 December at Colle Val d'Elsa, he presided at the Requiem Mass for Fr Giovanni Raineri on the tenth anniversary of his death.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Councilors

The Vicar General

In August Fr Juan Vecchi took part in the days of reflection and programming organized each year by the Province of Seville with the presence of the Rectors and members of local councils. They studied the participation of lay people in the educative communities and their formation in line with the project prepared by the Province. Fr Vecchi met also with the Provincial Council

to clarify certain points contained in the letter following the extraordinary visitation.

He next attended the provincial assembly of the St Mark Province of Verona, where he gave an address on: *"The educative and pastoral community - an ecclesial entity"*. On this occasion he also received the temporary profession of a number of confreres.

On 8 September he left Rome for the Far East. At Cheung Chau he preached a retreat for 14 Provincials of the Region, some of whom were accompanied by members of their provincial councils, a total of 27 confreres. He followed this by visits to the communities of Hong Kong and Taiwan, but was unable to fulfil the programme planned for Macau because of a typhoon. In a meeting with the Hong Kong Provincial Council particular attention was given to the vocational question.

He then went on to the Philippines, where in the Province of Manila he had three sessions with Rectors and members of the Provincial Council on the role of the Rector in a local community as foreseen by the GC23, and to comment on some practical aspects of the Lay Project. A similar meeting, but restricted to one day only, was held in the Southern Province of Cebu. The rest of the time was given over by Fr Vecchi to visiting works and communities and to an exchange of

news and guidelines with groups of confreres, especially those in initial formation.

He then spent a week (from 25 September to 1 October) in a visit to the confreres and works in Timor, Indonesia, accompanied by the Delegate, Fr Jose Carbonell. He made contact with the seven communities in the island, all of them in a state of expansion as regards both buildings and pastoral work, and gathered the Rectors together at Venilale to clarify some important points for the future. He finished with a visit to Jakarta to see the progress of the project there.

On returning to Rome he went on at once to Turin for the ceremony on 3 October of the presentation of the missionary crucifix to 31 missionaries leaving for the missions, two lay volunteers among them.

Next he had meetings with the Councillors in charge of the various Central Departments for the realization of decisions already made and to prepare for the coming plenary session of the General Council.

Still in October he took part in a Congress of the Italian Region on Oratories, and gave an address entitled: *"The oratory, a place for new responsibilities and missionary work on the part of the young"*. On the 23rd of the same month he was at Sondrio and Vervio for celebrations on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the death of Fr Giu-

seppe Quadrio, and at the end of October attended a meeting of Salesians and lay people working in the schools of the Milan Province, to whom he gave an address on: *"The presence of the educator in the education of young people to the faith"*.

Fr Vecchi dedicated the rest of his time, especially in the month of October, to preparations for the next session of the General Council, to the implementing of decisions made in the previous session, and to some aspects of the Generalate.

The Councillor for Formation

Recent months have found Fr Giuseppe Nicolussi involved in work at two main levels: visits to individual provinces, and in Team Visits.

A visit to provinces (in the majority of cases this was the first visit of its kind in the present six-year period) consisted among other things of a meeting with the provincial council and with the provincial formation team, with the formation personnel and with the communities for initial formation, to verify the situation in the province as regards initial and ongoing formation. This was the perspective for the visits to the provinces of Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina (Cordoba and Bahia Blanca) and Chile. A brief contact was also made with

the Sao Paulo Province of Brazil and that of Buenos Aires of Argentina. These visits took place between 21 August and 23 September.

The Councillor also took part in the three "Team Visits" that were made in this period: that to the Iberian Region (2-8 August), to the Pacific-Caribbean Region (26 September - 2 October) and to the English-speaking Region (20-26 October). In each of these visits was taken up the matter of ongoing formation, a theme common to all the visits in the present six-year period, but reference was also made to initial formation from various standpoints and according to the different situations (number of vocations, formational problems, etc.).

During October Fr Nicolussi was in more lengthy contact with the UPS, the international communities of salesian students in Rome (at Gerini and Testaccio), and with the theological studentate of Turin-Crocetta.

The Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work

In the last two weeks of July, with the plenary session of the Council still in progress, the Councillor was present as often as was possible at two courses taking place at Frascati (Villa Tuscolana) for SDBs and FMAs involved at direc-

tive level in Italian schools and institutes for professional training, on themes concerning curricular and extra-curricular matters and vocational guidance, with a view to the integral growth of the young.

From 3 to 8 August he took part in the Team Visit to the Iberian Region at Barcelona, after which he went on immediately to Canada to visit some of the works there, and then on to Denver to take part in the celebrations for World Youth Day and the meeting of young people with the Pope. He was totally inserted in the group of youngsters from the USA and Canada, living the days in the perspective of the young and thus experiencing at first hand the great effect of the event on the youngsters themselves, and becoming aware also of the difficulties and efforts they make to absorb all the richness of the liturgy and the word which is addressed to them.

After Denver he went back to Canada to make a retreat with the confreres of the Vice-Province.

On 23 August Fr Van Looy began a group work-project in Bangalore, India, in the house of Don Bosco Yuva Prachodini, for the purpose of drawing up a manual in English for the formation of lay collaborators in salesian works. For this work he was joined by five confreres from the Philippines, Korea, South Africa, the USA and India itself. In the space of three weeks they drew up

a good text which will be distributed among English-speaking communities throughout the world.

In the week from 29 August to 3 September at Hyderabad, he took part in a national meeting of pastoral teams on the theme of the school in India, with the reflections concentrated on the commitment of the salesian school in education to the faith in a non-christian religious context, on the educative community, and on the relationship between the school and the surrounding locality.

After the meeting at Hyderabad the Councillor made a brief visit to Madras, where he met with the confreres of the city, the available members of the Provincial Council and the students of the diocesan seminary of Poonamallee. He also spent an evening with the boarders of the house of St Bede's, and visited the work for street boys. The last part of his stay in India was spent in a brief visit to the three works at New Delhi.

After a few days stay in Rome Fr Van Looy next went to Brazil for a meeting with young SDBs and FMAs at Jaobatao, Recife, on the theme of Salesian Youth Spirituality. This meeting of three days duration succeeded in drawing up practical programmes for the growth of spirituality and the Salesian Youth Movement in the north-eastern part of Brazil, with good prospects for the future.

From Brazil he went on to Santo Domingo, with an overnight stop in the community of Miami, to take part in the Team Visit to the Pacific-Caribbean Region of Latin America.

From 5 to 9 October he was in Rome for the meeting of the Councillors in charge of the various Departments.

On 9 October he presided over a Marian Day at Scherpenhovel, in the North-Belgian Province. It was an event organized for the Salesian Family by the young people of this Province who had taken part in the "Confronto 92": an event of prayer, evocation and activities of various kinds, with the participation of 1,600 people, many of them youngsters.

From 10 to 16 October Fr Van Looy presided jointly with Mother Georgina McPake at the European meeting on youth pastoral work at Jachranka, Poland. Some 130 people, including SDBs, FMAs and youngsters from every country in the present Europe gathered to study the challenges posed to the salesian charism. Among the points discussed were:

- 1) culture and anthropology;
- 2) the religious situation of youth;
- 3) the lines and criteria of a response on our part to the European reality.

This proved to be a rich and promising meeting that strongly consolidated the process of collaboration between the young lay peo-

ple, the SDBs and the FMAs.

From 20 to 26 October the Councillor was at Lysterfield in Australia for the Team Visit to the English-speaking Region, and on the way back to Rome stopped for two days in Jakarta, Indonesia, to meet the post-novices of the Indonesian-Timor Delegation.

On 30 October and 1 November he took part in a meeting of the Iberian Region on pastoral work for vocations. Six years after the previous regional meeting it emerged that there has been a big increase in vocational sensitivity in local communities; much hard work has been done with good effect by those in charge of the work at provincial level, but despite this the number of prenovices and novices still leaves a lot to be desired.

On 6 and 7 November Fr Van Looy took part at Turin-Valdocco in a meeting of animators of the Salesian Youth Movement on the theme of the new evangelization in the social and political field, and at the end of the month from 27 to 29 in a further meeting, this time for the formation of members of pastoral teams of the SDB and FMA Provinces of Italy on the topic: "*Celebrating the faith with the young*". This marked the beginning of a two-year process in salesian Italy of intense work on the topic of salesian prayer.

The Councillor for the Salesian Family and for Social Communication

A. SALESIAN FAMILY

The present report is concerned almost entirely with the Cooperators' Regional Congresses, but there have also been significant events concerning the Salesian Family in the Provinces of San Francisco (USA), 14-26 August; Peru, 9-10 October; and Australia, 16-19 October 1993.

1. The Congresses that have already taken place.

In chronological order the following Congresses have already been completed. I was present at them to follow up and give support to the Association's progress:

- 1) Hayanís, Boston: 27-31 August 1993. Provinces of Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, USA.
- 2) Frascati, Rome: 4-8 September 1993. Provinces of Italy and Middle East.
- 3) Santo Domingo: 21-25 September 1993. Provinces of Antilles, Central America, Haiti and Mexico.
- 4) Lima: 10-14 October 1993. Provinces of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.
- 5) Hua Hin, Bangkok: 14-18 October 1993. Provinces of China, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Thai-

land and the Delegation of Burma.

- 6) Calcutta: 22-24 October 1933. Provinces of India.
- 7) Vienna: 29 October - 2 November 1993. Provinces of Central and Northern Europe.

2. *The new members of the World Consulting Body.*

One of the objectives of each Congress was the election of a representative on the World Consulting Body. The following have been elected so far:

- 1) Joe Caporaso, of the New Rochelle Province, USA.
- 2) Nino Sammartano, of the Sicilian Province.
- 3) Giusela Mejia, of the Antilles Province.
- 4) Maria Victoria Bernal, of the Medellin Province, Colombia.
- 5) Francis Wichai Srisura, of the Thai Province.
- 6) Paul Chung, of the Calcutta Province.
- 7) Peter Radl, of the Vienna Province.

While congratulating those newly elected and urging them to broaden their outlook to world dimensions, I express also our fraternal gratitude to the retiring members for the great work they have done in the service of the World Consulting Body, and hope that they will continue their activity in the Association

at provincial and local level. I think it a duty to list their names. They are:

- Kenneth Greaney, for the English-speaking Region;
- Pierangelo Fabrini, for the Region of Italy and the Middle-East;
- Pedro Monsalve, for the Pacific and Caribbean Region;
- Joseph Lazaro, for the Asian Region.

3. *The general atmosphere of the Congresses.*

In due course the Cooperators Association will reap the benefit of the work and results of the Regional Congresses, but it may be useful at the present moment to make a preliminary evaluation without any pretence to be complete or exhaustive.

The first point that emerges from the Congresses that have taken place is the number of participants. They have averaged about 100 per region, which means that the total number will far exceed those who could take part in a world Congress. Furthermore we must not undervalue the fact that the participants in the regional Congresses communicate immediately to others on their return the atmosphere, experience, contents and enthusiasm of the event.

A second point emerging is that the labour involved in the organiza-

tion of the Congresses, especially in the case of provinces that bore the greater part of the burden, has led to a deeper communion among the various Centres and among the members of Provincial Councils of the Association. This is an experience we must exploit: in the first place in a more accurate organization along the lines and in the spirit of the Regulations of Apostolic Life, and secondly in a commitment to the promoting of the vocation of the Cooperators, and in particular of young Cooperators.

A third result merits attention because of the value it can have in the future life of the Association: the awareness of being organized as a Region. Without any doubt we are in the early stages of what can be a promising reality. It has not always been easy in the Congresses to get across the idea of the *regional* aspect of the gathering, which is something new. The experience of local Centres can be enriched by the broader vision that attaches to the Region, both as regards a deepening of the characteristic spirituality and a greater convergence in the same mission. The future will show us how far we have succeeded.

The results of the Regional Congresses extend beyond the three aspects offered for consideration. It is impossible to convey in words the atmosphere of fellowship, joy and enthusiasm. We all know the great

love of the Cooperators for Don Bosco: this too was a significant trait in the Congresses. Some of them were able to give rise to a deeply felt environment of prayer and spirituality.

4. *The main themes of the Regional Congresses.*

The following are the bald statements of the themes chosen in accordance with the Regulations of Apostolic Life (RAL, 48).

- 1) Boston. Sharing our story of faith: The Cooperator and the new evangelization.
- 2) Frascati. New poverty and new solidarity: a multiethnic society and a welcoming culture.
- 3) Santo Domingo. The lay Salesian in the light of Santo Domingo.
- 4) Lima. Salesian Cooperators and the challenges of the new evangelization.
- 5) Hua-Hin. The formation of the Salesian Cooperator.
- 6) Calcutta. The identity of the Salesian Cooperator in a secularized India.
- 7) Vienna. The Salesian Cooperators at the present day; their formation and apostolate.

The Association is aware that it is living through a period of social and ecclesial transition. Since the World Congress of 1985, many events have taken place in the history of the world, in the awareness of the

Church and in salesian experience. Because of this the central theme in every Region, with its own particular nuances in each case, has been the practical and efficacious insertion of the Cooperators, as individuals and as an associated group, into present-day life.

The situation of Catholic life in Europe determined the choice of theme for Frascati and Vienna. The perspective of the new evangelization after Santo Domingo indicated the line of work in Latin America. In India and the East the multi-religious contexts of countries and society called for a deeper practical study of the identity of the Cooperator. In every case the themes led to wider reflection.

The conclusions reached in the Congresses will serve as practical guidelines for future work. It will be the task of each Consultor to see to the preparation of concrete programmes to enable the members to implement the options and proposals which emerged in the Regional Congress.

5. *The message for the SDBs and FMAs*

The chronicle of the Congresses contains some implicit points and items which are of direct interest to the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

1. In the period between August

and November of this year salesian life has experienced a season of many blessings. It is as though the Cooperators Association has bestowed a loving fraternal embrace on the whole world. Everywhere the care and attention of the Cooperators has been felt, and even that of Don Bosco. It is up to the SDBs and FMAs to see that this abundant charismatic experience does not go to waste. SDB and FMA Provincials and Delegates, at both provincial and local levels, must take note of the resolutions of the Regional Congresses, so as to assist and encourage the provincial councils of the Cooperators in their implementation and realization.

2. The Congresses have produced a convergence that was not specifically sought, and for that very reason is the more significant, i.e.

- * the laity are asking the SDBs and FMAs for a new commitment in their regard, for their christian and salesian growth;
- * they ask for follow-up, encouragement and a deepening of their salesian spirituality;
- * they want apostolic animation in the style of Don Bosco, in the preventive system, and in 'da mihi animas';
- * they want to be inserted more dynamically in the salesian life and mission, so as to live their «cooperation» to the full.

3. Through the organizational

work of the Congresses the participants have come to understand the importance that attaches to the leaders in the Association and their responsibility. By leaders here we mean specific persons: the coordinators and members of councils, including the SDB and FMA delegates. The need for an adequate formation of these is seen to be ever more necessary. SDB and FMA Provincials are asked to give their indispensable contribution in this regard, especially as regards delegates. This contribution will take on different proportions according as whether it is merely a case of appointing someone as delegate or of going much further and offering the chosen delegate the possibility of becoming qualified for a salesian service to the Association.

6. Conclusion

So far only half the Regional Congresses have taken place, all of them of interest and importance. Among those still to come are the African Congresses. The Association already has various groups in different African countries, but awaits a really effective launching. The occasion is promising. Let us entrust it to Don Bosco.

B. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

In this report the Councillor examines social communication in sale-

sian life with as the starting point the Team Visits in which he has taken part. Reference, therefore, is to visits to the following Regions:

1. Italy, Rome, 76-13 February 1993.
2. Middle East, Rome, 16-18 July 1993.
3. Iberian, Barcelona, 2-8 August 1993.
4. Pacific-Caribbean, Santo Domingo, 26 September-2 October 1993.
5. English-speaking, Melbourne, 20-26 October 1993.

The report does not examine the visits individually, but attempts to present a synthesis of the practical responses given by provincial communities to the thrust given by the Congregation through General Chapters and the Department.

A further premise is necessary to place the present report in its proper perspective: team visits do not exhaust all the reality of salesian experience in the world, and so cannot offer a complete and concrete panorama of life.

Despite these limitations, what follows may nevertheless be useful and significant.

1. Social Communication and the agenda of Team Visits.

Concrete references are to the Iberian Region which allotted a full days work to this theme.

The Salesians reflect seriously on

a practical theme when they recognize it as manifesting a concrete problem.

In the Iberian Region there was a desire to examine the problem of the Catechistical Centre of Madrid. From the consideration of a practical situation it was possible to pass on to more general questions.

Salesian communities need to become aware that «Communication» at the present day poses problems in the fields of both education and pastoral work. The confreres must discover at first hand that «social communication» creates a series of problems that call for a more attentive community examination.

Until the Province becomes aware that a series of products and instruments of communication, already present and realized in the community, need to be exploited for the efficacy they have and the guidance they can offer (I have in mind provincial newsletters, the Salesian Bulletin, newssheets prepared by parishes, oratories, schools and different groups), the theme of social communication can never be a topic tackled directly in local and provincial councils.

2. *Social communication in the mind of the Regional Councillor as he evaluates his six-year period of office: from the preceding visit to the present one..*

In the report given by the Regional Councillor, Fr Giovanni Fedrigotti, to those taking part in the Rome meeting, the theme of Social Communication was addressed.

When one looks at the overall perspective of salesian presence in a specific territory, one comes face to face at once with the social communication factor.

The need is felt to organize it in such a way as to highlight and give weight to salesian activity. In point of fact it must be recognized that the salesian provinces throughout the world have a considerable value and significance for the countries in which they are working.

But the theory frequently outweighs the practice, and the possibility for guidance and the impact on mentality and culture of people falls short of what it could be because there is no organized use of this sector.

To be intuitively aware of the educational and pastoral power of social communication is not something that comes readily to the mind of one who is overburdened with many urgent problems.

Lack of prolonged reflection on contemporary phenomena does not lead to the giving of due attention to social communication.

3. *Social communication in the direct experience of provincial output, capable of expressing the*

originality of the province in the field of activity.

Here reference is to the Team Visit of Santo Domingo. All the participating provinces had been invited to prepare a video, for the purpose of presenting to the others some significant facet of the life of the provincial community.

The many hours spent in front of the television screen made very evident the following aspects:

- a. the importance of communication through a combination of sound and image;
- b. the force of attraction and the power for convincing that lies in an audiovisual cassette;
- c. the need for competency in working in this sector with a professional approach, so that the message is not weakened or completely lost;
- d. the reaction of the viewers is the true measure of the skill of the communicator, rather than the truth of what is presented;
- e. the ability to put across the essence of the message before the viewer becomes bored at its length;
- f. there is an immediate comparison between different productions, and the product of professional quality rises immediately to the top in effect on viewers.

By this choice it can be safely said that the Santo Domingo visit brought the theme of social com-

munication directly into the agenda of the meeting as a point for analysis and deeper study.

4. *Social communication emerges automatically as a problem in salesian settings of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, or multi-cultural nature.*

Here my thoughts go at once to the team visit to the Middle East, but the point is of wider application.

The theme of social communication was not on the agenda in this case; there were other more urgent items claiming the attention of the participants. But the pastoral and formation themes illustrated the importance of communication.

The basic requirement expressed was that of being able to use aides and instruments in the language of the workers and those to whom the work was directed. This is a first level or first requirement for communication.

The second level is clearly seen in the need to lose nothing of the salesian experience, confirmed in words, expressions and typical realizations in which the story of the originality of the charism is condensed.

But there is a third level of communication which is the most difficult because of the time it needs, the energy it absorbs, and the difficult task of maintaining continuity

of values from one culture to another.

When communication risks leading to an impoverishment of data, experience and messages, of the gifts of the Spirit, it is no longer fulfilling its total function.

5. *In the vast and technologically developed areas of the Congregation, social communication is seen as a useful and necessary means for maintaining mutual communion and support.*

Thinking over the team visit at Lysterfield, Melbourne, one is forced to some conclusions that for their very simplicity might be thought useless:

- a. the more vast and geographically widespread the Region, so much the more is communication indispensable, for the development of the awareness of communion and the exploitation of different riches;
- b. areas of advanced technology require also on the part of the salesian community adequate instrumentation for ensuring that messages are of professional standard and received without delay;
- c. countries which lean heavily on social communication either on the part of the Salesians themselves or for the benefit of those for whom we work, must see to it that they have experts and qualified personnel to help in ani-

mation, and in education and pastoral work.

These are requirements which may well not come to light in a meeting of those responsible for a province at high level, because their attention tends to be centred on other urgent problems, but sooner or later it will be found that the problem must be faced; it will not just go away.

The Councillor for the Missions

In this period the Councillor for the Missions was involved in activities concerning:

- Visits to missions,
- Missionary animation,
- Ongoing formation for missionaries,
- Participation in Team Visits and various initiatives at the level of the Department and in coordination with other Departments.

1. At the end of July Fr Luciano Odorico spent a weekend in Kenya and Tanzania to launch among the confreres the consultation for the appointment of the new Superior of the Nairobi Vice-Province (AFE). In various meetings he emphasized the importance of this new experience of communion among all the confreres who form part of this circumscription, which is now extended to cover Uganda and the communities

of the former Central Province present in Kenya.

2. In the first part of August the Councillor went with Fr Augustyn Dziedziel to various countries of the former Soviet Union. The visit was a detailed one with the specific objective of assessing the missionary physiognomy of our old and new foundations in those parts.

In particular he visited the recently opened technical school at Gatchina, near St Petersburg, the parish and youth centre at Moscow, the new Siberian mission of Aldan (entrusted to the Bratislava Province), the salesian foundations in Lithuania and Byelorussia, and the possible new foundation at Karaganda in Kazakhstan.

He was able to draw the overall conclusion that the challenge of a new evangelization amounts in effect to a work of first evangelization, after almost a hundred years of religious persecution.

Deserving of special emphasis is the directly missionary work in Siberia, and the explicitly educative presence in St Petersburg. In the other foundations youth pastoral work is in clear qualitative growth, and work for vocations is already producing significant results.

3. From the end of August to the middle of September Fr Odorico made the extraordinary visitation of the missions in the Prelature of

Ayutla, among the Mixes, Chinantecos and Zapotecos of Mexico. He was able to observe the significant pastoral growth that has taken place in this Prelature, now celebrating its silver jubilee, and the efforts that have been made in inculturation, pastoral work, and the fostering of native vocations.

4. From 20 to 24 September, the Councillor presided jointly with Mother Lina Chiandotto FMA, at a course of ongoing formation for the SDB and FMA missionaries of the Amazonian missions of South America (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Venezuela).

Those taking part numbered more than fifty; they shared their experiences in the light of the central theme, "*Evangelization and Culture*". The results of the experience of international salesian fellowship, sharing within the Salesian Family, and a renewed awareness of missionary commitment, were the three main elements emerging from the meeting.

5. At the end of September he took part at Santo Domingo in the Team Visit to the Pacific and Caribbean Region, during which he emphasized certain important aspects of salesian missionary commitment in the Region.

6. In early October Fr Odorico was at Turin with those leaving for new salesian missionary frontiers

(31 altogether, between SDBs, FMAs and lay people).

With Fr Mario Marchioli, a member of the Department, he shared with them some elements of preparation for the missionary life. Worthy of note is the growing international character of the departing missionaries, and the broad spread of new missionary frontiers in Eastern Europe and Asia which was particularly evident this year. More than 300 young members of the International Volunteer Movement (VIS-Italia) participated in these missionary days.

7. From 4 to 9 October the Councillor was in Rome for the previously arranged meeting of those in charge of the Central Departments, at which Fr Juan Vecchi presided.

8. On 12 October he left for the far distant mission of Samoa (Province of Australia), where he was able to see that the salesian missions had become well and truly consolidated with a well developed service to youth in the field of technical education, a parochial pastoral work of reevangelization, an ongoing formation project for catechists and lay ministers, and the growth of Samoan salesian vocations.

9. From 20 to 26 October he took part in the Team Visit to the English-speaking Region in Mel-

bourne, Australia; he was able to note that all the Provinces represented there had a clear missionary commitment.

10. On his way back to Rome, Fr Odorico made a three-day stopover at Goa (India) where, accompanied by the Provincial (Fr Loddy Pires) he visited two missions and gave a boost of animation to the Salesians working in Goa.

Highly significant was the Eucharist he celebrated in the Church of St Francis Xavier at the altar where the Saint's body is kept. Here he prayed in a special way for all the missions and missionaries of the Salesian Congregation.

On 31 October the Councillor returned to Rome.

The Economist General

From 9 to 29 September Fr Omero Paron was in Argentina with the following calendar:

1. Meeting of the provincial economists of the Plata Conference. Three days at Manucho as guest of the Rosario Province, for an examination of various themes: salesian poverty; the service of the economist; the financial report; administrative obligations in salesian parishes.
2. Area meetings for Rectors and economists in the Cordoba pro-

vince at Mendoza, Tucuman and Cordoba itself. The theme was mainly that of salesian poverty. Fr Paron took the opportunity also to visit some communities in the area.

3. Visits to the communities of Bahia Blanca, Fortin Mercedes, Patagones, Viedma, and those of the Alta Valle of the Rio Negro, in the Province of Bahia Blanca.
4. Visit to the agricultural school of Del Valle and Uribellarea in the Province of La Plata, after taking part in the episcopal ordination of Mgr. Jose Pozzi at Santa Rosa.

From 8 to 10 October the Economist General was at Lodz in Poland for the Feast of the Rector Major.

At Pacognano on 25 October he held a study-day for Rectors, economists and parish priests of the Southern Italian Province for a reflection on the Rector Major's letter on poverty.

The Councillor for the Atlantic Region of Latin America

After the conclusion of the summer session of the General Council, Fr Techera left Rome on 1 August for Angola, where he preached a retreat to the Salesians in the new house built in the Palanca quarter of the capital, Luanda. In Angola at present there are 29 Salesians, three of them in practical training, and

two novices; there are five students of theology at Lubumbashi, and two following specialized courses in Rome. While in the country the Regional was able to have a meeting with the Council of the Delegation, see the new professional training centres, and visit the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Moving on to Brazil, on 10 August he began the consultation for the appointment of the new Provincial of Sao Paulo, and in the following week did the same in the Province of Recife. On Sunday 22 he was at Sao Paulo-Itaquera for the inauguration of the new premises of the Centre of professional formation. On the following day he began the extraordinary visitation of the Province of Belo Horizonte.

From 9 to 11 September, in the house of Manucho, in the Rosario Province of Argentina, he presided at a meeting of the Plata provincial conference. Among the matters dealt with was the finalization of preparations for the Team Visit, with a revision of the three reports to be presented; an evaluation was also made of the first steps for the arrangement of a meeting on social communication at Cabana. Fr Luiz Piccoli gave some further information about Angola, and thanked the La Plata Province for their generous missionary collaboration.

During the time of the extraordinary visitation, Fr Techera also took

the opportunity to hold a meeting with all the Rectors of the Province at Cachoeira do Campo for the celebration of the feast of the provincial community. It was a very happy experience with the lively participation of a good number of Salesians and youngsters from the various foundations in the Province.

On 27 October at Belo Horizonte the visitation was brought to an end with a meeting of the provincial council, after which Fr Techera returned to Rome for the winter session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the Pacific-Caribbean Region of Latin America

Before beginning the extraordinary visitation of the "St John Bosco" Province of the Antilles, Fr Guillermo Garcia made a stop in Mexico to see the work at Merida, which was founded in 1991 on the occasion of the centenary of the first Oratory in the country, established precisely in that city, the capital of the State of Yucatan. He then travelled on to Havana, where he arrived on 11 August to begin the extraordinary visitation.

1. Cuba.

1993 marks the 75th anniversary of salesian work in this country. There will be no triumphal celebration with great festive manifesta-

tions; it will rather be an occasion for living in the interior joy of fruitful silence and proven poverty the satisfaction of having worked with ever-renewed commitment to keeping the radical charism of Don Bosco alive for the better part of a hundred years.

The country is living in a time of doubt and uncertainty, officially defined as "situation zero - a period of peace".

In the face of a progressive and generalized process of social deterioration, the Church keeps up with strength and dignity its prophetic mission. On 8 September last, a significant day for many people, because the feast of Our Lady of Charity of Cobre, the national Patroness, the Bishops published a pastoral letter entitled: "*Love never loses hope*". In it the Cuban Bishops, in fulfilment of their teaching role, speak out clearly with evangelical force and pastoral solicitude on the situation the country is living in. "There will be no true justice", they say, "without love: the love that conquers hatred, that heals wounds and binds hearts into unity".

Before 1959 (the year when the Castro revolution began) Cuba was the country of the Antilles with the most numerous and robust salesian presence: there were 7 houses with 82 confreres, and with the headquarters of the Province at Havana. Now there are only 5 foundations in

the Delegation in which are working amidst great difficulties 12 Salesians, two of them generously given by the Provinces of Guadalajara and Bolivia as a gesture of solidarity with this Caribbean country.

The work done by our confreres, especially among young people, is having tremendous results: baptisms are increasing, good vocations are appearing, christian communities are springing up in places that would have been thought impossible three years ago. As a Region and Congregation we are challenged to show greater solidarity with these confreres of ours by trying to bring to three the members of those communities which at present have only two, or even one. In other words, salesian volunteers for work in Cuba will be received with open arms!

2. *Haiti.*

From Cuba Fr Garcia went on to Haiti for a simple visit of animation. He arrived on the very day that came into force the embargo decreed by ONU and OAS (Organization of American States) to exert pressure on the military regime to return to power the deposed constitutionally elected President.

As is already known, Haiti was erected into a Vice-Province on 31 January 1991. From that moment salesian work has become progressively more consolidated and the

number of confreres has increased. In 1988 they were 30, with 5 novices. Now they are 43, with 9 novices! There are 7 works in all, and they are becoming steadily stronger and better organized.

Though the situation has become more difficult, the Salesian Family is growing in communion and shared responsibility. Great efforts are being made to promote new groups of Cooperators, especially young ones.

In face of a future that is so uncertain and in no way encouraging, the Haitian people are yearning for stability, but until this is attained they will be compelled to live under an abuse of power by contending groups and pass through the tunnel of fratricidal violence. According to experts, the transition to a just and enduring peace will be both long and difficult. And so the Vice-Province of Haiti must be added to the lengthy list of those needing understanding and effective help.

3. *Dominican Republic.*

Here on 23 August Fr Garcia took up once again the work of the extraordinary visitation. The context is different, but is still one marked by big social and cultural change, with a relative peace and apparent progress, but with an ever-present insecurity, tension and increasing poverty.

Social decay, through lack of val-

id alternative ways of life, has led to an increase in the number of children and young people who are totally abandoned. The Salesians are making great efforts to respond to this youth situation with apostolic dynamism and ability.

4. *Porto Rico.*

To visit Porto Rico, Fr Garcia interrupted for ten days his journey around the Dominican Republic. In this country he was able to enjoy the warm welcome and hospitality of the confreres, youngsters and members of the Salesian Family, but especially to admire the fine pastoral work carried on in our five foundations. Each of them has its own particular attractive qualities, but at the same time is responding to truly gigantic challenges. Among the many fine features of this Provincial Delegation some of the most prominent are the great collaboration and mature christian commitment of innumerable lay helpers, and the variety and consistency of catechetical programmes, of schemes for social advancement, and of the evangelization of the young and the poor, especially in our parishes.

5. Events of particular importance taking place in the Antilles in August and September were: the Cooperators' Regional Congress (northern zone) and the Team Visit to the Pacific-Caribbean Region.

Both these events bore the stamp of the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of Latin America, recently celebrated at the spot where the Cross of redemption was first planted in the continent. By God's grace they will be for the Provinces of the Region a proclamation and commitment of new significance, as the GC23 desired.

In the Antilles Province there is youth, harmony between different works and foundations, and great enthusiasm of heart. May the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Star of Evangelization, be our guide and companion.

The Councillor for the English-speaking Region

From 1 August to 12 October Fr Martin McPake carried out the extraordinary visitation of the Vice-Province of Southern Africa: in the Republic of South Africa which is passing through a very difficult moment in its history as it moves towards a new kind of democratic regime; in Swaziland, where there have also been significant political changes; and in the Kingdom of Lesotho.

In the midst of so much uncertainty, with reasons for both hope and fear, the Visitor found that our confreres are going ahead with courage, adapting themselves to political and civil changes, and facing

up to challenges as they come. Significant, for example, is the commitment with which they dedicate themselves, in the city of Cape Town, to the rescue of street boys, all of them black; while outside the city they are fully inserted into the world of the "coloureds" in various pastoral contexts and especially parishes. The Visitor noted that the Salesians are highly regarded in the various dioceses of the Republic, both for the work they do for the benefit of abandoned youngsters, and for their cooperation with the Bishops in various pastoral sectors, and especially in the field of religious education. At the time of the Visitation preparations were taking place, in collaboration with the Diocese of Johannesburg, for the opening of a new Pastoral Centre for the formation of lay people, especially young ones.

Also in Lesotho and Swaziland the work is making progress. In Swaziland the Visitor was present at the opening of a big Youth Centre, recently built through the efforts of a member of the Manzini community, described in the newspapers as the "Father of the poor": the Centre is part of several works of charity started up by this son of Don Bosco for the benefit of the young. Not far from this new Bosco Centre the Visitor was also able to take part in the opening of a new church, dedicated like so many other salesian

churches in the world, to Mary Help of Christians, "Don Bosco's Madonna".

After the extraordinary visitation of Southern Africa, Fr McPake went on to Australia where he took part in the Team Visit, an event that was judged to be very positive, and of which the conclusions will be the object of a further study by the Provincials of the Region in March or April of 1994.

The Councillor returned to Rome on 29 November.

The Councillor for the Asian Region

From 10 August to 27 October 1993, Fr Thomas Panakezham carried out the extraordinary visitation of the "St John Bosco" Province of Calcutta, India. From a geographical standpoint this is the biggest of the Indian Provinces, comprising seven States, the special territory of New Delhi, and Nepal. From a salesian point of view it has two provincial delegations: that of the "Hindi-belt" of New Delhi, and the other of Myanmar (Burma). The visitation of the New Delhi delegation had already been made in the previous February and March.

The Province has 306 confreres with 32 novices, and a visitor is immediately struck by the amount of work carried out by the confreres. Missionary spirit is everywhere evi-

dent and in some areas pioneering work of the first hour is going on! The confreres are fully involved in the integral development of the people with whom they are working. There are great hopes for the future of missionary work in this Province.

In Myanmar (Burma) Fr Panakezham was able to visit only the houses of Yangon (Rangoon) and Anisakan (near Mandalay), but he managed to speak with all the confreres and novices – including a bishop, 20 priests, 2 brothers, 9 post-novices and 6 novices. Despite the difficulties, the confreres are doing their best to spread the charism of Don Bosco among youth and the common people. They ask for a prayer from all who read these lines.

While the visitation was in progress the Regional also presided at a meeting of the Provincials of the Far East, at which was able to be present for the first time the Superior of the Vice-Province of Vietnam, Fr Peter De. Previously the Vietnamese Government had never permitted the one in charge to leave the country. In this meeting it was decided to organize a course of ongoing formation for confreres at Canlubang (North Philippines) from 4 April to 4 June 1994, and a meeting of perpetually professed Brothers of the Far East (16-21 October 1995) at Cebu (South Philippines); a

preliminary study was also made of the manner of participation in the World Youth Day to be held at Manila in January 1995.

At the end of the visitation Fr Panakezham presided also at a meeting of the Indian Provincial Conference at the Provincial House of Calcutta. At this meeting, among other things, were prepared the statutes of "Boscom India", the social communications body at national level, and a national delegate was selected for this sector; also studied was the theme of contextual Formation, especially for theological studies, and a deeper reflection was launched into the matter of spiritual direction, especially for young Salesians.

After taking part in the first Indian Regional Cooperators Congress, at which were present all seven SDB Provincials and all five FMA Provincials of India, the Regional left for Rome on 29 October, with a brief stopover at Bombay.

The Regional Councillor for Central and Northern Europe and for Central Africa

In the Regional's agenda during the summer period, the greater part of his time was reserved for the South Belgium Province in view of the coming extraordinary visitation to be made. The houses to be visited were listed: Farnières, Remouchamps, Liège, etc.

Before, after and during the Belgian visitation, he also fulfilled the following engagements in Europe:

- Southern France, first week of August, spiritual retreat;
- Rome, mid-August: reception of pilgrims;
- Hungary, last week: 80th anniversary of Province;
- South Belgium, all September: visitation;
- Slovakia, Bratislava, 3-7 October: Interprovincial Conference, with twelve European Provinces taking part;
- Warsaw and Lodz, 8-11 October: meeting of Polish Provinces with the Rector Major;
- South Belgium, till 1 November: continuation of the visitation begun in September.

To complete the round of interprovincial conferences begun at Bratislava, the Regional presided over the Interprovincial Conference of the French-speaking Provinces which took place at Paris from 5-8 November, with the participation of the provinces of France and Belgium.

Personal contacts with Africa during this period were limited to a brief visit to the sick and aging confreres of the Missions Office at Boortmeerbeek.

The Regional Councillor for Spain and Portugal

In the first days of August Fr Antonio Rodriguez took part in the third Team Visit to the Iberian Region. At Marti Codolar, Barcelona, the Rector Major and four members of his Council met with all the Provincials of the Region and their Provincial Councils. Also present were some provincial animators and national delegates: some 70 participants in all. The themes considered included the following: the quality of life of our confreres and communities and the quality of pastoral activity; in practice the themes referred to salesian communities, confreres in formation, the formation of young animators, and the work of social communication in the Provinces. The results of the careful and intense work were expressed in 13 conclusions:

- Three of them referred to the quality of life of communities and confreres, under the following headings: oratorian style of the local community; the Rector, animator of the community; the community day.

- Four referred to confreres in initial formation: preparation for the novitiate; the perseverance of young confreres; the formation of the salesian brother; coordination and collaboration in formation.

- Three were concerned with social communication: formation of

the confreres in this respect; communal and pastoral animation in this sector; organization of the sector at provincial level.

— The last three referred to the animation of lay people, with particular attention to young animators: follow-up of young animators; the christian formation and qualification of lay collaborators as educators to the faith; and finally the salesian community as the animating nucleus of the educative and pastoral community.

On August 15 the Regional left for Mexico and went to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe to ask her protection for the Visitation he was about to begin.

On the following day at Coalco he presided at the first profession of ten new confreres of the Province, and on the 17th began the extraordinary visitation which was to keep him busy till the end of October.

On 22 October he had meetings, first with the Provincial Council and then with the Rectors, for an exchange of impressions on the Province and the communities. The following day he had a celebration with virtually all the confreres of the Province during which he gave a conference on growth in the awareness of a provincial community. This was followed by the celebration of the Eucharist and a festive meal.

On the 24th the Visitor went

again to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe to thank her for the graces of the visitation, and in the afternoon of the same day was present for the inauguration of a congress of young past-pupils of Latin America, called LATINJEX. The work of this congress continued through the following week.

Later on the same day the Councillor left to return to Madrid.

During November he was present at various meetings which had been postponed because of his absence from the Region. They included the following.

From 20-22 November there was the 38th session of the Iberian Conference, which studied various themes, including the further consideration of the conclusions of the Team Visit with a view to their practical realization, with the appointment of those in charge and the laying down of a timetable. Also discussed was the volunteer missionary movement in the Region; the "Zero Book", the fundamental text for the process of the education of young people to the faith was reviewed and revised after being in use in the Region for fifteen years. It should be noted that during this session the Iberian Conference had a joint meeting for the first time with the parallel Conference of the FMA; the combined Conferences studied the theme of pastoral collaboration and practical opportuni-

ties for its realization. The pastoral organisms of the two groups are now studying the conclusions in greater depth so as to bring them once again before the two Conferences.

From 24 to 26 November the Regional visited the two Spanish novitiates at Astudillo and Sanluca la Mayor; he also made a visit to the confreres following the course of ongoing formation at Campello.

On 27 November he was present with Fr Odorico, five Spanish Provincials and more than 100 priests at the funeral of Fr Modesto Belido, who had been at one time Councillor General for the Missions and also Catechist General of the Congregation.

From 4 to 7 December he took part in the 2nd Regional Congress of Salesian Cooperators on the theme "Identity and participation", and was able to note the qualitative growth of the Association during the period between the two congresses. The organization of the Congress was in the hands of lay people, and provided a good sign of the maturity they have reached. Mr Emilio Pascual, a Cooperator of the Seville Province, was elected to the World Consulting Body as the representative of the Iberian Region.

The Regional Councillor for Italy and the Middle East

On 4 June at the Generalate, Fr Fedrigotti took part in the first meeting of the "Missionary Consulting Group" of the CISI, which has the task of coordinating the pastoral and missionary work of the various salesian agencies involved in this field at national level.

On 19 June at Brienza (Basilicata) in the house of the FMA he had a meeting with the Provincial Council of the Southern Italian Province to consider various problems that had arisen in finding a successor as Provincial for Fr Testa who had been called to direct the new Special Circumscription of Piedmont.

On 21 June at the Sacred Heart, Rome, there was a meeting of the Italian Provincial Conference (CISI). It considered among other items the transfer of the San Lorenzo community (CNOS) from the present site at the Catacombs of San Callisto to new premises at the Sacred Heart, Rome.

On 25 June he took part in a meeting of the Major Religious Superiors of Italy, in preparation for the Italian Bishops Conference autumn assembly in view of the '94 Synod on consecrated life.

On 26 June at Mineo, Catania, he joined the local population and Salesian Family, for the inauguration of a commemorative stone-tablet at

the house where Fr Ricceri, sixth successor of Don Bosco, was born.

From 9 to 11 July there was another meeting of the CISI Presidency to enact the civil legal requirements for the setting up of the CNOS/SCS (Social Civil Service) Association, to cover the cases of conscientious objectors to military service, those working in situations of social emargination and, where possible, those who opt for service in our oratories. A plan was also studied for the further training of Brothers after their normal 'practical training' period – an effort will be made to revive this at Valdocco. Also considered was a plan for initial formation to "salesian praxis"; a plan for the prenovitiate, to be proposed to those working in this field; and two further plans for a CISI commitment in Calabria, as requested by the Rector Major at the end of the Team Visit.

On 13 July, at Castelgandolfo, he blessed the habits of the FMA novices in preparation for their profession.

From 16 to 18 July Fr Fedrigotti took part at the Generalate in the Team Visit to the Middle East Province. For the first time this took place in separation from the rest of the Region, because of the particular problems involved in that area. In a rich atmosphere of cordiality and family spirit, a deeper analysis was made of the themes of ongoing

formation, the lay project, and the priority of problems in the Province.

In the second half of July he was present at the biennial course organized by the CISI for the formation of new Rectors, and the two meetings for the updating of scholastic directors, all taking place at the Villa Tuscolana.

From 22 to 28 August he took part at Padua in the "quinquennium" for the formation of young salesian priests, and studied with them the theme of "missionary mentality and approach".

In the morning of 28 August at Como he presided at the installation of Fr Francesco Cereda as Provincial of the Milan Province in succession to Fr Arnaldo Scaglione.

On 30 and 31 August he was present at Rome-San Tarcisio at the CISI course for young confreres preparing for perpetual profession; he developed the theme: "Young Salesians and Mission".

In the afternoon of 31 August he presided once again at the installation of a new Provincial, this time at Caserta when Fr Emidio Laterza succeeded Fr Luigi Testa as Provincial of the Southern Province.

From 3 to 8 September the Regional took part in the Regional Congress of the Cooperators, at which were present for the first time representatives of young Cooperators from the Middle East.

On 9 September he took part in a meeting of the presidency of the major religious superiors of Italy (CISM), in preparation for the meeting of the Italian Bishops Conference (CEI) on consecrated life: he was assigned to the "Vocations" group, which is making a deeper study of that particular theme.

From 16 to 19 September he was present at a meeting of the National Council of the Past-Pupils.

On 22 September he visited the confreres in retreat at San Callisto; on the 24th the young confreres of Nave in retreat at Carisolo; on the 25th those of Bologna and district; and on the 26th the past-pupils at Bolzano.

On 27 September Fr Fedrigotti began the extraordinary visitation of the Province of Genoa.

On Sunday, 3 October, he was present at Sesto al Reghena (Pordenone) for the inauguration of the new auditorium, offered by a past-pupil and having Don Bosco as its titular.

From 25 to 28 October he took part in the meeting of the Catholic Bishops Conference (CEI), in preparation for the Synod on consecrated life.

On 31 October and 1 November he was at Chianciano at the "Social and Political Forum" of the Past-Pupils Association.

From 6 to 8 November he presided over the assembly of the CISI,

which made a further study of the themes of vocation and of social communication.

From 7 to 13 November at the Generalate he preached a retreat to the Rectors of the Milan Province.

On 18 November at Rome he gave the concluding address at a congress for the updating of Parish Priests and Directors of Oratories.

Finally, he was present on 29 November at a meeting for the formation of Delegates for Youth Pastoral Work, organized by the SDB and FMA Provincial Conferences on the theme: "Celebrating the faith with young people".

The Rector Major's Delegate for Poland

From 1 August to 7 September Fr Augustyn Dziedziel made a journey round the countries of the former Soviet Union. He passed through Byelorussia, Georgia, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine, visiting all the salesian foundations for the purpose of launching among the confreres a consultation on the possibility of setting up a circumscription with a special statute to comprise all the countries of the former USSR.

In the first two weeks he was accompanied by Fr Luciano Odorico, Councillor General for the Missions; they began with a visit to the work at Gatchina, near St Petersburg, passing on then to Moscow and fi-

nally reaching Jacutsk and Aldan in Siberia. Then followed a rapid passage through Kazakhstan for a first contact and assessment of the possibilities for a future commitment at Karaganda or some town in that neighbourhood. They then visited Lithuania and saw the works at Vilnius, Kaunas and Rumsiskes; finally they visited the foundations centred around Lida, Asmiana and Smarhon in Byelorussia.

Afterwards Fr Dziedziel journeyed on alone to our works at Kirostysiv, Lviv and Odessa in the Ukraine, to C'chaltbila and Turc'ch in Georgia, and lastly to Saratov in Russia.

Returning to Poland, he presided in September over a meeting of the Conference of Polish Provincials on the theme of the laity and voluntary work, and took part in the National Congress of Salesian Cooperators held at Czestachowa. He also made a visit of animation to the eight formation communities in Poland.

From 8 to 11 October at Lodz, in

the centre of Poland, he took part in the celebrations for the feast of the Rector Major, at which were present not only members of the Salesian Family from all over Poland and the countries of the former Soviet Union, but also guests from the General Council and from the neighbouring European Provinces.

The Delegate was later present at the first part of the European Congress on Youth Pastoral Work, which took place at Jachranka, near Warsaw.

Subsequently, after a brief stay at the Generalate in Rome, Fr Dziedziel went on to Africa to launch the consultation for the appointment of a Superior of the new Circumscription with a Special Statute for Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

After returning to Rome for the Plenary Session of the General Council, he made a further brief journey to Moscow in November, to start up the process for the purchase of a house for a future novitiate on the outskirts of the same city.

5. DOCUMENTS AND NEWS ITEMS

5.1 Circumscription with Special Statute for the countries of the former Soviet Union

We print the decree of erection of the "Immaculate Conception" Circumscription with Special Statute for the countries of the former Soviet Union ("Eastern Circumscription"), approved by the Rector Major with his Council during the last plenary session.

Prot. n. 313/93

THE RECTOR MAJOR
of the Salesian Society
of Saint John Bosco

- after careful consideration of the salesian work in the territories of the former Soviet Union, and with a view to its more adequate coordination and development;
 - after noting the favourable opinion expressed in the consultations carried out among the confreres working in salesian foundations in Byelorussia, Georgia, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine, and other confreres belonging to the same territories;
 - in accordance with art. 156 of our Constitutions,
- with the consent of the General Council in its ordinary meeting of 7

December 1993, and in accordance with articles 132 and 156 of the Constitutions,

DECREES

1. The **CIRCUMSCRIPTION with a Special Statute "THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION" (Eastern Circumscription)** is erected, with headquarters in **MOSCOW**, Russia, and made up of the following canonically erected houses situated in the various States:
 - in *Byelorussia*:
 - ASMIANA, "Saint John Bosco"
 - LIDA, "Immaculate Conception"
 - SMARHON, "Mary Help of Christians"
 - in *Lithuania*:
 - ALYTUS, "Mary Help of Christians"
 - KAUNAS, "Saint John Bosco"
 - RUMSISKES, "Mary Mother of God"
 - VILNIUS, "Saint John Bosco"
 - in *Russia*:
 - MOSCOW, "Immaculate Conception"
 - in *Ukraine*:
 - KOROSTYSIV, "Mary Help of Christians"
 - LVIV, "Mary Help of Christians"

- ODESSA, "Mary Help of Christians"

The following works, not yet canonically erected, also belong to the Circumscription:

– in *Georgia*:

- C'CHALTBILA, "Holy Name of Jesus"
- TURC'CH, "Mother of God"

– in *Russia*:

- ALDAN, "Bl. Aloysius Versiglia"
- SAMARA, "Sacred Heart of Jesus"
- ST PETERSBURG - Gatchina, "Saint John Bosco"
- SARATOV, "Saint John Bosco"

2. To this Circumscription "Immaculate Conception" with its special Statute belong the confreres at present assigned to the Houses indicated above, as well as the confreres in formation coming from or already assigned to the territories of the Circumscription.

3. The Superior of the Circumscription has the faculties "ad instar" of a Major Superior. He will be assisted in government and animation by a Council made up of the Vice-Superior, Economer and three or five other Councilors, appointed by the Rector Major with his Council, after opportune consultation and at the request of the Superior.

4. In accordance with art. 156 of the Constitutions and art. 114 of the General Regulations, in the General Chapter will take part a Delegate elected by the confreres meeting in the Chapter of the Circumscription.

The Chapter of the Circumscription is composed of the Superior, who presides, the members of the Council of the Circumscription, the Rectors and a delegate from each canonically erected house, as also the delegates of the confreres in the proportion of 1 for every 25 in the sense of Reg. 165.

5. Within the Circumscription internal Delegations can be set up, if the circumstances so require, in accordance with and in the manner of art. 159 of the Constitutions.

6. The present Decree will come into force on 15 August 1994.

Rome, 8 December 1993.

Fr Egidio VIGANO
Rector Major

Fr Francesco MARACCANI
Secretary General

5.2 New Salesian Bishops

1. *Mgr. Adriaan VAN LUYN, Bishop of Rotterdam, Holland.*

On 27 November 1993 the news was published that the Holy Father had appointed *Fr Adriaan VAN LUYN*, SDB Bishop of the Diocese of Rotterdam in Holland.

Adriaan Van Luyt was born at Groningen, in the Province of Utrecht, Holland, on 10 August 1935. He was a pupil of the Salesians at Ugchelen, made his novitiate at Twello and his first profession there on 16 August 1954.

After the study of philosophy and practical training, he followed the course of theology at Turin-Crocetta, where he gained the Licentiate in Theology. On 9 February 1964 he was ordained priest at 's-Heerenberg, Holland.

He became immediately involved in pastoral work. In 1969 he became Rector of the house of Nijmegen and in the following year Vice-Provincial. In 1974 he moved to Assel as Rector, and one year later became Provincial of the Dutch Province. In 1980 the Dutch Religious elected him as their President, and named him as their representative at the Synod of Dutch Bishops held in Rome in the same year.

At the end of his mandate as Provincial the Superiors called him to Rome, and entrusted him first with the office of Delegate of the Rector Major for the UPS (1981-84), and then with that of Superior of the UPS Vice-Province (1984-90).

On his return to Holland in 1990, he was appointed Secretary of the Bishops Conference of the Low Countries.

2. *Mgr. MALAYAPPAN Chinnappa, Bishop of VELLORE, India.*

On 17 December 1993 the Osservatore Romano carried the news of the appointment by the Holy Father of *Fr Chinnappa MALAYAPPAN* SDB as Bishop of Vellore in the State of Tamil Nadu in Southern India.

He was born at Ayandur, Pondicherry, in the Province of Madras, on 7 March 1937. After a year in the aspirantate of Tirupattur, in 1963 he asked to be admitted to the novitiate which he made at Yercaud, making his first profession at the same place on 24 May 1964.

After the study of philosophy and pedagogy, also at Yercaud, and the period of practical training, he followed the theological course in the salesian studentate of Bangalore.

He had already gained the civil degrees of B.Ed. and M.A. in English, and subsequently obtained the Licentiate in Theology (Spirituality) from the UPS in Rome.

He was engaged in educational and pastoral work in various houses, and in 1984 was appointed

Rector of the house of Varadarajanpet and four years later in that of the Lourdes Shrine at Madras. From 1991 he had been Rector and Parish Priest in the parish of Madurai, also dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes.

5.3 Our dead confreres (1993 – 4th list)

"Faith in the risen Christ sustains our hope and keeps alive our communion with our brothers who rest in Christ's peace... Their remembrance is an incentive to continue faithfully in our mission." (*Cost.* 94).

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P ALENCASTRO Miguel	Riobamba	25.10.93	95	ECU
P BARBACCI Antonio	Venezia	31.10.93	89	IVE
P BELLIDO IÑIGO Modesto	Madrid	26.11.93	90	SMA
<i>Fu per 6 anni Ispettore, per 17 anni Consigliere per le Missioni e per 6 anni Catechista generale</i>				
P BERTOLINO Giacomo	Varazze	14.09.93	85	ILT
P BIANCO Dario	Maroggia (Svizzera)	02.12.93	68	ILE
P BONTIGNALI Enrico	Maroggia (Svizzera)	05.11.93	78	ILE
P BORSATTI Luis Manuel	Paraná	25.11.93	57	ARO
P BOTTO Fulvio	Udine	27.11.93	77	IVE
L BRACCO Antonio	Torino	14.10.93	71	ICP
P CEBREIRO Carlos Blas	San Luis	21.11.93	69	ACO
L COLOMBO Luciano	Milano	20.11.93	73	ILE
L CRIVELLI Antonio	Montechiarugolo	11.12.93	76	ILE
P De OLIVEIRA NUNES João Bosco	Brasilia	13.10.93	69	BBH
P DELLA VEDOVA Gino	Sondrio	28.09.93	72	ILE
P DI MEO Vincenzo	Roma	08.11.93	67	IRO
<i>Fu Ispettore per 6 anni</i>				
P DONADEO Mario	Torino	06.10.93	76	ICP
P DUCHATKIEWICZ Józef	Dębno Lubuskie	02.11.93	82	PLN
L ECHTLER Peter	Benediktbeuern	13.11.93	76	GEM
P ESPINOSA Manuel	Buenos Aires	03.11.93	82	ABA
P FAITA Giovanni	Montreal	16.10.93	80	CAE
P FORERO PARRA Luis Antonio	Medellín	25.09.93	88	COM
P FUCHS Johann	Wien	05.10.93	76	AUS
P GARCIA GARCIA Valentín	Madrid	29.11.93	78	SMA
P HANNA Peter	Ballinakill	02.11.93	85	IRL
P HYNEK Václav	Brno	15.09.93	85	CEP
P KREJCI Herbert	Pians-Tirol	10.07.93	60	AUS
P LADETTO Pietro	Torino	09.11.93	73	ICP
P LADURNER Valentin	Linz	30.08.93	79	AUS
L LAUZZANA Parisio	Varazze	29.11.93	84	IVE
P LEONFANTI Mario	Buenos Aires	27.11.93	51	ABA
P LOBO Oswaldo Sérgio	Silvânia	15.10.93	89	BBH

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P LOVIŠEK Vojtech	Košice	28.09.93	68	SLK
P LUSKAR Alois	Stein im Jauntal	14.09.93	88	AUS
P MAFFÈ Giuseppe	Varazze	23.10.93	70	ICP
L MAIA da SILVA Aldo	Belo Horizonte	30.10.93	79	BBH
P MARCHESOTTI Pasquale	Bahía Blanca	21.10.93	90	ABB
P MARCHESI Abramo	Arese	18.11.93	80	ILE
P MAREK Jan	Stramberk	19.07.93	71	CEP
P MIGLIO Angelo	Borgomanero	21.10.93	76	ICP
P MORANTE Annibale	Napoli	06.11.93	73	IME
P MUSTO Aurelio	Castellammare di Stabia	28.10.93	92	IME
L PIREDDU Antioco	Buenos Aires	25.10.93	70	ABA
P PUPPO Ernesto	Tucumán	30.09.93	83	ACO
P SAVAZZI Cesare	Ferrara	19.12.93	89	ILE
P SÖHNLEIN Otto	Nürnberg	21.10.93	53	GEM
P SPÄTH Robert	Pforzheim	19.11.93	80	GEM
L SPINARDI Giovanni	Bahía Blanca	05.11.93	87	ABB
P STRADELLA Giuseppe	Torino	04.11.93	86	ICP
P SZOKA Stanisław	Szczuczyn (Bielorussia)	28.07.93	61	PLN
L TOSINI Giovanni	Bologna	09.12.93	76	BMA
P VALDORA Renato	Varazze	14.10.93	87	ILT
P VIOL FERNANDES Sérgio	Belo Horizonte	05.12.93	31	BBH
P WALTER Karl	Bamberg	17.11.93	80	GEM

