



acts

of the general council

year LXXIX

july-september 1998

N. 364

**official organ
of animation
and communication
for the
salesian congregation**

**Direzione Generale
Opere don Bosco
Roma**

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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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CHURCH AND FAMILY EVENTS

1. **The Synods** - American solidarity - Asia calls for the Gospel - Life and proclamation - A look towards the young - Concern for education - 2. **Celebrating in order to grow** - Some memories - The gift of brotherly union - Don Bosco: a fascinating Saint - Relevance of the message of education - A strategic point: formation - Conclusion.

Rome, 29 June 1998
SS. Peter and Paul

My dear confreres,

In meetings I have had recently with provincials and confreres it was suggested to me that occasionally I should interrupt the series of letters of a doctrinal character and pass on to you, almost in the style of a Good Night, some impressions and news of the Congregation and of the life of the Church seen from my own point of view.

This time I am trying this and do so very willingly. The Provinces, meanwhile, are deeply involved in the most complete and systematic application possible of the GC24. This requires not only organizational expertise, but also a deepening of salesian spirituality, reflection on our educative legacy, and the strengthening of our ability for animation as Salesians with an adequate store of ideas and skills. They have therefore abundant material to keep them occupied.

There are many events I could speak of and situations on which to comment. I will choose just two of them: the first because of its ecclesial importance, and the other for its salesian significance.

1. The Synods.

I have had the good fortune to take part in two synodal assemblies: that for America and the one for Asia. At the first, nine salesian bishops were present; at the second we had four bishops, with a further three confreres and an FMA invited as experts. The two Synods were part of a series of six similar assemblies. They were preceded by the one for Africa (10 April – 8 May 1994) which gave rise to the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, already published. They will be followed by those for Oceania and for Europe, due to take place respectively in November of this year and in the spring of 1999. A final assembly of the universal Church will serve as an occasion of convergence and unification, of deeper study and synthesis.

Even though they are directly concerned with individual continents, the Synods carry out a reflection and propose lines of thought which are useful for the universal Church and for personal Christian life in any context. They view the present panorama from every angle, because people, cultures and social situations are interdependent.

Seen together in this way they appear as the point of convergence of four requirements which are emerging in this period of approach to the third millennium: the commitment of the whole Church for a new evangelization; the urgent need to develop a broader and practical spiritual communion in the Church, which is the subject of this evangelization; careful attention to the culture or cultures of which the Gospel must become the leaven and critical yardstick; and the intention to enter into dialogue with society in process of rebuilding and in which the Gospel must find an echo, challenging consciences and structures.

The stages of the process which lead to the conclusions of these assemblies are well known: the selection of a theme, the distribution of the *Lineamenta* for reflection and contributions from the Churches concerned, and the preparation of the *Instrumentum laboris* which collects together the contributions,

and forms the basis for discussion.

When the assembly begins, after the opening conference which summarizes the work of preparation, there is the listening phase in which each member can speak to emphasize, develop or introduce a theme he considers important. Then follows the *Report after the discussion* which highlights the key points of the debate. The *circuli minores* make a first study of these which they present to the assembly, after which the work returns to the groups themselves for the elaboration of the *Propositiones*, placed in order and unified by a commission under the responsibility of the Secretary General. Corrections and integrations follow, and then comes the final voting which is by name and with the voting sheet signed by the voter. This is the process already used in various assemblies with fixed timetables and procedures, which permit free expression but call for careful preparation of the contributions.

From the statement of the theme for each Synod, from the proposals made in the *Lineamenta*, from their development in the *Instrumentum laboris*, from their deeper analysis in the discussion, from the collection of the key points emerging in the *Propositiones*, one point stands out very clearly: the need of Christ for the salvation of man, the man of today, and the wager of the Church (we can say the faith!) on the power of enlightenment, liberation and renewal inherent in his mystery. At a time of the declining of ideologies and the devaluation of every "theory" concerning the human person, the event of Jesus and his Gospel, the experience of human life and of God that with Him and in Him can be made, reappear as a source of wisdom and reason for hope. His declaration is resounding again: "I am the way, the truth and the life".¹

The Church therefore reaffirms her determination to live in herself the mystery and presence of Christ with greater intensity. Frequent and of primary importance is the call to conver-

¹ Jn 14,6

sion, to authenticity, to witness on the part of individual Christians and communities, in line with the conditions in which life is now expressed and with the challenges presented by mentalities and environment.

Evangelization has become understood as the communication of a way of life. Of great interest therefore is what is said about ways for setting out what we live with greater energy and dynamism, along new lines and in more efficacious ways.

All this is expressed very clearly in the formulation of the themes: "The Church in Africa and her evangelizing mission towards the year 2000 - "You shall be my witnesses"" (Acts 1:8);² "Meeting with the living Christ, the way to conversion, communion and solidarity in America";³ "Jesus Christ the Saviour and his mission of love and service in Asia: "That they may have life, and have it abundantly""; ⁴ "Jesus Christ: walking his way, telling his truth, living his life: an appeal for the peoples of Oceania";⁵ "Jesus Christ alive in his Church, the source of hope for Europe".⁶

The modern or postmodern age, call it what you like, presents a challenge to believers: it is the question of Jesus himself: "But who do you say that I am?"⁷

The Church is not unaware of the human situation in which this question, with its consequent response, must re-echo and be understood. The world seems united by the elimination of physical distances, by universal practices and customs and by social communication. In the field of economics there has been a "globalization" which makes it appear to be the one and only place of exchange, interdependent in its parts, and obeying the same laws. On the other hand it is deeply divided by ethnic

² Synod for Africa

³ Synod for America

⁴ Synod for Asia

⁵ Synod for Oceania

⁶ Synod for Europe

⁷ Mt 16,15

and national rivalries, by financial interests and unexplainable inequalities and, as regards norms and values by individualism. For the future the prospect seems to be either a peaceful coexistence of persons and peoples in solidarity, or the indiscriminate domination by the few with the impoverishment and exclusion of the many.

In the religious field there is a vague search for religious experience, a sign of dissatisfaction with purely temporal horizons; there is a numerical growth of Christianity in vast areas, a more precise identification of believers in others, a fundamentalism which attempts to establish supremacy through repression and violence, and the diffusion of widely varying ideas all with some semblance of spirituality.

The Church is aware that it is not alone in its responsibility for the Kingdom, but that it is its sign and instrument. It accepts therefore as part of the normal daily features of its activity financial openness, interreligious dialogue, and solidarity with humanity in its pilgrimage.

The field is wide open, as also is the commitment. The participation of all is needed. And so lay people, priests and consecrated persons are urged to renew their spiritual life, aiming at a holiness that can say something to men of the present day; to live the Christian vocation with joy; to return always to Christ as the source of strength and meaning; to be updated in the reading of reality so as to proclaim the Gospel in an effective way.

Reference to the figures of the officially recognized saints and martyrs, and of those on the way to such recognition, has been frequent, deeply felt and inspiring. The holiness of the disciples of Christ, in fact, is put forward by the Synodal assemblies as the primary method of evangelization.

American solidarity.

The new element which gave universal significance to the Synod for America was the consideration of the continent as a

single unit. The assemblies of Medellín, Puebla and Santo Domingo were of and for Latin America. They were confined to the particular features of that area, and took up their perspectives. The United States and Canada were considered as belonging to a different world: it was the classical North-South division, developed countries and those in process of development, rich and poor, secularized environments and those of popular religious devotion.

But this time the bishops of the two halves of the continent were brought together. The situations of the Churches were approached as forming part of a single phenomenon, and this meant that problems could be addressed in terms of interdependence and solidarity.

The Synod for America therefore moved freely between three perspectives, and considered them together: evangelization in the restricted area entrusted to each diocese, the Christian sense of life and projects in contexts of a certain magnitude such as nations or regions of the continent, and questions of continental and world level requiring collegial treatment. It was a question of grasping every present possibility of Communion and making them operative by a body of bishops formed of 1,625 members.⁸

America appears as a pluriethnic continent, formed of native peoples, populations coming in successive waves of emigration from Europe and Asia, and descendants of Africans who were brought over as slaves. The second group, those from Europe, is the most consistent, but the native groups are increasing in numbers and in the awareness of their own identity. There is a desire for peaceful coexistence and integration with an increasing appreciation of the different values.

It is also a "Christian" continent in respect of cultural substratum and social tradition, with the Centre and South Catholic and the North Protestant. This character is seen in

⁸ Annual Church statistics. 1 July 1997

the regular organization of the churches, in ethical criteria, in popular religious devotion, in the tendency to adhere to new religious movements, and in the response given to the sects. Nowadays the influence of secularism is felt on mentality, on individualism in the organization of life, and on subjectivism in the expression of faith. But powerful currents of Christian life are seen to be developing; many aspects of culture are awaiting the gospel message; there is freedom for the proclamation and activity of the Church.

The social and economic situation tends towards a progressive impoverishment: the number of the poor is increasing, as also is the distance between an ever more reduced minority with resources and an ever growing majority of people who lack what is necessary for their own development. This phenomenon is observable also in the North. It is blamed on the present system of managing the world's resources, the method of governing national societies, and of conceiving international order.

It is a continent which is showing a new sense of solidarity: in the recognition and peaceful coming together of the different ethnic components, and in regional organization through such organisms as *Nafta*, *Mercosur*, and the *Andean Treaty*.

A term that recurred frequently during the discussion was *globalization*, i.e. the world-wide nature of problems, and interdependence between peoples and their areas of activity. From the significance and economic consequences of the word, not always just and desirable, there has been a change to a definition more human and all-embracing, providing hope for a more practical organization and more lively practice of episcopal collegiality and of communion between Churches.

Some areas were indicated in which ecclesial communion can be expressed more concretely and with a greater possibility for involvement.

One of these is that of economic relationships between peoples, particularly with regard to **foreign debt**, which has been

a burden for years on countries of low and medium development and prevents them from improving their quality of life or of increasing indispensable wellbeing. The proposals were very modest and discreet.

It was asked that the Holy See should continue to insist, by means of an authoritative document, on justice in international economic relationships, which have no sufficiently based ethical code of practice at present.

The hope was expressed that the Bishops Conference of America would promote a meeting of experts at high level to seek a technical solution to the problem which would satisfy the fundamental interests of all parties. Its objective would be the cancellation of the debt, or a substantial reduction even to the elimination of interest once the capital had been brought down, with the obligation of using the part of the debt condoned for the benefit of the poorest sector of the country benefiting by the arrangement.

Another area for collaboration is that of care for **emigrants**. There is a great movement from the South towards the North. The Hispanics constitute the latest wave of emigrants which have given greater consistency to the Catholic component of the United States. They carry with them some characteristics of their faith and ecclesial life, but on the other hand both men and women are exposed to various forms of exploitation because the illegal status of many of them leaves them a prey to every kind of blackmail.

The phenomenon caught the Churches by surprise; formerly they did not have any clear policy in this regard and had not been able to give the immigrants sufficient assistance, much less accompany them from a human point of view at the time of their arrival and insertion.

The intention was endorsed to achieve a greater mobility of priests and religious in both directions, to bring about greater understanding and better pastoral care. For us it is interesting

to note that this coincides with a certain project of collaboration which had its first expression in the creation of an "interamerican" region, and is now being manifested in new initiatives.

Collaboration was called for in facing the spreading of the **sects**. The evaluation of these in the early part of the assembly was rather severe. They were considered aggressive and bent on denigrating Catholicism. They use proselytising methods which profit by the financial and psychological weakness of the people and create dependence. They rely on powerful financial and technical resources which allow them to acquire property and rapidly construct places for meetings and religious practice. But after mentioning these aspects, which seem realistic in view of a possible dialogue or collaboration with them for the benefit of mankind, the discussion turned to the reasons for their ability to attract and to the limitations of our own proclamation and faith proposal, and of our celebrations. Finally a more respectful view was reached of the sects, recognizing the fact that despite the far from indifferent criticisms expressed they do constitute "religious expressions", and that for many they represent an appeal to feelings and encourages a change of conduct.

And then there is the phenomenon of **drug-trafficking**. Its organization has reached highly sophisticated levels. It is master-minded not by those who cultivate, transport or sell narcotics, but by those who have the necessary capital and have available also other sources of income. They are able to launder money through non-suspect investments and even institutions. This totally disrupts the social life of some countries, making it completely arbitrary. It is a phenomenon which comes home to us in our commitment to prevention, assistance and rescue. It is no bad thing therefore to be aware of the dimensions of the problem, to be forewarned about its ramifications, and knowledgeable about its implications.

Finally there is **financial cooperation** among the Churches. Some have more than adequate resources and others are extremely poor. There is not at present a regular interchange of goods, even though Christians always prove generous in their offerings. An improved distribution would permit the evangelization of some disadvantaged areas with better results.

For the realization of such proposals of collaboration between these different regions of the continent, forms of communication and coordination were adopted which would not add to the existing structures but rather review those already existing so as to make them more responsive to the new demands of collegiality.

In addition to this concern for the accomplishment of forms of pastoral work in line with "globalization", a discussion developed on the state of the faith in the continent, and on ways to bring about the proclamation of the Gospel to groups in situations which at present seem a long way from it.

Evangelization is a complex process which includes multiple activities, various modes of service to peoples in different stages of development. Such complexity is very obvious in America after 500 years of history and through the authoritative presence of the Church in widely varying sectors of life.

For this reason we heard in the course of the first two weeks 221 interventions of eight minutes each, made by members of the Synod, plus a further 33 interventions of six minutes each from the "auditors" and other invited persons. With various evaluations and suggestions they highlighted the dispositions needed in evangelizers like bishops, priests, laity and religious; they tried to clarify the role of the ecclesial community, like the parish, the family, ecclesial movements, Catholic schools, and universities; they emphasized the attention that must be given to different groups: the poor, the young, the sick, women, intellectuals, emigrants; they hoped for a renewal

and development of the different activities such as catechesis, the liturgy, education, social communication, assistance and charity, and the prophetic ministry.

Subsequently there was a greater concentration on the fundamental themes about which to organize the guidelines.

In face of the lack or reformulation of the meaning of life, and of the new religious movements, the need was seen for insisting on the **personal experience of Christ** and on ongoing formation for priests; on the setting up of pastoral work in terms of missionary ideas and conviction; on the preparation and greater involvement of the laity and hence on a reordering of the tasks of priests, who must be above all guarantors of evangelical authenticity, animators of the community, formators and spiritual guides of individuals and groups.

Because of the numerous wounds and lacerations, insistence was laid on pastoral work characterized by understanding, charity and forgiveness, able to take on the conditions of the people and accompany them on a possible path towards the realization of a life according to the Gospel.

Faced with the evolution of the mentality for the influence of a universal culture and the means of social communication, it was proposed to insist on **inculturation** in two senses: appreciating and accepting the lawful expressions of native cultures, and dedication to the evangelization of the new urban culture.

This is the context in which the Salesian Family is working with more than 9,000 between Confreres and Sisters. The Synod provides us with a panorama of the Church and society which is useful for taking our bearings at a time which is complex but full of possibilities.

We await therefore the Apostolic Exhortation, which will soon be made public by the Holy Father in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and which must be the object of careful study.

Asia calls for the Gospel

‘Challenge’ is the word which comes frequently to mind when you think of the evangelization of Asia. And in few cases does the word have so real a meaning. Asia, it was said during the Synod, is the home of a little more than 60% of the present human race. It was the first to receive the Christian message which immediately reached some of its farthest parts.

But today Asia is still the continent in which Christianity is numerically least present: except in the Philippines and Lebanon, Christians are a tiny minority, even though they have considerable cultural and social weight. Their percentages are at their lowest of 0.21% in Cambodia, 0.19% in Bangladesh, 0.05% in Bhutan, 0.02% in Mongolia, and going down to almost zero in Saudi-Arabia. Faced with percentages like these, those of Sri Lanka (6.60%), Vietnam (7.94%) and Indonesia (2.78%) seem good.⁹ In comparison with the total population, relatively few persons outside the Christian communities know about Jesus Christ, even though many have heard him mentioned. The **missionary dimension** therefore of the faith and of Christian communities appears as the dominant point for reflection.

The Synod has made clear the multiple reality which exists under a single geographic name. Asia extends from Siberia to Indonesia, from Lebanon to Japan, from Arabia to China. Many and diverse are its cultures, rooted in antiquity and with a great influence on the people, even though nowadays they must come to grips with currents of thought and forms of life which pervade the world.

There is a great diversity of religions, born and developed in Asia and sometimes deeply penetrated by local customs. Their enumeration during the Synod in both interventions and texts always ended up with the addition “and others”, because of the impossibility of listing all of them and the fear of leaving one of

⁹ International Faith Agency, 17 April 1998 – No.4091/4092 – NE 232

them out. Asia appears therefore as a continent "open to mystery, to religious sentiment, and to the idea of divinity", even though in recent times it has suffered like the rest of the world from the impact of demythologizing and practical materialism.

Asia is also multifaceted from the standpoint of political organization: together with democratic States there are also strongly repressive ideological systems, the residue of former communist regimes now running wild, military dictatorships, rigid fundamentalist governments and longstanding areas of conflict among peoples. It is multifaceted too from a social point of view: contexts of wellbeing with first-class technology, and vast areas of widespread poverty where the struggle for greater social justice is not yet felt. The map of religious freedom and human rights looks like a leopard skin.

It is multifaceted too as regards evangelization, the historical origins of which go back in some cases to the Apostles, and in others to the patristic epoch, to mediaeval Europe, to the modern era, to the last century, and to the post-war period. Different rites have matured and today characterize the Christian presence in some areas. The vicissitudes of the Christian community through the years have followed diverse paths in their confrontation with powers, religions and societies, and their present place in the social context varies. An example of this is provided by the relationships with Islam.

Against this background the **Christian sense of identity** is striking. Their joy is evident at having received the light of the Gospel and of being reached by Christ. The desire is also felt for communicating to their neighbours what they themselves have experienced: "The heart of the Church in Asia will be restless until the whole continent finds rest in the Peace of Christ, the Risen Saviour", was one of the statements made, and the expression summarizes a feeling that was in the air throughout the discussion.

Several interventions provided first-hand testimony to Christian communities in situations of suffering, of discrimina-

tion, of precarious and heavy conditioning: China, North Korea, some Arabic countries, and the central Asian Republics where evangelization has begun again only recently.

The highpoint of this testimony was the exchange of greetings and messages with the Chinese Bishop Duan Yimin. With his Auxiliary, Bishop Xu Zhixuan (both belonging to the so-called official Church), he had been invited to the Synod by the Holy Father. They were not given permission – according to the spokesman for the Chinese Government – “because they had been chosen arbitrarily and unilaterally, and because China has no official relations and religious links with the Vatican”.

Bishop Duan Yimin expressed his adherence by fax at the risk of being accused of wanting to establish relationships with a foreign State. “In the first place”, he had written, “I want to greet the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II. It is impossible for me to take part in the Synod for political reasons. I am absent in body, but my heart is permanently present with you in the Synod of Bishops. (...) In the Synod”, he went on, “all is made public to be put into practice by all who believe in Christ. I would be glad to be informed of what takes place, and for this I thank you in advance”.

Life and proclamation

The paths of evangelization will therefore not be the same for all the regions of Asia. But certain indications emerge which do seem to be of universal application.

One is the value that attaches in Asia to **life** rather than to doctrinal explanations. Often Mother Teresa is recalled as a figure able to proclaim the quintessence of the Gospel by her life.

Among the aspects of life a central position is held, because of the sensitivity of the context and with regard to other religions, by the **experience of God** made by the Christians and its concrete manifestation in attitudes and practices. Spirituality, prayer and the sense of God appear as convincing signs of a proclamation of salvation which will find a way into the Asian heart.

Pressing recommendations were heard and even precise details and clarifications were given about "Christian spirituality", with sources, significance and procedures different from, though not opposed to, "natural" spiritualities. It is Trinitarian, "following Christ and in conformity with his paschal mystery"; it is the gift and presence of the Spirit who unites and fuses in a single movement love of God and love of man, as a commitment in history for the Kingdom.

Religion, culture and life in Asia have **harmony** as the ideal objective: transcendent and temporal, divine and human, creation and the work of man, exterior life and depth of heart, religion and its practice, individual and society, tend to become integrated in an experience of personal unity, interior serenity and reconciliation with reality.

The **quality of relationship**, in the first place the human kind which generates peace but also the other which is established between different realities, is another important aspect of the manifestation of faith. For this reason the compassionate and attentive love for every being is something that pays off. Hence it suits many Asian peoples to present Christ as Master of wisdom, the spiritual Guide, the Principle of energy and healing, the Source of light and enlightenment, Merciful friend of the poor, Liberator, Good Shepherd, and Obedient to God.

In life must also be included **the public options** of Christians, their initiatives, service and expressions of social commitment. Hence reflections were made on the quality of formation of believers, on the condition and ministry of priests, on the place to be allotted to lay people and the follow-up they must be given, on the importance to be assigned to the presence of religious, and in particular to that of contemplatives. The value was recognized in the past and for the future of the different forms of service of the Church: education, development, preference for those who are poorest, and influence in the social sphere.

To the most prophetic expression of Christian life on the part of individuals and communities must be added a clear and abundant proclamation of the Gospel, appropriate to the plurireligious context.

Christ must be proclaimed. To know him is the right of everyone. For this reason, with due respect to the value of other religious experiences, the urgent need was seen to make clear the evangelical concept of salvation. Similarly a meditation on Christ as the one definitive Saviour, an enlightenment concerning the mediation of the Church, a theological reflection on the value and limits of religions appears necessary to add thrust and point out clearly the starting and finishing points of evangelization. This in fact implies not only listening to the proclamation, as though it were a religious explanation or a spiritual pilgrimage which man must undertake, but the personal acceptance of Christ as man's fulfilment and the mediator of our rapport with God, the conversion of mind and change of habits, and insertion in the Christian community through baptism.

Closely linked with witness and proclamation, and almost part of them, are interreligious dialogue and the effort at inculturation. We dealt with this in the letter on missionary commitment: "Look around you and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting".¹⁰ The Synod's emphasis enriches our reflection.

The insistence on **interreligious dialogue** is interesting as emphasizing that it is not only a matter of verbal discussion to face up to and clarify the various terms and religious concepts, but also of the "dialogue of the heart, life and works", i.e. of peaceful coexistence and friendship, service to the individual and groups, shared responsibility in social initiatives and commitment to common values. Dialogue includes participation with those belonging to other religions, the advancement of justice and peace; joint activity for the protection of children

¹⁰ AGC 362

from all forms of abuse, for the advancement of women to equality and freedom, for the extension of education to all, for the overcoming of social and religious discrimination, for the assistance of immigrants, and for the defence of human rights.

The urgent need of **inculturation** was emphasized for overcoming the image of Christianity as a "foreign religion". It was made clear that the task is one for all the people of God, guided and animated by their pastors. In it therefore the Christian formation and practice of the community have an importance no less than that of the reflections of theologians.

It is a long and unending process which has as its reference point and source of energy the incarnation of Christ, with at its centre the paschal mystery of his passion, death and resurrection. It implies the effort to introduce Christian word and practice into the heart of culture, and hence acquire the discernment to accept what is valid in cultures, express the Christian mystery through their elements, introduce into them the new ideas of the Gospel, purifying those which are incomplete and abandoning those which are opposed to man's salvation.

The Asian Synod therefore, like its predecessor for America, was more than an Assembly. It was an **experience of communion**: felt and expressed with visible signs by those who took part in it; extended in spirit and prayer to all the Churches and peoples of the continent. It took into account, therefore, the situation of those who are suffering through lack of freedom, particularly as regards religion or for other causes. It asked publicly for a change on the part of those in power who are responsible for these situations of unjust discrimination and oppression. The thought of the conditions of the Church recently or still present in China have led to the recalling of other similar periods in history, in which martyrdom has been a mark of the life of the Christian community. An object of attention and of interventions was the situation of Iraq and the consequences on the people of the imposed sanctions, with

also a general ethical judgement on the use of such political measures.

Encouraged too was a movement of missionary endeavour in "new" areas where Christian communities are taking root: Siberia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgistan, Tad-jiskistan, and Turkmenistan.

These are ecclesial, political and cultural scenarios which help us to form an idea of the situation in which our confreres are living, and to consider in what direction we should point our future efforts, having in mind the effectiveness of our "mis-sionary" contribution.

A look towards the young

During the synodal discussions some themes recurred which we have particularly at heart because they help to place us as Salesians in the movement of the new evangelization.

The first concerns youth. In both Synods it emerged that young people constitute the numerical majority in nearly all the countries of the respective continents. They represent the human riches of the future for society and the Church. They therefore deserve from the latter quite particular concern.

Young people of today are to be found in a whole variety of situations, and hence service to them must be diversified in line with the reality in which they are placed, always with the objective of offering them the possibility of a personal encounter with Christ.

In the case of America some of these situations were explored in pastoral detail. For those youngsters who are already *in sufficient contact with the Church*, catechesis needs to be rethought and organized so as to lead to a personalized faith which becomes light and guidance for private and public life. To those with the necessary dispositions, Christian commitment in its various forms should be suggested: active involvement in ecclesial communities, membership of Christian associ-

ations or movements, the missionary volunteer movement, the possibility of a vocation of total consecration.

A high proportion of the continents' young people are *a long way from the Church*. The Christian community, it was emphasized, must try to make contact with them, overcoming physical distances and also those due to interests, culture, personal and social situations. A particular effort is required to reach the young individually and in the places where they gather together through need or preference. A way of proclaiming Christ must be thought up in response to the search for happiness, meaning and fulfilment they are experiencing and their desire for other ways of life.

And then there is the multiple category of *young people who are poor*, economically or culturally: those on the margin of society, the destitute, the unemployed, those without any preparation. These are groups which need a specific service of charity, welcome reception, instruction, rescue and follow-up. The presence and solidarity of Christ's disciples is for them a sign and first proclamation of the Gospel.

Young university students need special care to the extent that they are a determining element for the immediate future of society. They are on the receiving end of systematic cultural communication, and are exposed to ethical challenges and to the social and economic visions of the present day. The reflection and practice of the faith, at a deep and well founded level, has for them a particular importance, as also has the social thinking of the Church.

Analogous, but differing in some respects were the perspectives of the Assembly for Asia. For the small proportion of young Christians was asked a more substantial spiritual nourishment through meaningful liturgies, enlightening homilies, learning how to pray, and reflection on problems which are of particular concern in the period of youth.

It was recommended that intellectual and cultural formation be integrated with emotive and moral development, so

that the young recognize and take up the values of their own culture with a Christian awareness and become moulded in harmony with their religious and cultural identity.

Of the young too it is expected that they will become evangelizers of their peers and active elements in society. In contact with other youngsters of different religions in educational environments and elsewhere, young Christians (if appropriately prepared) are given an opportunity of being harbingers of peace, of tolerance, and of acceptance of diversity. Finally insistence was laid on the need for youthful interchange with other Churches and countries.

For these reasons support was given to the idea of a director or person in charge of youth in the principal pastoral structures.

Special attention needs to be given to young women. The Church, by reason of its proclamation, promotes their dignity, their freedom from various forms of subjugation and exploitation, and from every form of discrimination in respect of education, and personal choice in questions which specifically regard them (marriage, work, etc.).

Concern for education

The theme of youth brought with it that of education. A great deal was said about it in both assemblies and it finished also in the "Proposals" in each case.

Perhaps in some interventions the idea of education was centred too much on processes of teaching and linked with the respective institutions, rather than presented as a permanent dimension of evangelization; evangelization brings about growth in humanity, and an education which takes its inspiration from the image of man revealed in Jesus Christ is already evangelization, though it is not sufficient by itself. But this approach was accepted after the interventions. "The Church supports and encourages the whole of the educative process in so-

ciety in which the human person is formed and made capable of tending to his integral development in conformity with his destiny"; "education is an integral part of evangelization". Both statements were made during the Asian Synod.

Christian presence was encouraged and recommended in institutions for formal and systematic education, where religious have a unique tradition for quantity of initiatives and pedagogical experience. But they must strengthen and express more clearly the Catholic identity and intention to evangelize. For this reason cultural content and the tenor of communication must be revised, as also the method of confronting other aspects of life which teaching programs neglect. The processes of education possible in plurireligious educative environments need to be restudied.

Christians committed in this field need specific pastoral care to encourage and qualify them in their work and make them aware of the importance it has in culture and the ecclesial community.

Alongside the network of institutions for systematic education, every initiative was encouraged for youngsters and adults not reached by such education. In this way education appears as a broad spectrum of possibilities, open to creativity. The hard core are the institutions for teaching and systematic preparation for work, but they are not sufficient by themselves and it is hoped that there will also be other forms adequate for meeting the present requirements.

In the American Synod a lance was broken in favour of freedom of education. This was understood as the right of families to freely choose its kind and aim without being penalised from the standpoint of public recognition or new financial burdens. It was understood also as the possibility for the Church to set up educative initiatives which would enjoy juridical and financial parity. "It must be asserted", it is emphasized, "that the State has the obligation of providing education for all, and in particular for the poor, and also the task of respecting and

protecting freedom of teaching. State monopoly must be denounced as a form of totalitarianism if it violates fundamental rights, in particular those of the family in what concerns the religious education of children. The family in fact is the first educational setting for the whole person".¹¹

The Asian Synod, for its part, recognized that in many countries Catholic education is esteemed for its organisational efficiency, its teaching quality and pedagogical competence. It has created opportunities for the education of neglected minorities, for rural populations, for girls and in general for the poor and disregarded.

Moreover it emphasizes the role that has been played by Catholic educational institutions in evangelization, from both the aspect of proclamation and that of inculturation and religious dialogue with regard to life and society.

For the future the work and its importance will not become less, but the need is seen for rethinking and reshaping the educative apostolate. In the first place by a decisive directing of services towards the poor and emarginated to develop their ability to live in society as full citizens with full voice; and this even with the possible financial difficulties it could imply. It is hoped that in a spirit of freedom and without any suggestion of proselytism, Catholic schools may be places where the faith can be put forward and accepted. Finally, it is asked that institutions of a higher level (high schools and universities) commit themselves to a greater degree in the formation of leaders for the Church and society.

2. Celebrating in order to grow

The Rector Major's journeys in the last two years provide ample material for interesting comment. Some of them were

¹¹ From the *Propositiones*

for the purpose of visiting communities in particular circumstances: the Eastern Circumscription, which is continuing its growth and progressive organization; Cuba, which after a long period of restricted freedom and vocational stalemate, is beginning to sense a time of development lying ahead; Cambodia, where we have begun our work in two professional schools; China, which is showing signs of hope, offering some possible openings, but with uncertainties still existing; and Africa, where two new circumscriptions have been constituted and a third will be erected in the near future.

A certain number of visits were motivated by centenary celebrations of salesian work in various countries: Bolivia, Paraguay, Egypt, South Africa, North Belgium, USA, Poland and El Salvador. Other more frequent and fleeting visits were linked with a jubilee of a particular work: Alexandria (Egypt), Nazareth, Cuorgnè, Caserta, Pisa, Trieste, Sondrio, Legnago, Pavia, Carmona.

It is impossible for me to dwell on every journey and every visit, and so I will comment only on some of the recent ones – made on the occasion of centenaries – which have left me with some common impressions, despite differences in contexts and style.

Everywhere the celebrations have provided an opportunity not only of remembering the past, but also of charismatic reflection, of renewed pastoral initiative, of membership of the Salesian Family, and of extraordinary communication with the local people. They aimed at bringing together in specific programs confreres, young people and all those who in various ways feel themselves linked with the spirit and mission of Don Bosco. They reached the local Church, social forces and public opinion with news of history and educative messages, testing our capacity to activate multiple and effective channels of communication.

The desire to rekindle the enthusiasm of the beginnings and of the most flourishing moments of salesian life in the country concerned was expressed in the search for a **spiritual renewal**. I am writing after the retreat which brought to-

gether for the first time in history all the rectors of the Provinces of the United States and Canada with the Rector Major. Similar events have taken place elsewhere with the presence also of some members of the General Council.

Historical memories have been collected in volumes and articles which tried to bring to life again the circumstances of the beginnings and the main stages in our subsequent activity. Put to the test were the state, credibility and availability of the documentation referred to in some of the articles of the Regulations¹² on the basis of the principle stated in art.62: "Special importance attaches to the preservation of archives and other documentary material, because of their cultural and community value".

The published volumes are clearly written for the benefit of the people and are reminders for those locally concerned. They constitute a collection of attractive and thought-provoking material, because they reflect daily life in figures of confreres and lively anecdotes.

At the same time the need is felt of greater historical completeness and a better arrangement of studies which would render more adequately the picture of our insertion in a particular context.

Pastoral initiatives have been directed especially towards the young. Their interest has been stimulated by the personal sayings and doings of Don Bosco and in the present work of the Salesians in the various countries and in the world in general. They have been involved with enthusiasm and conviction at times of large-scale gatherings, religious celebrations and artistic manifestations. Those with greater interest have taken an active part in the preparation and realization of the events, and have frequently been also the beneficiaries of particular initiatives for their own spiritual life. Everywhere was clear the vocational significance which lay behind the celebrations.

¹² R 62, 146, 178, 180, 191

In this way we have been able to verify the hold we have on young adults, noting the results of efforts to form animators, volunteers and collaborators, and we have seen at first hand the advantages that follow an integration and cooperation between the youth pastoral work of the SDB, FMA, Past-pupils and Salesian Cooperators.

Pastoral relaunching has led also to the thinking-up of new forms of activity, made possible by the reshaping of works which seemed less urgent and the consequent redeployment of personnel; to the reformulation of our services in works already existing, in line with criteria of effectiveness; and to the strengthening of front-line initiatives begun earlier.

The **Salesian Family** has been present in different ways in local meetings and in civil and religious commemorations. It is becoming ever more visible and complete. It displays the desire for communion and the capacity for practical co-involvement, even though its reaction has frequently been stimulated by an 'ad hoc' committee rather than been animated by a permanent team. Its participation is a good reflection of its present state in each locality and opens up encouraging possibilities.

Authorities and social organizations have been provided with abundant information on the objectives the Salesians pursue, on their characteristic educative style, and on their future intentions. Personal relationships, participation in civil and religious activities, interviews given to the media, special insertions in newspapers etc., have all provided openings for communication with society.

Civil authorities, in line with the dimensions and incidence of salesian work, have considered the celebrations as cultural events of interest also to them, and have willingly conferred honours and recognitions: honorary citizenships, official receptions, public monuments, commemorative stones, names of streets and squares. Such recognitions, rather than being honours sought after, are for us parameters for measuring the reality of our insertion in the social texture and invitations

to provide with still greater confidence a service to the young marked by our charism.

Some memories

A certain concentration of national centenaries in America documents the implications of our first missionary project: the times of realization, the preferences shown, the directions and criteria of expansion. In the 25 years between 1875 and 1900 the Congregation set its roots in almost all the countries of the continent through a regular and planned annual insertion of confreres offered by regions more flourishing in respect of vocations.

The uninterrupted succession of local centenaries, particularly in Europe, gives on the other hand an idea of the expectations existing in the infant Congregation and of the mobility towards which it seemed also to be driven. According to data in the Central Archives, in fact, though they come from different sources, 664 requests for foundations from widely different countries reached the Rector Major, Bl. Michael Rua, between 1888 and 1900. Of these more than 200 were accepted. The mobility appears in the fact that 38 of these houses were closed again while Don Rua was still Rector Major, and a further 29 afterwards.

In every case it is a moving experience to look again at the **emergency situations** which the Salesians were called upon to solve or at least improve: immigrants with no religious care or with difficulties of insertion, who easily gave rise to prejudice among their new neighbours by their image as labourers, the apparent domestic conflict to which their poverty seemed to expose them, and the noisy forms of their Sunday relaxation; street children without the possibility of education, who thus became a social danger; the need for preparation for work in countries which had no training programs for this purpose; missions among native minorities difficult to contact. Listening to speakers and givers of conferences, I formed the idea that we were not called to strengthen normal pastoral activity

but to solve extreme situations for which there was no one available on the spot, or for the solving of which those already there did not feel themselves capable. The spirit of adventure, a sense of pastoral courage and the awareness of bearing a prophetic message of salvation for the young and the working class, characterized all the beginnings.

Memories recall the **precarious conditions** in which work often began, where the confreres lived, and the environment and working conditions and equipment: an old barracks (Paraguay), a long abandoned fortress (Alexandria), the crypt of a church (New York), a farmhouse on the edge of a city or even outside it, and similar situations. It goes to show how the evangelical quality of the work, dedication to the poor and rapport with the people led gradually to better conditions, always with an eye to the needs of the young.

The Salesians were also accompanied, almost instinctively, by **certain pastoral convictions** which were so deeply rooted in them that they needed no verification: the universal value of the oratorian model, the efficacy of the preventive system, the preference for trade schools, closeness to the people and their problems, the commitment to the immediate promoting of local vocations to continue the work. The Sunday after their arrival in Bolivia, as Fr Ceria relates,¹³ the Salesians began the festive oratory which immediately brought together 250 boys, despite the restricted space. And we have heard of similar experiences linked with other beginnings. They are initial traits which become prolonged and eventually merge into developments with greater fruit.

In ways like this Provinces came to be established and the Congregation extended after the manner of concentric circles around the first foundations, in a process which was neither uniform nor consistent. But the educative and pastoral service became diversified and enriched, until it includes at the pre-

¹³ Ceria, *Annali*, vol.II, p.552

sent day an array of initiatives which cover poverty, formal education, the involvement of the young and adults in apostolic enterprises, work at university level, accompaniment of ethnic groups, means of social communication, and the animation of a vast apostolic movement.

The gift of brotherly union.

The thing I find most striking in visits, in meetings, and especially on the occasion of celebrations, is the **unity of the Congregation**: an enthusiastic sense of belonging combined with a desire to work and achieve objectives together. This is something we often take for granted and we may not avert to the wonder it represents, the grace it needs, the delicate work it supposes and the richness it signifies. We are talking about a body of 17,000 persons spread over 2,000 communities linked around 91 provincial centres.

I have perceived this unity as a fact lived quite naturally by the confreres, without any problems about the risks it could imply, or even the awareness of them; and with the deep joy of feeling united in a common vocation and enterprise despite distances and differences. I have noticed it also as an objective of animation and government, and as a concern in groups of reflection. And I have thought spontaneously of that passage in the Constitutions which says: "Superiors at every level of government share in one and the same authority, and exercise it in communion with the Rector Major for the benefit of the whole Society. In this way, while fostering the good of each individual community, they are solicitous for the unity, growth and perfecting of the whole Congregation".¹⁴

This unity refers to the **spirit and religious mentality**, recognizable everywhere under different cultural wrappings. The difference in customs, language and manner of life do not im-

¹⁴ C 122

pair the identity of vocation and the typical characteristics of salesian life. Passing through all five continents and different countries, we find the same family style of life and work with certain universal aspects and others diversified from place to place.

Unity of this kind does not come about spontaneously. Contributing to its creation and reinvigoration are the acceptance, study and reference to the Constitutions, which set out an individual and community project, with choices of inspirations and attitudes, and with practical indications for the ordering of life.

It has been strengthened through the years by the guidelines of General Chapters and the work of clarification and stimulation of each successive Rector Major. It is enriched by contact with updated salesian literature. It is kept alive by communication with the Congregation: of the substantial kind through directives and guidelines, and also of the informal kind which comes through the rapid exchange of information. Where confreres and communities have easy access to these sources in line with the value due to each, and where such sources are esteemed, one notes a greater abundance of references and motivations and a greater daily sense of life in unity.

Nowadays, when the multiplicity of proposals and the chronological distance from our Founder might make us more disposed to accept different ways of doing things, familiarity should be encouraged with the texts which document our history and present our religious experience in an authoritative manner.

But this unity we are speaking of is also stable from an **institutional and organizational** point of view. I am told this frequently by friends who admire the linkage and correspondence that exists between the Rector Major and his Council, between the Provincials and their Councils, and between both of these and the Rectors. It reminds us of a desire of Don Bosco which coincides with that of Jesus himself: that the union between his disciples should be real and manifested by signs that could be humanly perceptible. Organization for the purpose of unity is a criterion which Don Bosco seems to have developed

precisely through the practice of government: "For a Congregation like ours to prosper, it must be well organized".¹⁵ The instrumental sense of structures, loyalty, shared responsibility and spirit of initiative ensure a practical decentralization which multiplies services and works, and which here and there even spills over into individualism: a risk to be accepted and a price to be paid for reconciling necessity with coordination and creativity.

In conversations with confreres I often hear it said, in contrast with my comments above, that some guidelines which imply a change of course are assimilated only slowly and apparently reluctantly by the communities. The application of General Chapters is an example of this. A certain tardiness is in the very nature of adaptations to be made which require complex processes, and in the dimensions of our Congregation which require long periods for them to reach all its parts which differ in cultural context, language and pastoral situation. But it is clear that we are everywhere moving in the same direction.

The unity of spirit and mentality, which rests also on institutional clarity is manifested in the first place in a **fraternity** of human and even juvenile traits. Salesians willingly listen and take an interest in the different situations in which their confreres are working. If nothing is said of particularly sad or painful items of which they have heard general remarks, they ask for further information. The story is often the part of the conversation most eagerly awaited and followed. In interregional meetings called for the purpose of studying problems of particular areas or sectors, discussion starts up at once as between members of a family, even though the participants may be seeing each other for the first time.

Great confidence is shown in the richness that can result from diversity, when there is awareness of the common inspirational elements and guidelines. Living together in "international" communities committed to the same salesian mission in

¹⁵ BM 9, 268

line with the style of life traced out by the Constitutions, is already an established fact and is becoming ever more a criterion to be followed; it has in fact already been our practice.

I would add that unity is seen to be **efficacious in practice**. It is evident in declarations of availability and the readiness shown in putting at the service of the Congregation whatever the Rector Major judges suitable.

We see this in missionary collaboration. At a time of a widespread falling off in vocations we were able to launch "Project Africa", which is now at the consolidation stage. Through the annual sending out of missionaries, new foundations are being established or areas are being strengthened where there is the possibility of development.

Not less is financial solidarity, expressed through various channels: the missions fund, the solidarity fund, notable contributions by the Provinces to the missions entrusted to them, the funds raised by individual missionaries.

It has not escaped me that this grace of unity of spirit, of mentality, of government and fellowship and work, may come up against some of the typical trials of our time, like the simplistic assertion of cultural peculiarities, regionalism, gratuitous confrontations which seem to be taken for granted, an enclosure in one's own environment of work which hinders the giving of thought to the Church, the nation and the world. Such things have a grain of truth, but must be approached positively, kept within reasonable limits and made to interact with a firm identity, a sense of cordial belonging and a deep understanding of the reality of the Congregation. They are harmful, on the other hand, when they grow in uncontrolled fashion and in isolated form.

Don Bosco: a fascinating Saint

Among the factors contributing to our unity as a Congregation and Salesian Family, the first and most powerful is love for Don

Bosco. It is an empathy, an admiration, a feeling, an attraction, a kind of instinctive energy which leads to his imitation, the desire to remain with him spiritually and be involved in his work.

We know that grace is at the origin of our vocation. By directing us to Don Bosco as our Father, Teacher and Friend, the Holy Spirit has led us to the religious consecration characterized by his mission to the young and his educative concern.

In salesian tradition our affection has always been manifested without shame, almost with youthful enthusiasm, prolonging the admiration of the first young oratorians who wanted "to stay with Don Bosco" and formed the first nucleus of the Congregation. It is the sign of a filial rapport which is deeply felt.

From the Salesians this enthusiasm and admiration passes in the first place to the youngsters themselves, who express it in many forms according to their style: with songs, scenarios, T-shirts, celebrations, pilgrimages, reading of some biography, presentation of films and videocassettes, pleasure at being in or linked with our houses, friendship with confreres: a common collection of songs and hymns which by now has spread around the world and is heard in every language.

I have seen at first hand two results of this affection. In the young it gives rise to initiatives, thoughts, desires and projects in the line of commitment and growth in faith; it is a powerful vocational factor. In the communities it is a source of joy, of confidence in our work, of serene identification and membership. Even in cases in which a critical observer might discern a bit of ingenuity or exaggeration the results are positive. Coldness and detachment, on the other hand, seem entirely unproductive.

The admiration is not confined to our own environment. We hear comments, necessarily of a general kind, about the genius and originality of Don Bosco in ecclesial circles, from civil authorities and from ordinary people. Many expectations rely on the application of his methods and on the setting up of educative initiatives like those to which he gave origin.

I found interesting the study on the formation of Don

Bosco's image.¹⁶ It was certainly influenced by the adherence of his youngsters, who had been won over by his ability to love them and open them to life. They collected and spread anecdotes, dreams and enterprises with extraordinary narrative verve when modern means of communication were nonexistent. As they passed on their experiences, they seemed almost to bring the fascinating fatherliness of Don Bosco to life again. It is something that has remained among our charismatic and pastoral characteristics: the enthusiastic love for the Founder and its communication to the young.

It was also influenced by the manner in which his enterprises were presented by the Salesian Bulletin, under his direction and in line with his own criteria. Good was to be spread and presented in an attractive way.

But especially it was influenced by the direct impact of the style and educative results in a society becoming more and more concerned with the phenomenon of youth.

At the origin is a typical holiness, marked by pastoral charity capable of reaching a person's heart and attentive to the questions of his time. Congar, in a well known comment on the Council, referred to Don Bosco in these terms: "The greatest novelty of the Council lies in this: if the Church is in the world and in the world there are problems, then holiness is a phenomenon which is of concern to culture. This may seem a debatable concept, but a central point of the Council's intuitions is that there is a connection between holiness and history. With the Incarnation human history becomes the place where the love of God is expressed; holiness therefore is not born of flight from the world or its rejection, because it is in the measure that I immerse myself in the world to save it that I find the great gift of God.

Who are the saints? I like to recall in the first place one who preceded the Council by a century: Don Bosco. He was

¹⁶ Cf. Stella P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol.III; ch.I, pp.13-61

prophetically a new model of holiness through his work which distinguished him from his contemporaries' manner of thinking and judging".¹⁷

"We study and imitate him", say the Constitutions.¹⁸ The two seem linked together. Today a great deal is said about creative fidelity with respect to consecrated life. A serious approach and renewed attention in this sense not only takes nothing from the image of our Father, embellished by affection and by a tradition which has kept the memory of his deeds alive, but endorses the validity of his permanent place in the historical and ecclesial context.

Relevance of the message of education

One of the elements which emerge from the visits and is highlighted in celebrations is the esteem on the part of civil and ecclesial authorities for salesian work, specifically because of the combination of its original characteristics: its place in the youth area, preference for those most in need, harmonious integration of education, advancement and evangelization, and positive insertion in the ecclesial community and in society.

The preventive system in its various aspects, which include the manner of being present among the young (assistance), the creation of broad youthful environments for encounter and work, a community which includes young people as members with responsibility, multiple projects adapted to different levels requirements and groups, the oratorian model which impresses a physiognomy on all initiatives: these are all elements which give rise everywhere to positive comments, expectations and the desire for greater knowledge.

In the presence of authorities and of the people we have the opportunity to explain our fundamental intuitions, our history,

¹⁷ Congar, Vatican Radio, 20 Feb '84; *Avvenire* 22 Feb '84

¹⁸ C 21

the modern formulation of our system, and to reply to questions about its efficacy in the face of phenomena at present troubling society.

I come back home with offerings or requests for new foundations, not only in the so-called poor countries but also in those well developed but beset by new and uncontrollable manifestations of youth distress, and of new questions linked with the accompaniment of young people in the faith. The traditional educational agencies and initiatives on which at one time we used to rely are proving insufficient, not from a quantitative standpoint but from their adequacy. At the centre of the crisis is "educative rapport" (parents and children, the generation gap, institutions and students, teachers or communicators and pupils) which is the hub and wisdom of the preventive system. It happens not infrequently therefore that those unable to appreciate pedagogical details see in the salesian method and in the way young people respond to it that it provides the young with a sure formula for handling and resolving difficult situations.

Not only is this legacy of ours recognized, but practical appreciation is shown for our competence, especially in some specific areas of education: preparation for employment, the animation of spare time, informal education for the rescue of children, scholastic experience, youthful emargination, group activity.

We see in these requests an invitation by society and the Church to exploit all the individual and communal resources of our charism, and to think up new applications and possibilities of activity.

The salesian mission and its animating spirit are today at the centre of an effort of diffusion which must not diminish, but rather come to grips in practice with what is learned in life. Don Bosco used to say: "Come and see how we work". Direct contact with the young and their circumstances, our way of setting up and animating a work of education will always provide the best presentation and the best lesson on the preventive system, which cannot be understood unless it is seen in action. Systematic

knowledge and practice make possible its communication to those who work with us in the pastoral field of education.

A strategic point: formation.

In moulding the reality we have spoken of, an indispensable part has been played by formation. The forms of apostolate of the Salesians and the contexts in which they work have been and still are very diverse. The Congregation has gone ahead by preparing its members as pastors and educators, deploying communities (often small ones) in distant places and confidently entrusting them with pastoral opportunities and responsibilities. Trust was shown in their fidelity and creative ability.

With so open a style and in fields of activity so diverse, formation comes to be an aspect which is both strategic and sensitive. It should not therefore be exposed to improvisation nor sacrificed to practical needs. The Constitutions lay down the principle of unity and decentralization in formation. To ensure a proper balance between these two criteria and protect them from individual or occasional evaluation, they also indicate limits by indicating a program which is obligatory for all (the *Ratio*), and leaving to the responsibility of Provinces or Provincial Conferences local adaptations in the *Directory*, both of them requiring the approval of the Rector Major and his Council.

Human maturity, spiritual depth, pastoral competence and enthusiasm, and the salesian spirit all take root and have their first sure growth in a deliberately formative environment and with the help of prepared formation guides.

Formation communities and structures are the most powerful system we have available for communicating our spiritual heritage and salesian pastoral praxis: for the length of time of exposure, for the systematic nature of transmission, for the human environment in which communication takes place, for the many channels through which it is passed on, and for the willing participation on the part of those to whom it is directed.

Results show that the kind of formation we have used in the past has been efficacious in its fundamental aspects: identity, religious sense, moral dependability, communal responsibility, pastoral dedication, and the ability of striking up an understanding with the people.

The unity created by it, which is not just material uniformity, has been strengthened by living in international centres which have provided qualified superiors and created networks of friendship, interests and knowledge.

At the present day much evolution is taking place in the system of formation. The very concept of formation is changing, starting from the need for ongoing formation and from the multiplicity of possibilities which the subject is called upon to use and unify. We are facing the need for an overall adaptation of the system of formation, in line with the new type of candidate which is coming forward, the configuration of the pastoral field, the practical model we are trying to apply, the challenge posed by secular culture to Christian identity, and to the consideration of the place of our religious consecration in the ecclesial context. We are therefore facing a demand for a greater expansion of the professional approach in our educative and pastoral work.

This must not lead to a disintegration which is frequently the involuntary result of an incomplete and sectorial vision, but to a greater convergence on an identity, analyzed more deeply and assumed with greater awareness. This is the effort asked for from the Provinces in the processes of revision desired by the last General Chapter.¹⁹

But rather than from the reform of programs and methodologies, greater help will come in the immediate future from the personal determination and community commitment to not allow the gift we have received wither, but to extract from it all its richness through a form of community life which gives due importance to the formation of the confreres.

¹⁹ cf. GC24 147

Conclusion.

What I have said to you represents no more than a tiny part of what is emerging from the events of the Church and the more modest ones of those of our Family in which I have taken part. Living them from within, so to speak, leads us to a feeling of gratitude to the Lord, which is almost one of adoration. He is present with his Spirit and guides the progress of the Church and of our Family. To this gratitude for his gifts and divine protection is united the recognition of so many brothers and sisters who by their daily fidelity and extraordinary efforts have built the reality we witness today.

May Mary Help of Christians help us to follow where they have led and continue the work, confident that the seed will continue to fall in fertile soil.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Juan Tucki". The signature is written in a cursive style, with a large, sweeping initial "J" that extends downwards and to the left, forming a large loop. The rest of the name "uan Tucki" is written in a more fluid, cursive script.

RENEWED PASTORAL WORK FOR VOCATIONS

Fr Antonio DOMENECH

Councillor General for Youth Pastoral Work

In recent months several important meetings have taken place in connection with pastoral work for vocations. At Barcelona, Spain, at the beginning of February there was a European congress on salesian work in this field, with the participation of 90 confreres representing the European Provinces. A few weeks later there were two meetings on vocational pastoral work and formation, one at Harare (Zimbabwe) for English-speakers, and the other at Yaoundé (Cameroon) for French and Portuguese-speakers.

They were interesting periods of shared reflection on an argument which is central to Youth Ministry and one which has priority in the program for the present six-year period. The ability to give rise to vocations to salesian consecrated life and follow them up is one of the significant factors to be promoted in salesian foundations.¹ For this reason it was decided in programming the work of the Department to give special attention to this sector in developing youth pastoral work in general.²

In response to the request of some of the participants in these meetings I want to offer the Provinces and communities, and especially the Provincial Delegates and members of their teams, some reflections and guidelines which reached a certain convergence in the discussions. I think they can be of use in

¹ cf. 6-year program; AGC 358 (supplement)

² cf. *ibid*; area of animation 3

making an evaluation of the vocational quality and impact of the pastoral activities of communities in the various works.

When we speak here of vocations we must have in mind a harmonious union of the fundamental vocation of every individual to life and love, according to his having been made to God's image, with the Christian vocation of discipleship of Christ in the Church which we received in baptism, and the specific vocations or processes through which we realize the vocation of the following of Christ, in the service of the one mission. For this reason what is said about vocational pastoral work is open to all, and not just to a chosen group; but equally the obligation cannot be overlooked of a stronger and more radical promoting of vocations. In this reflection I would like to deal positively with each of these levels.

1. A vocational situation which is a challenge to us

The present vocational situation is marked everywhere by a disproportion between an ever more abundant harvest, and our own tiny forces.³ Rejecting pessimistic and alarming interpretations, I believe that this reality is for us a sign of the times, i.e. a strong word addressed by God to the Congregation to reawaken in our communities a dynamism of conversion and of deep pastoral renewal. This is how it was expressed by Fr Egidio Viganò in his letter on vocations in 1991: "It is also possible to see the present crisis in vocations as being linked with the signs of the times, and hence permitted by God to reawaken in Christian communities a dynamic conversion, a sense of creativity and innovation which will tailor the care for vocations to the social and cultural challenges".⁴

Our fundamental attitude, therefore, must be one of faith and

³ cf. Mt 9,37

⁴ AGC 339, p.18

confidence, in the certainty that God is calling us to a renewed fidelity to our vocation, so that the transparency and contagious dynamism of our communities may be renewed as well.

2. A vocational youth ministry

Vocational pastoral work is not just one activity or sector amongst others in pastoral work for the young, but rather its fundamental characteristic. "All pastoral work, and especially that for the young, is vocational of its very nature; in other words, to speak of vocation is to speak of the constitutive and essential dimension of all ordinary pastoral work, because the latter is from the outset essentially directed to vocational discernment. Pastoral work for vocations is the vocation of all pastoral work at the present day".⁵

But we must move on to practical applications and look at some concrete elements of our pastoral activity which are necessary if it is to lead young people to a committed vocational option.

In the various meetings already referred to, some of these elements appeared, and I think they can help us in making a vocational verification of our pastoral practice.

2.1 *Giving priority to evangelization*

When we are beset by a multitude of activities, structures and obligations, it happens not infrequently that we run the risk of losing sight of the horizon at which we are aiming, and we appear as great pastoral activists, managers of works and structures, outstanding benefactors, but very little as explicit witnesses to Christ and mediators of his saving actions. A pastoral project or activity will be "vocational" only if it gives ef-

⁵ Final document of Congress on vocations to priesthood and consecrated life in Europe, Vatican 1998, n.26a

fective **primacy to evangelization**, directing all its activities, proposals and interventions to opening individuals and groups to Jesus Christ.

Important elements to be given pride of place in our educative project are: a clear and explicit presentation of the evangelical motives underlying our activity, the meaningful proclamation of the person of Jesus, direct and pedagogically prepared contact with the Word of God, moments of celebration and of personal and communal prayer, and effective communication and encounters with believers and Christian communities of yesterday and today.

2.2 Developing a systematic process of education to the faith

We are very good at creating welcoming and festive environments, in organizing numerous and attractive activities, in trying to provide a generous response to requests of young people, but we find it more difficult to handle a systematic and continuous process of education to the faith, to use a methodology which helps to personalize evangelical values and attitudes, and to propose effective experiences which open new horizons and lead to progress.

To *personalize* one's own faith means to pass from an adherence to evangelical values or from an admiration and first enthusiasm for Christ, to *a deep and solid personal relationship of friendship with him* through systematic contact with the Word of God, which illumines one's own life, and sacramental experience, especially through the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

Personalization always means growing in the *experience of Church*, even to the extent of taking the Christian community as my new family in which I receive Christ and the gift of the Spirit, and to which I am called upon to give growth through the generous giving of my life for the Kingdom.

Personalization means, moreover, the maturing of certain

attitudes which permit young people to take up *life as a vocation*, like self-knowledge, confidence in oneself and others, the meaning and value of life as a gift and responsibility, gratuitous self-giving and service, willingness to be called upon and involved, courage to dream and aim at great things, and the willing acceptance of God through mediation.

Do we attend to these aspects of our PEPS, especially when organizing our time and resources?

2.3 A pastoral work centred in the community

An important aspect for ensuring that youth ministry becomes vocational is the creation of welcoming and lively communal environments, which enable life to witness to the joy of the Gospel and the following of Christ, with the courage to make strong and meaningful proposals and to accompany individuals and groups in their process of maturing and development.

Nowadays vocational suggestions are put forward in the evangelical style of "*come and see*". This was also Don Bosco's line of approach; he wanted to teach the young a kind of Christian life which would make them happy, and for this reason he saw to it that in the Oratory there should always reign a great happiness and a family style which attracted youthful hearts.

An important objective of our pastoral work is the building up of a salesian community which manifests the values of the religious life embodied in the confreres, which shares with the young moments of life and prayer, giving ever more explicit care to the motivations behind personal options and commitments; a community in which is felt the joy of fellowship and family spirit.

2.4 A pastoral work which gives prior attention to the individual

We want the individual to be at the centre of our pastoral

activity, but in practice we frequently find ourselves occupied in so many things, projects, activities, organization, that we are unable to find the time and opportunity for real attention and sharing in a free and family manner with the youngsters, confreres and lay collaborators. The rhythm of life is such that we become reduced to pastoral functionaries.

The message of the GC24 to the young takes up one of their requests: "You asked us insistently to be present among you spontaneously to a greater extent, to share your life in an informal manner; you want us to accompany you and help you in attaining a deeper formation...".⁶

It behoves us to recover this fundamental dimension of pastoral work, especially if we want it to be vocational pastoral work, seeking time and occasions for free and familiar sharing, assigning persons for the work of dialogue and the follow-up of individuals and groups.

3. The family, a prior objective

For different reasons many families, even Christian ones, find it difficult to understand, respect, encourage and foster the vocational choices of their sons and daughters; often they think about their future using criteria which are different from, if not opposed to, evangelical values which constitute vocational culture, such as interest, prestige and yield.

The family plays a decisive part in the formation of the mentality and the education of the deep attitudes of the individual, as for instance in religious formation. For this reason it is important to interest parents and the family in the educative and pastoral process being offered to youngsters, and to help them to be aware of their responsibility in fostering the vocation of their children.

⁶ GC24, 284

A first commitment to promote is the knowledge of and interest in the family experience in which our youngsters live, through assiduous contact with parents and developing with them the deepest possible concern and educative experience.

As well as this, youth ministry must give great attention to the formation of parents and to accompanying them in their responsibility as educators in the faith; for this reason they are among the first to be brought into the life of the EPC.

One of the themes to be taken up with them is that of the vocation of their children, helping the latter to grow in proper autonomy and freedom, and to look upon their lives as a gift of God which parents must help to develop according to his divine plan, by collaborating in the process of the vocational discernment of their offspring.

This can well be a specific area of collaboration with the lay groups of the Salesian Family.

4. A vocation which calls for special attention, that of the Salesian Brother

The salesian religious vocation is not complete unless it is presented as a community way of life in which the lay religious vocation of the salesian brother and the priestly religious vocation of the salesian priest react in mutual complementarity.

But in point of fact we have been witnessing for years a constant decline in brother vocations in the Congregation. We have reflected on this reality in countless meetings, and we have wondered how we can put forward the vocation of the salesian brother in our vocational pastoral work.

It is not easy, particularly in certain contexts, to make the identity and value of the salesian brother understood: the values of consecration are not perceived with sufficient clarity and incisiveness, community life does not appear as something fundamental and an evangelical novelty in its concrete style of life and

work. And so many young persons who have a desire to share in the salesian spirit and mission do not think of salesian religious life. The salesian religious proposal, therefore, needs to live and present in fidelity to Don Bosco's plan the figure of a consecrated person which is meaningful for the young:

- an individual committed to the service of life while recognizing the absolute nature of God; able to inculcate confidence in education and the integral advancement of the young, as Don Bosco did;
- with a way of living the evangelical counsels so as to manifest their pedagogical effect on human growth and of prophecy of a new humanity;
- with clear testimony to community life in a family spirit, open to sharing in life and prayer, with a style of action which balances work with community life and prayer, all at the service of the poor;
- and with a particular sensitivity for the world of work, attention to the social reality of the local neighbourhood, and open to the need of a professional approach in educative and pastoral activity.⁷

5. Some practical consequences

5.1 *Every salesian community is responsible for the vocational animation of the young people with whom it is working*

In every meeting there was insistence on the vocational responsibility of the salesian community, and on the need to give it a vocational aspect and environment. Vocational orientation is not the responsibility of a few confreres who have been given such work as a special task, but an essential part of the educa-

⁷ cf. GC24, 151-155

tive and pastoral activity of the community and each of its members, as is recalled by the GC23.⁸

The community fulfils this responsibility:

- by being a community which is *effective and welcoming*: the young must feel that Don Bosco is alive in salesian communities, not only as a community working for the young people themselves, but especially as a community of fellowship and faith; they must feel the joy of fraternity and the family lifestyle, and share with us the motivations of faith which nourish our life and work. A salesian community which is open to the young, and contagious as regards its religious vocation, is the first and most efficacious vocational proposal for the young;

- by taking care that in its own PEPS there is provision for *explicit moments and processes of animation and vocational guidance*;⁹

- by facilitating the *welcoming and follow-up of young people*, especially those who show signs of a vocation to a consecrated life;

- by fostering frequent moments of shared prayer with the various members of the EPC and the local Church for vocations; in this we express our faith in the action of the Spirit, who renews his gifts in every young person, and nourishes our availability to be efficacious mediators of his call.

Aging confreres can make a special contribution in this field as witnesses of an admirable salesian life. Communities should seek to provide opportunities for contact and rapport with the young: taking part in meetings with them, and being willing to converse with them in groups and vocational camps, ready to offer them priestly ministry, etc.

⁸ cf. GC23, 247ff.

⁹ cf. GC23, 252

5.2 A precise process of vocational animation at provincial level must be laid down in the PEPS

Everywhere there are many vocational activities and initiatives, but frequently the Provinces lack a concrete program of vocational guidance which can give continuity and gradual development to the various proposals offered, and ensure their convergence and complementary nature.

This ordered arrangement should be included in the process of education to the faith proposed in the PEPS, emphasizing certain objectives and aspects more significant for vocational guidance, fostering certain activities and periods of a more directly vocational nature, and giving special attention to those more open to a process of vocational discernment. Some elements to be included in the PEPS are the following:

a. *A vocational guidance* offered to all youngsters from an early age, through:

- pedagogical and professional guidance, in line with age and situation, to help each youngster to discover his personal resources and make fruitful the gifts he has received;
- an educative environment with indications for living life as a vocation;
- information about different vocations in society and the Church (meetings, witnesses, experiences);
- the possibility of experiences of freely given service to those most in need, as a training for generosity and availability;
- personal formative contact, offered to all young people who want it.

b. *A clear and explicit vocational proposal*, through:

- the presence of and contact with significant personal and community evidence of the past and present;

- a deep spiritual formation through initiation to prayer, to listening to the word of God, to frequentation of the sacraments, and to participation in the liturgy and in Marian devotion;
- active sharing in the life of the ecclesial community through apostolic groups and movements, considered as privileged places for Christian and vocational maturing;
- a deepening, in the various stages of the process of education to the faith, of the vocational theme, especially in the period of adolescence and early adulthood;
- a personal invitation to follow the vocation;
- the possibility of direct contact with some community as a vocational reference point.

c. Careful and gradual discernment:

- made in community following agreed criteria;
- through direct knowledge, dialogue and frequent communication, prayer and meditation, which open the individual to availability to God's call, and sharing in the apostolic commitment of the community;
- with an experience of community, through sharing the life, prayer and mission of a salesian community.

5.3 A fundamental point: personal follow-up

Personal follow-up or accompaniment is a fundamental element in an educative and pastoral process which places the young person at its centre. It is of still greater importance in the salesian educative system, which is founded on the presence of the educator among the youngsters and on a personal relationship based on mutual knowledge and interest, on understanding and confidence.

But in fact we sometimes find ourselves busy about so many things that we do not give the young people a real possibility of

opening themselves and being accompanied. It is desirable, therefore, that each community should reassess its pastoral tasks so as to give the necessary time to the follow-up of individuals.

When we speak of follow-up we are not referring only to individual dialogue but to a *whole collection of personal relationships* which help the individual to make a personal assimilation of values and lived experiences, to adapt general principles to his own concrete situation, and to clarify and deepen his motives and criteria.

It includes *different levels* which mutually complete each other, and which the salesian community must promote as a matter of real priority, to ensure an educative environment able to foster personalization and vocational growth:

- presence among the young, with the intention of getting to know them and of sharing one's life with them, and with an attitude of trust and confidence;
- the promotion of groups in which youngsters are followed up by an animator and by their own companions;
- brief occasional contacts which show interest for the individual and his world, and educative care and attention at certain moments of special significance for him;
- frequent moments of brief and systematic personal dialogue, following a concrete plan;
- contact with the salesian community, sharing its life of prayer, fellowship and apostolate.

In the practice of follow-up or accompaniment, and especially in personal dialogue, it is well to make sure that attention is given to *certain fundamental points* for the human and Christian growth of the young person and the discernment of signs of a vocation. They include the following:

- *Educate to self-knowledge*, to discover the values and qualities which the Lord has sown in each one, but also the limitations and inconsistencies in his ways of living or thinking.

How many young people have failed to respond to a vocational appeal, not because they were indifferent or lacking in generosity, but simply because they were never helped to know themselves and discover the shaky and pagan root of certain mental or affective ideas, or because they were not helped to free themselves from fears and defences with regard to the vocation itself.

- *Develop the recognition of Jesus as the Risen Saviour* and the supreme meaning of one's own existence. Vocational motivations must be founded on the recognition of the initiative of God, who first loved us.

- *Educate to reading one's own life and history as a gift of God and as a call* to offer it in the service of the Kingdom. To help to throw light on this life, with all its density, as the Word of God, with reference to Jesus Christ, lived and shared in the Christian community, to discern the gift and call it signifies for each one of us, is a slow and patient process which requires courage and hope.

- *Deepen the personal assimilation of evangelical values* as permanent criteria of the options made in daily life, resisting the temptation to follow the crowd in doing what is most easy, useful or efficacious. An aspect to which we need to give special attention in this field is education to love and affectivity.

5.4 Assign certain persons to work for vocations

The practical importance of a project is reflected in a particular way in the quantity and quality of those who are assigned to it. If we assume as the important objective for the present six-year period "to promote with the Salesian Family an explicit vocational project, truly ecclesial and salesian"¹⁰ we must assign to it personnel, times and resources.

¹⁰ cf. Department Program, 33

The following suggestions were among those proposed in connection with these responsibilities in the European and African meetings:

- The *provincial delegate for vocational animation*, as a member of the provincial team for youth pastoral work, should have as his first task:

- to help the communities to commit themselves directly in the vocational animation of their own work;
- to foster the unity and coordination of the process of vocational animation in the province;
- to follow and coordinate the more significant and important experiences of vocational animation;
- to dedicate himself to the vocational follow-up of young people and the coordination of those accompanying them.

- The *Rector of each community* must take up again the role of guide of the young and especially of the animators and collaborators,¹¹ and be himself animator of the vocational quality of the community and of its clarity and effectiveness.¹²

- *All who have any responsibility for animation* in the pastoral field (the Provincial with his Council, the provincial delegate with his team, the parish priest and director of the oratory, etc.) should consider vocational animation as an integral element in their task, and foster the involvement of all in the EPC who share our educative and pastoral project.

6. Conclusion

We are living in a period of grace, in which God is renewing his Church with a great variety of vocations. In the last Gen-

¹¹ cf. GC23, 252

¹² cf. GC24, 168

eral Chapter we thanked the Lord for the fertility of the Salesian charism, but this obliges us to bear witness to and promote this common vocation which unites the Salesian Family, and *“to make a responsible commitment to a unified pastoral work for vocations, with special attention to vocational guidance and the putting forward of the various forms of Christian vocation (lay, ordained ministry, consecrated life), and specifically those of the Salesian Family”*.¹³

And I finish with the words of the Pope to the participants in the European Congress on Vocations: *“You are facing a task which is far from easy, but unceasing prayer... nourishes hope in God’s promise and in the radical responses to his call: they are possible even in our own days. Prayer is the secret which can guarantee the rebirth of confidence within the Christian Community. Prayer is the constant support of all who are called to give their service in these difficult years which, however, are not without clear signs of a new spiritual springtime”*.

¹³ GC24, 146

4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

13 March. Fr Vecchi left Rome for **Bonn** to take part in a seminar on the theme: *Youth work in the Eastern European countries of the reform*. It was organized by the Missions Office of Bonn, with Fr Karl Oerder as the moderator.

The seminar lasted from 8 to 16 March, and the Rector Major was present for the full day of the 14th, during which he expressed the thought of the Congregation on proposed themes and initiatives of collaboration in projects for the benefit of youngsters of Eastern Europe. He emphasized *the positive prospects and significance of collaboration with both governmental and private agencies: involvement in a movement sensitive to ecumenism, peace, just distribution of resources, and the love and charity proper to the Christian message*.

He stressed that the present proposals had been prompted by the *inspiration, memory and practical holiness of Don Bosco, and his pastoral charity: the salesian educative vocation open to and in contact with all youngsters, religiously motivated or not yet so; and with the collaboration of the laity*.

On Sunday 15th, Fr Vecchi had a meeting with the Salesians, saw the new building to which the Mission Office will soon be transferred, presided at Mass in the small parish church, and returned to Rome.

20 March. The Rector Major went to the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences at the Auxilium, Rome, and spoke to the students about the Synod for America, answering questions afterwards.

21 March. He left Rome for **São Paulo**, Brazil, to preach a retreat for all the Provincials of America. Afterwards he visited several salesian works in the Province.

The retreat took place at Compo do Jordão from 22 to 28 March, and during the week the Fr Vecchi was able to speak personally with each Provincial and the two Regionals. At the end of the exercises the whole group made a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady Aparecida where they concelebrated a Eucharist which was broadcast on television.

In the afternoon of the same day, Saturday 28th, with the Provincial and the Regional he visited the theological studentate of **Lapa**, where he had a meeting with all the confreres in formation in the Province, from pre-novices to students of theology; he spoke to them about *the great development of the Congregation in the world, referring in particular to the places he had visited in his two years as Rector Major*, and indicated what in his opinion were the reasons for such development.

29 March, Sunday. He visited the **Santa Teresinha** Institute in São Paulo, which has 4,500 students from elementary to high-school level. He blessed some new localities for school activities, and in the large gymnasium had a meeting with the Salesian Family, at which 800 were present. Fr Vecchi reminded them that they corresponded to *Don Bosco's great desire to bring together as many persons as possible of good will who were concerned about the education of the young to meet the urgent needs of young people of today. The desire continues, he said, and is reflected in the program of the Salesian Family for the third millennium which is to grow individually in quality, and also in number as the members spread Don Bosco's spirituality and program.*

In the afternoon Fr Vecchi went by helicopter to the aspirantate at **Piracicaba**, where he greeted the Rector and confreres and met the local Bishop; and then listened to addresses of welcome and songs of the aspirants in praise of Don Bosco, and similar presentations by the Cooperators.

Fr Vecchi reminded the aspirants of John Bosco's dream at the age of nine, which had set him on the road to the priesthood. The path had not been easy but he pursued it with constancy and determination.

He reminded the Cooperators of Don Bosco's phrase: "*Without the Cooperators, the Salesians are nothing*", and that their efforts must not be only for the Salesian Congregation but for the Church, in which they are called to work with Don Bosco's spirit for the benefit of the young.

After this meeting the helicopter took him on to **Campinas** where it landed in the playground of the Mary Help of Christians High School, with its 2,700 pupils from elementary to pre-university levels. Here there was a meeting in the splendid Basilica of Our Lady with all the Salesian Family. Fr Vecchi thanked them for their welcome, congratulated them on the spectacle they had provided and reminded them of what Don

Bosco had said: *To do good to many youngsters you need to be numerous and united. It is my hope that the whole Salesian Family of Campinas will grow in numbers and union.*

The event concluded with the blessing of Mary Help of Christians, after which the Rector Major spent a little time with the confreres, and then left to return to the Itaquera quarter of **São Paulo**, a poor area on the outskirts of the city in the diocese of Bishop Fernando Legal SDB. Here the Salesians run the great *Obra Social Dom Bosco*, a professional training centre for some 5,000 boys and girls with many different sections. There are also eight hostels, with some 20-25 students accommodated in each.

After the usual welcoming ceremony, Fr Vecchi visited the workshops and inaugurated some new ones. After supper with the confreres and Bishop Legal, he returned to the Provincial House.

The Rector Major's visit to Brazil concluded on 30 March with a visit to the **Bom Retiro** College in São Paulo, a professional training centre with 970 students. After meeting them he had a further final meeting with the confreres, and left them a message for the Province centred around three points: the local

community, the Province, and the salesian world.

***The local communities** are the spearhead of the Congregation. The last General Chapter asked them to become animating nuclei in respect of the laity. That means that there must be a detailed plan for the latter's formation, for their acceptance of shared responsibility in the salesian mission and spirit, and for communicating to them Don Bosco's spirituality.*

***The Provinces** must develop and exploit their resources to the utmost, by the formation of personnel, attending to the effectiveness of their presence in their locality, and fostering deeper educative and pastoral work.*

***For the salesian world** there are two priorities: to consolidate our missionary foundations, and to think about new frontiers.*

Fr Vecchi then left for the airport to return to Rome.

1-7 April. In Rome the Rector Major presided at the "intermediate" session of the General Council, which studied in particular the salesian reality of Europe, with special reference to the North-West zone of the Northern European Region and that of the West European Region. Present, in addition to the Rector Major,

were the Vicar General, the Councilors for the various Departments and the Regionals of the two European Regions. The Council gave the go-ahead for the erection of two new Vice-provinces: Eritrea and Ethiopia, and Indonesia-Timor.

18 April, Sunday. Fr Vecchi went to Pavia, in the Milan Province, for the centenary celebrations of salesian work in that city. After visiting the two works of the FMA, the Mary Help of Christians Institute, and the Don Bosco work known as the League for Good Works, a reception centre for youngsters who are abandoned or in difficult family circumstances, he was received in the Town Hall by the Mayor and civic authorities, who expressed their thanks for the work done in the city by the sons and daughters of Don Bosco. He was presented with a bronze medal with a reproduction of the symbol of the city of Pavia.

In the afternoon, after the blessing of a chapel in the basement of the hostel called the "Crypt of the Dream", the Feast of the Salesian Family was celebrated in the playground with music, games and commemorative presentations. Touching was the recalling of the fact that Bish-

op Luigi Versiglia left for China from the salesian oratory of Pavia, a fact referred to by the Rector Major in his concluding address.

The festivities culminated in the solemn Eucharist celebrated in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace, which a hundred years ago was entrusted to the Salesians by the then Bishop of Pavia, Mgr. Riboldi. It was the best way to give thanks to God, as Fr Vecchi recalled in the homily, when he expressed the hope that God would keep the Salesian Family united, increase its numbers, and continue to produce among them fruits of holiness.

19 April to 14 May. The Rector Major took part in the Bishops Synod for Asia, the great ecclesial event which enabled him to make contact with the multiple realities of the Church in Asia, its expectations, and the challenges to the mission there, which are also expectations and challenges for our own Society. He refers at length to the Synod in his letter published in this edition of the AGC.

He interrupted his participation in the Synod to go to the United States of America where two events were programmed in connection with the salesian cente-

nary in that country: a retreat for all the Rectors of the two Provinces, preached by the Rector Major himself, and the solemn conclusion of the centenary in the Cathedral of New York.

Fr Vecchi arrived in New York in the evening of 24 April and was taken to the Provincial House in New Rochelle.

25 April, Saturday. Accompanied by the Provincial, he flew to Chicago where, at the invitation of the Archbishop and the numerous past-pupils present in the city, the Salesians have recently begun work in the parish of St John Bosco (which was the first parish dedicated to the Saint after his canonization). It is a symbolic work in which collaboration has been expressed by the Interamerican Region, which is showing concern for the many hispanic immigrants in Chicago. Fr Vecchi inspected the parish premises and those intended for the youth centre, had a meeting with the confreres and collaborators, and endorsed the lines of the pastoral program explained to him. After celebrating Mass in the parish and a festive supper, he went to the residence of the Cardinal Archbishop where he spent the night, and left on the following day to return to New York.

26 April - 1 May. The Retreat

took place at **West Haverstraw**, a youth and retreat centre directed especially to the young. Present were all the directors of the two provinces of the USA and of the Vice-province of Canada. The celebration of Lauds and Vespers were animated by the directors. The Rector Major, in addition to the conferences, presided at the Eucharist, preached the homilies and gave the Good Nights, in which he spoke of various items like vocations, the situation in Cuba and China, his recent journey to Africa, and the Synod.

1 May. Fr Vecchi had a meeting with the coadjutor brothers, and emphasized the importance of the vocational pastoral work of the brother; *he indicated some lines of the formation of the brother after the novitiate, and pointed out the original and unique nature of the brother's service.*

After this meeting he went with the Provincial, Fr Angelucci, to **The Marriott Hotel** at Park Ridge in New Jersey, where the centenary banquet was to take place. The festive evening had been very well prepared. 700 people were present between members of the Salesian Family and friends; they included Cardinal Rosalio Castillo Lara, Mgr. Oscar Rodriguez, the salesian bishop of Tegucigalpa (who gave the

commemorative address for the centenary), and Mgr. Emilio Allué, the salesian auxiliary bishop of Boston.

2 May, Saturday. This was another day of great festivity in the Great Adventure Park at Six Flags, one of the largest in America, where there was a great encounter and spectacle with the young people, with music, singing, various interventions, and a question and answer session between the young and the Rector Major, which concluded in the afternoon with the celebration of the Eucharist in the park itself.

3 May, Sunday. In the first part of the morning Fr Vecchi had a meeting at New Rochelle with the seven new priests ordained in recent years, and the two deacons who will be ordained in the coming months, and then left for St Patrick's Cathedral on the famous Fifth Avenue in Manhattan for the centenary Eucharist which began punctually at 2 p.m. The Cardinal Archbishop of New York (Mgr John Joseph O'Connor) presided, and in addition to the Rector Major there were several bishops among the concelebrants. They included Cardinal Castillo Lara, Abp. Renato Martino, representative of the Holy See to the United Nations, Mgr Basil

Losten, Bishop for the Ukrainians, Mgr Emil Allué, auxiliary Bishop of Boston, and Mgr Raymond Goedert, Vicar General of Chicago.

The number of priests concelebrating were about 120, the majority of them Salesians, but there were also representatives of other religious Institutes as well.

The Provincials of the Eastern and Western Provinces of the USA (Frs Patrick Angelucci and Nicholas Reina) were present, together with the Superior of the Canadian Vice-province (Fr Richard Authier), the Provincials of Central America (Fr Heriberto Herrera) and of the Antilles (Fr Angel Soto) and delegates of the two Mexican Provinces. The celebration began with the blessing of an alto-rilievo at the end of the Cathedral as a memorial of the centenary celebration.

The Holy Mass, very well arranged and animated as regards singing and ceremonies, was followed with attention and devotion by the large crowd of worshippers which packed the Cathedral, and was transmitted by TelePace which, in collaboration with the TV of Mother Angelica, reaches by satellite the whole of America, Europe, the Middle East and the southern part of Africa.

In his homily Fr Vecchi traced

the story of Don Bosco, of his vocation, and of his mission and educative system. He concluded by declaring that *"the difference that can exist between Don Bosco and ourselves is in the intensity of our faith. Our own faith often seems to waver beneath the impression we have of the weakness of our strengths and the scarcity of our resources. We are worried by the sense of our limitations. Don Bosco saw himself as a weak instrument in the powerful hands of God, and declared that everything had been done by the Blessed Mother. Our limitations must weigh less with us than our capacity to entrust ourselves to his grace."*

We are affected too by a certain insensitivity of our environment to the religious message. After the incarnation the world is permeated by the presence of God: he is at work in every heart, in every desire for good, in every act of generosity, in every society. It is part of our spirit 'to have full confidence in the Father', to believe in man's natural and supernatural resources, 'to embrace the values of the world and proclaim the good news with unfailing joy and hope'. This is the food that will sustain us on our journey".

At the end of the Mass, Cardinal Castillo Lara read a telegram of greetings and blessing from the

Holy Father, and the Provincial (Fr Angelucci) thanked the Bishops and all present for their participation; he presented Cardinal O'Connor and the Rector Major with a miniature copy of the altorilievo blessed at the beginning of the celebration.

In the evening Fr Vecchi returned to Rome, and the following morning found him once again participating in the work of the Synod for Asia which ended on 14 May.

15 May, Friday. The Rector Major left Rome once again, this time for the **Province of Seville** in Spain. The occasion was the centenary of the work at Carmona, but he profited by the opportunity to visit other houses as well.

In the afternoon of the 15th, after a reception at the Provincial House, he met the young confreres in formation in the nearby theologate. Speaking to them he outlined the *characteristics of the Salesian: a person humanly mature, capable of relationships, of taking responsibility, and of stability of purpose; with a deep religious sense, convinced of the validity of the salesian spirit, enthusiastic about the reality of our life, and full of love for the young. The Salesian, moreover, must be pastorally well trained in educative*

tasks, in the animation of large and small groups, and in the ability to follow up and accompany individuals: humanly mature, with religious depth, salesian convictions and pastoral skill.

16 May, Saturday. The Rector Major was at **Utrera**, where the work includes a large Institute with 1,800 pupils, large playgrounds, a large theatre, a cloister, and a fine church dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Here the **provincial feastday** was celebrated. In addition to numerous Salesians, others present included Cooperators, past-pupils, and members of ADMA, who had come to take part in the festivities. The Rector Major met also the Mayor of the town, who is a past-pupil of the institute, accompanied by all the town council.

After the celebration of the Eucharist all moved to the theatre where Fr Vecchi, in reply to the greetings of the Provincial, after praising the province which is well organized and deeply committed to the mission and communion, went on to speak of some themes which are of particular interest to the Congregation at the present day. *The first concerns the new subject of pastoral work emerging from the GC24: the laity, called to play an active part, shar-*

ing the responsibility for the salesian educative mission. The second is the impact of our evangelizing activity and faith proposal on the young. The third is concern about vocations, and the final point regards missionary frontiers; and Fr Vecchi related some of the significant situations through which the Congregation is living or preparing to live in Africa and Asia.

After lunch, during which due honour was paid to those celebrating jubilees and milestones in their salesian lives, Fr Vecchi had a meeting with more than 200 young animators, first in the Church and then in the theatre; he spoke to them about some aspects of the life of the animator.

17 May, Sunday. The Rector Major left for the town of **Rota**, to visit the salesian work which is celebrating its golden jubilee. He was met at the town's outskirts by a civic representative, and was then accompanied by a police escort to the Town Hall, where he was welcomed officially by the Mayor (a salesian past-pupil) and the entire Town Council.

He then moved to the neighbouring church where he was welcomed by various groups of the ADMA, celebrating their XXXI Assembly, and then accompanied to

the Salesian Institute where he blessed a bust of Don Bosco erected by the municipality to mark the Jubilee, and finally went on to the Institute of the FMA where the people had gathered in the spacious gymnasium for the celebration of the Eucharist and the feast.

Returning then to Seville, at 6 p.m. he presided in the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians at a Eucharist during which seven young confreres from the Provinces of Córdoba and Seville made their perpetual profession.

18 May, Monday. Fr Vecchi paid a visit to the Archbishop (Mgr Carlos Amigo) at his residence, and then gave interviews to the local press and TV; an interesting point was a meeting with Fr José Maria Javierre, brother of Cardinal Antonio Javierre, who directs a Sunday television program entitled "Today's witnesses".

In the afternoon he had a meeting with the rectors of the Province, and then went on to visit the house of the FMA in the Nervión area, where he was welcomed by the Provincial and Sisters.

19 May. In the morning The Rector Major visited the houses of **Jerez de la Frontera** and

Cádiz, and received the usual festive reception in both places. In the afternoon he was at the salesian parish of Don Bosco in the **Seville-Triana** quarter. In the evening he met the Cooperators in the provincial house, and then went on to the neighbouring **Colegio Mayor** to meet the residents and former residents of the university hostel.

20 May, Wednesday. Finally, with the Provincial, Vice-provincial and other Salesians, Fr Vecchi reached **Carmona**, the final stop on his journey, though it had provided the motivation for the whole visit, the centenary of salesian work. Carmona, in fact, no longer has a stable salesian community, but is animated from neighbouring salesian communities.

The Rector Major was welcomed by the educators and pupils of the school, who put on an interesting spectacle in his honour. In reply Fr Vecchi thanked them and *emphasized that the work at Carmona had all the characteristics of a true salesian environment: family spirit, devotion to Our Lady, happiness and study. These are the foundations on which the pupils can grow and mature, becoming good Christians and upright citizens.*

After a rapid tour of the premises, Fr Vecchi reached the large gymnasium, where all the pupils of neighbouring salesian institutes who were members of the ADS had gathered, and presided at a Mass in honour of St Dominic Savio.

Afterwards he met the Mayor of Carmona, who expressed the gratitude of the citizens to the Salesians for the work they had done, and presented the Rector Major with a plaque as a souvenir of his visit.

In the afternoon Fr Vecchi returned to Rome.

23 May, Saturday. Shortly afterwards the Rector Major was at another celebration of fifty years of salesian work, this time at **Châtillon** in the Valle d'Aosta, where we have a centre for professional training.

The function included, as always, interventions by the oratorians emphasizing the significance of the salesian presence and manifesting the joy and happiness of the members. Of particular note, was the intervention of the Regional President, Dr Dino Vierin, who outlined the history of the Institute from 1948 to the present day, highlighting the various phases and improvements made possible by collaboration be-

tween the Salesians and the Regional Administration of the Valle d'Aosta.

In reply Fr Vecchi spoke of the importance trade schools and professional training centres had always enjoyed in salesian history and pedagogy. *With the oratories they had always been the works of predilection of the Salesians, and they were still characteristics of salesian work, even in mission territories.* He pointed out the benefits that had been gained by the young people of the Valle through the enterprise of the Salesians, the financial contribution of the Region and the unfailing adherence of the lay collaborators.

A concelebration of the Eucharist followed in the parish church, and immediately afterwards, in the Town Hall, the Mayor of Châtillon conferred honorary citizenship on the Rector Major as a sign of gratitude for the work done by the Salesians for local youth.

The Mayor also honoured with illuminated addresses Fr Giovanni Gobber, who had been the pioneer of salesian work at Châtillon, and Fr Aldo Spizzo, the present director.

The celebrations finished with lunch, after which Fr Vecchi returned to Turin and went to visit the Holy Shroud. He then re-

turned to Valdocco for supper with the provincial community and to prepare for the Midnight Mass in the Basilica, which is always the highpoint of the celebrations of the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians.

The Basilica was filled to overflowing and many priests concelebrated at the solemn Mass. The Rector Major gave the homily: Pentecost was approaching, and he dealt with the various Solemnities they were celebrating.

24 May, Sunday. The traditional procession through the neighbouring streets did not take place this year, because the Pope was in Turin on this day to visit the Holy Shroud.

In the morning Fr Vecchi went to visit the sick confreres of the "Mary Help of Christians" community at Valdocco, and then those of the "Andrew Beltrami" house at Valsalice. He also made a short visit to the San Giovanni Institute.

After lunch with the community of the provincial centre to mark the birthday of the Provincial, Fr Luigi Testa, Fr Vecchi returned to Rome.

27-30 May. The Rector Major was at Ariccia for the Assembly of the Union of Superiors General.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Councillors

The Vicar General

16-18 January 1998. Fr Van Looy coordinated the preparation and realization of the "Salesian Family Days of Spirituality", on the theme: *Together with the young, let us rediscover the presence of the Spirit in the Church and in the world.* In this period (which now covers a three-day weekend, to facilitate the presence of lay people) an effort was made to understand more deeply the different ways in which the various groups of the Salesian Family feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in the specific characteristics of each group. The question was approached from an educative standpoint, with a consideration of the pedagogy of the Spirit and the communication of the Spirit to the young and to people in general. In conclusion the Rector Major gave a commentary on the Strenna, as is customary on this occasion.

25 January. On the Sunday preceding the feast of Don Bosco, Fr Van Looy presided at the Eucharist in the Temple of Colle Don Bosco. The Mass was transmitted by the *Radio Maria* national network.

30 January. At Udine, he was at the "G. Bearzi" professional institute, to celebrate the feast of Don Bosco with the trainees and past-pupils.

31 January. At the parish of Gerini, Rome, for the feast of Don Bosco with the parishioners.

1 February. Fr Van Looy celebrated the same feast at the Generalate, for the people of the area who come to our church. In the afternoon he went to Tivoli, to the Generalate of the Salesian Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart, for a meeting on salesian spirituality.

2 February. He was at the Gregorian University to direct a morning for women religious on the spirituality of consecrated life.

14 February. At Messina for the national assembly of the Salesian Youth Tourism Group (TGS) on the theme: *Culture, Tourism, Environment*.

16-21 February. A meeting with four Provincials from Africa to draw up an aid for the formation of rectors for the African continent. The aid deals with: "the situation and needs of the missions in Africa" and is made up of five study themes: *Inculturation; Projects, programming and coordination; Salesianity; Formation and follow-up; Administration, community structures and financial means*. It concludes with

some practical suggestions. The aid is available for Provincials and Superiors in Africa.

22-28 February. At Porto in Portugal, he preached a retreat for the Salesian Family based on the salesian spirit and bible passages.

7 March. Fr Van Looy left for Asmara (Eritrea) for an eight-day visit to Ethiopia and Eritrea, and was able to meet every confrere. At the conclusion of these days, full of missionary hope, he had a meeting with the Council of the Delegation and the rectors. He thanked the confreres for their dynamism and for the projects they were carrying out so effectively.

15-21 March. At Zafferana Etnea he preached a retreat for the SDB and FMA rectors, superiors and council members of the Sicilian Provinces. After the retreat he was present for the opening of the SDB Provincial Chapter of Sicily.

29 March. The Vicar General represented the Rector Major at Don Bosco Boys Town (Rome-Prenestino) during the visit of the Pope to our parish.

1-8 April. Intermediate session of the General Council at the Generalate.

12-17 April. From the evening of Easter Sunday to the following Friday he preached a retreat to

the provincial council and rectors of North Belgium, interpreting the salesian educative spirit for our times.

19 April. At the UPS, he took part in the COSPES study-day on the *Orientation of education*.

Between 20 April and 21 May, Fr Van Looy was involved in the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Generalate*.

20 April. He presided in Belgium at the celebrations for the golden jubilee of the technical school of Hoboken.

1-4 May. The world assembly of the past-pupils took place at the Generalate. 3 May: Fr Van Looy guided the process of discernment preceding the election of the members of the World Council.

2 May. He was at Turin and Colle Don Bosco: at Turin for the pilgrimage from the Adriatic Province, and at Colle for the international games of the PGS.

8-10 May. He took part in the meeting of the Council of the World Union of Catholic Educators (UMEC) at the University of Cardiff in Wales.

22 May. He celebrated the Eucharist at the Salesian Pontifical University on the occasion of the feast of Mary Help of Christians, and immediately went on to Sicily for the festivities connected with the centenary of the house of

Pedara. On this occasion he was received in the Town Hall by the Mayor and City Council in the presence of many local people. All then went on foot to the Salesian House for the triduum for Mary Help of Christians.

23 May. The main celebrations at Pedara with pupils, teachers, past-pupils and friends of the work.

24 May. Fr Van Looy celebrated the Feast of Mary Help of Christians at the Generalate of the FMA.

The Councillor for Formation

On the basis of what the Rector Major indicated in his Letter "*For you I study*" (AGC 361), Fr Nicolussi on 15 January 1988 sent a communication to Provincials and their Councils asking them to draw up a provincial plan for the qualification of confreres, and to send it to the Rector Major by the end of November 1998 (cf. letter in AGC 363, pp.82-84).

Later, on 24 February 1998, the Councillor sent another letter to all Provincials concerning the revision of the FSDB, and asking each Province to contribute to the revision of the "*Ratio - Criteria and Norms*". The revision of the *Ratio* was also the principal

theme at the meeting between the formation departments of the FMA and SDB, which took place at the FMA Generalate on 27 March.

Another point in the department's programming, the reflection on the elements involved in "*perseverance and leaving*", was the object of a meeting between Fr Nicolussi and those responsible for the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the UPS who were asked to prepare a study outline in this connection.

Some *regional or zonal meetings or seminars* have taken place during this period.

Two of these were in the Region of Africa and Madagascar, together with the Councillor for Youth Ministry: at Harare (Zimbabwe) from 2 to 7 March, for the English-speaking areas, and at Yaoundé (Cameroon) from 9 to 14 March for the French and Portuguese-speaking areas. The two meetings, which brought together animators of vocational and youth pastoral work and of formation, concentrated on pastoral work for vocations and the first stages of formation. They were meetings of particular interest in this initial period of the Africa-Madagascar Region, and of the consolidation of salesian work in the continent.

On 23 and 24 March the Councillor was at Lisbon at the meeting of the West European Regional Conference, during which the Provincials and delegates examined the situation of initial and ongoing formation, and adopted certain practical guidelines for the coming years at the level of the Conference.

During May, *two regional seminars on initial formation took place in America*, with the participation of the provincial delegate and another formation guide from each Province. The seminar for the Southern Cone Region was realized at Ramos Mejia (Argentina) from 3-9 May, and the one for the Interamerican Region at Cumbayá (Ecuador) from 10-16 May. The main objective of these meetings was to emphasize and strengthen the role of the provincial commission of formation, at the service of the provincial formation project of each Province.

At Quito on 17 and 18 May, the central Department organized a meeting of interprovincial coordinators of ongoing formation of the two Regions of the American continent, for the purpose of sharing present experiences and deciding on sectors of collaboration.

Profiting by the opportunity offered by his presence in Ecuador for the regional seminar, Fr Nico-

lussi was able to meet with the formation communities of the Province and with the Provincial Council.

Earlier, from 10-12 February, had made contact with the formation situation in the Province of Slovakia, visiting the communities of the post-novices and of the students of theology, and holding meetings with the rectors and with the provincial formation commission.

From February to the end of May the Department maintained contact with a numerous group of Salesians who were following a one-semester course for formation guides in the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the UPS. The Department organized for them a particular visit to the "places of the origins", where the vocational process had developed of Don Bosco and his formative pedagogy.

The Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work

From 11-17 January Fr Domenech animated a retreat for rectors of the Piedmont Circumscription (ICP) on salesian spirituality. From 23-26 January he visited various salesian foundations in Hungary for the external feast of Don Bosco, and on the

30th was at the Salesian Institute at Este (Province of Verona) for the presentation of new programs of professional formation.

From 4-8 February at Barcelona (Spain) the Department, with the three Regionals of Europe organized a *European Meeting on Pastoral Work for Vocations*. 90 confreres took part, representing all the Provinces of Europe. In the meeting lines of pedagogy were sought which would permit the inclusion of ample vocational guidance in Pastoral Youth Ministry, and a clear and decisive proposal and follow-up of committed vocations and of special consecration in the Church and the Salesian Family.

At the end of the month (25 February - 1 March) the Councillor made a rapid visit to the Delegation of Mozambique for the annual meeting of the animators of the Salesian Youth Movement which took place at Moamba. He was able to visit a good part of the salesian work in the Delegation and present to the Salesians the fundamental lines of the PEPS.

Subsequently he was present at two meetings on vocational Pastoral Work and initial formation in Africa (cf. Chronicle of Fr Nicollussi above). In these meetings some criteria and practical guidelines were adopted on vocational

discernment and follow-up to make them more adequate for the cultural reality of young Africans.

From 16-18 March Fr Domenech took part at the Generalate in the second meeting of the central commission for *Confronto '99*, in which were fixed, with the agreement of the corresponding Department of the FMA, the objectives, theme and dynamics of the next European *Confronto*.

After the intermediate session of the Council and the Easter festivities, in the period from 14-30 April a *World Course in Youth Pastoral Work* took place at the Generalate. 32 Salesians took part, all of them national or provincial delegates from all regions of the Congregation, who would subsequently return to animate regional courses of a similar kind. The course aimed at giving those responsible for pastoral animation a clear and efficacious knowledge of the elements which identify salesian pastoral work for the young and their organic relationship, to develop the fundamental lines of a practical shared model, and to foster a method of reflection, planning and continual verification applicable to all workers in the pastoral field. This was the first step in a process of formation of such workers on the

fundamental lines of salesian youth pastoral work to be continued in the coming two years in line with the program.

In the same period the Department was represented at the World Congress on the Catholic School, organized by the OIEC at Jaipur (India) from 18-21 April, and at the ordinary Assembly which followed from 22-24 April.

From 4-9 May Fr Domenech had a meeting with Delegates and members of provincial teams from the Provinces of Eastern Asia. They went more deeply into some fundamental points of salesian youth pastoral work in the light of the characteristics and needs of the social, cultural and ecclesial realities of various countries.

In addition, the Department has promoted or participated in various meetings concerning schools and formation centres: 11-12 May at the meeting of the provincial delegates for schools and professional training centres of the SEP-SUR at Buenos Aires, and 15-17 May at Brussels at the third meeting of the European consulting body of the salesian school – this time with the FMA, to promote a common coordination of the animation of this sector.

Finally, Fr Domenech represented the Rector Major at the World Congress of Ecclesial Move-

ments and New Communities, held at the *Domus Pacis* (Rome) from 27-29 May.

The Councillor for the Salesian Family and for Social Communication

The activities of Fr Martinelli can be gathered together under three headings:

- A. Ordinary activities at the Generalate
- B. International engagements
- C. Extraordinary visitation of the Milan Province.

A. ORDINARY ACTIVITIES AT THE GENERALATE

The work has been intense in both the Department for the Salesian Family and in that of Social Communication. The latter has been reorganized, as regards the following points:

1. The renewal and relaunching of the Salesian Bulletin in the world.

The survey of the situations of the various national editions of the Bulletin has been completed. So too has been the analysis of the results.

An informative picture appears: interesting from some aspects and worrying from others.

All the documentation has been organized in a volume which will be sent to all those concerned with the theme of the Salesian Bulletin.

There has also been prepared an *action plan* which will soon be sent out. It will be of concern to directors and editors of Bulletins, those responsible for the sector in general, and any others who may be involved in the project of renewal and relaunching.

2. Verification of the Web pages realized by provincial centres and local communities.

In international and regional meetings regarding social communication the need has emerged to verify the salesian presence on the Internet.

The following three steps have been taken:

- a *three-day period of study and formation* on the significance and value, manner and quality of presence in the Internet. The course took place at the Generalate and was guided by external experts; it was open to all the confreres of the Generalate.
- following the course, a survey was launched of the Internet sites linked with salesian foundations.

The survey had a double objective:

- to make a list of all such known sites;
- to evaluate the sites against a prepared list of qualities.

In this operation only 15 sites were included, representative of works differing widely in type and geographical location.

- It was thought useful to gather all the material together on paper and on a CD, to serve as material for a reflection on a plan of intervention in the sector.

3. The preparation by the Department of a manual of formation to social communication for young confreres has continued. It is hoped to have the text ready by the end of the present year. A first version already exists and is in process of revision.

4. Work has also begun on a survey on the situation of salesian radio in Latin America, in view of an intervention for coordination and renewal.

A project is being developed in the Department to meet the different situations.

*The following activities relate to the **Salesian Family**:*

- the **preparation** of international meetings with provincial delegates in line with the program of the General Council,

for a revision of the project as so far realized;

- the preparation of the **World Assembly of the Past-pupils**;
- the preparation of the **World Council of the Salesian Family**.

B. INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

There have been two in particular of considerable importance:

1. **World Assembly of the Past-pupils**

The second World elective assembly took place at the Generalate from 1-5 May, with the participation of many National Federations and many observers. They were five days of intense work in general assembly and in groups. Helped by some contributions of reflection and perspectives, the assembly produced a series of guidelines on the following points:

- strengthening the sense of membership of the Salesian Family;
- developing formation in the Association;
- founding the group project and adherence to the Past-pupils' Movement;
- facilitating the presence of Past-pupils in salesian works;
- renewing the organizational and financial arrangements;

- exploiting the means of communication.

2. World Consulting Body of the Salesian Family

This consulting body met at the Generalate from 29-31 May, for the annual meeting which takes place each year about the end of May.

Fifteen of the member groups of the Salesian Family took part, and the fundamental objective was a reflection by the individual groups on the institutional content of the mission, with a view to the elaboration of a common text, after the manner of the Common Identity Card.

The manner of working contemplates an ongoing dialogue between the members of the consulting group and their respective Central Councils

Among the decisions were the following:

- the reformulation of the volume on the Salesian Family
- the deeper study of the Common Identity Card
- the date of the next annual meeting: 28-30 May, 1999.

C. THE EXTRAORDINARY VISITATION OF THE PROVINCE OF MILAN

A particular task entrusted to the Councillor in this period was the Extraordinary Visitation of

the Milan Province in the name of the Rector Major.

The Councillor for the Missions

From 10-24 January 1998, Fr Luciano Odorico was in **Mozambique** for a visit of missionary animation and to preach the annual retreat to the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

During his stay he was able to observe the significant progress made by the Delegation in the field of educative and professional structures, in pastoral work for vocations and in missionary activity. The spiritual exercises are a privileged occasion for sharing the salesian charism.

25 January. He moved to **Angola** for a missionary visit; he saw the various works and communities and left guidelines for the travelling missionary work; he also had a meeting with the catechists and catechumens of St Paul's parish in Luanda, and found that the growth of local vocations is constant and positive. He also visited the site of the future work at Benguela, where there will be an aspirantate and missionary parish.

31 January. He celebrated the feast of Don Bosco in the new

trade school of Lixeira (Luanda), a foundation which is a sign of hope for many poor youngsters.

4 February. Fr Odorico returned to Rome and for the next three days presided at a meeting on the **Refugees Project**. Representatives from Central America, Africa, Asia and Albania were able to contribute their experience to the planning of future activity in favour of refugees.

13 February. The Councillor made a short visit to the Missions Office in Madrid where he had meetings with the Office personnel and the salesian community. He noted the rapid and advanced progress of the work on the new block for the Office.

15 February - 15 April. He went on to make the **Extraordinary Visitation of the Brazilian Province of Manaus**. Here he was able to observe the positive growth in local vocations, in the structures of initial formation, of social works for poor youngsters, of the dedication to youth pastoral work, and the renewed commitment to missionary work.

On returning to Rome he spent some days at the Generalate.

24-26 April. Fr Odorico made a short visit to the new salesian foundation at Costanza in Romania. It is a centre for vocational reception and youth pastoral ac-

tivity in an environment which is prevalently orthodox and post-communist. The Venice Province has the responsibility for this new work which has native Salesians who made their novitiate and early formation in Italy.

1-6 May. At Los Teques (Venezuela) the Councillor directed and animated a panamerican meeting for provincial delegates for missionary animation. It was a positive experience of a detailed study of the new *"Manual of the Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation"*, a booklet which will surely become an indispensable instrument for missionary animation in the Congregation.

10-16 May. Together with Sr Ciriaca Hernández, the FMA Councillor for the Missions, Fr Odorico animated and coordinated the meeting for South-East Asia and Oceania on: *"Animation and Missionary Formation, and the need of primary evangelization"*, held at Hua Hin in Thailand. There were 40 participants between SDBs and FMAs. They made a deep study and exchanged pastoral experiences concerning primary evangelization. It was a very positive example of ongoing missionary formation.

17-25 May. Fr Odorico made a visit of missionary animation to **Vietnam**, where he found con-

stant vocational progress among the Vietnamese Salesians, in their missionary commitment even of first evangelization in the various parishes and works among ethnic minorities, and the willingness of young Salesians to be sent as missionaries to other countries.

Accompanied by the Vietnamese Provincial he went also to Hanoi, the cradle of salesian presence in Vietnam, where he met Salesians working in direction and formation in the inter-diocesan seminary. He also visited the parish entrusted to the Salesians by the Cardinal of Hanoi, and examined a project of collaboration in professional formation agreed on by the Mission Office in Bonn and the Government in Hanoi.

26 May. Fr Odorico returned to Rome to prepare documents for the summer session of the General Council.

The Economer General

In the period between January and May 1998, Fr Mazzali was concerned mainly with the process of restructuring the accounts section of his Department. A new program with new software has been installed and configured by experts, and all the staff of the Economer's Depart-

ment have been trained in its use. Data from the former system of keeping accounts has been carried over into the new one.

While the restructuring was in progress, Fr Mazzali continued to follow the complex developments of the business of the "Gerini Foundation", and take part in the meetings of the Executive Committee and Administrative Council of the SEI, and those of the AGIDAE at national level.

19 January. He preached the monthly retreat for the SDB students at Testaccio.

30 January. He animated the "Salesianity Day" for the students of theology at the Crocetta, Turin.

31 January. He celebrated the feast of Don Bosco with the youngsters of the Don Bosco Oratory of Sangano, Turin.

8 February. He gave a commentary on the Strenna of the Rector Major for the Salesian Family of Piedmont, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco.

17 February. Fr Mazzali, with some members of his Department, presided over a meeting of the Council of Administration of the UPS, to approve the balance-sheet for 1997 and the budget for 1998, and the subsequent decisions concerning the annual subsidies from the General Council.

1-7 March. At Monteortone the Economer General preached the retreat to the confreres of the Venice and Verona Provinces on the theme of the Holy Spirit.

9 March. He took part in a meeting of the local economists of the Roman Province.

22 March. He addressed the second Assembly of the Salesian Family of Piedmont, giving a commentary on the Letter of the Rector Major written on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Salesian Family.

23-30 March. He preached a retreat at the Generalate to a large group of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians of the two FMA Provinces of Rome.

1-7 April. The intermediate session of the General Council.

10 April. He preached a day of retreat for the novices, confreres and FMA at Monteoliveto-Pinero-lo, before leaving for the Philippines.

12-25 April. He preached two retreats for the confreres of the two Provinces of the Philippines.

Returning from the Philippines, and after a brief period at Forno di Coazze, Turin, for the retreat to the Cooperators of Piedmont, the Economer General continued to follow the work of the transformation of the accounting system of his Department, and to attend

meetings for the organization of the work of restructuring about to begin at the Generalate, Testaccio and the UPS.

18 May. He took part in the meeting of the Provincial Council of the Middle-East Province for the approval of the balance-sheet of 1997, and for a verification of the financial state of the Province.

24, 25 May. Fr Mazzali celebrated the feast of Mary Help of Christians at Livorno and at Figline Valdarno.

The Councillor for the Africa-Madagascar Region

12 January. Fr Antonio Rodriguez Tallón left Rome for Brussels and the Missions Office at Boortmeerbeeck, where a number of confreres reside who had earlier worked in the former Zaire. He celebrated the Eucharist with them in thanksgiving for their missionary life in Africa, and remained with them for the rest of the day to talk about the situation in the "Africa / Madagascar" Region and its future prospects.

In the evening he left by air for Lubumbashi, where he took part in the work of the *Curatorium* of the *Theologicum* and also visited

the novices and post novices.

18 January. He was at Kinshasa to visit the confreres and discuss the situation with them after the recent political events. On the following day he went on to Brazzaville in the Congo to begin the Extraordinary Visitation of the Vice-province of Tropical Equatorial Africa (ATE).

19-25 January. He visited the two salesian foundations in Brazzaville and was able to see for himself the disastrous consequences of the war of the preceding months. Thanks be to God, none of our premises was damaged and we were able to do much praiseworthy work in taking in evacuees and refugees.

25 January. He was at Pointe Noire for the visitation, and then went on to the three foundations in Gabon.

31 January. He celebrated the feast of Don Bosco at Oyem, with a large crowd of young people, and with the local Bishop (Mgr Basil Mvé SDB) presiding.

4 February. In the company of various rectors of the area, the Regional flew from Libreville to Douala, to take part in a meeting arranged at Yaoundé for a reflection on the *exercise of authority in our family*.

5 February. With numerous confreres and members of the Sale-

sian Family, he was at the airport of Yaoundé to welcome the Rector Major, who was coming for his first visit to this part of Africa for the celebrations for the inauguration of the two new Vice-provinces of the area: ATE and AFO.

In the following days Fr Rodriguez accompanied the Rector Major in his visits to Yaoundé and Ebolowa. Details of the events of this period are given in the Chronicle of the Rector Major in the previous issue of the Acts.

8-10 February. While the Rector Major was visiting Equatorial Guinea the Regional stayed on in Ebolowa for the canonical visitation. He rejoined the Rector Major once more in the evening of the 11th at Douala, to accompany him in the remainder of his visits. These are described in detail in AGC 363, pp. 66-69.

19 February. After the departure of Fr Vecchi for Rome, the Regional went on to N'Djamena for the extraordinary visitation of the confreres working in Chad, and remained with them until 2 March. At present we have only a single foundation in Chad, but problems of distance and difficulties in communication do not favour short visits. The work is just beginning and the confreres like visits to be made without haste.

2 March. Fr Rodriguez flew to

Bangui, and remained in the country till the 9th, visiting for the first time the salesian work in the Central African Republic and reflecting with the confreres on its future prospects.

9 March. He returned to Cameroon and began the visitation of the salesian works of Yaoundé: Mimboman and the formation community for young coadjutor brothers. During this period he managed to be present for some parts of the meeting organized at Yaoundé by the Formation and Youth Pastoral Departments.

14 March. He arrived at Malabo (Equatorial Guinea) for the visitation, and remained in the country until the 24th to visit the four salesian foundations we have there. Before leaving for Libreville (Gabon) he had a meeting with the Council of the Vice-province to communicate his impressions at the end of the visitation.

25 March. He flew to Johannesburg, to get a connection for *Madagascar*, where he arrived the next day for another Extraordinary Visitation.

26 March. The visitation began with the provincial house and novitiate, and continued with the other foundations of the Circumscription (9 in all), with the Regional dedicating a week to each house as an average.

During this period he was able to participate in the annual meeting of the confreres, direct and animate their retreat, and take part in some sessions of the provincial chapter.

He celebrated the feast of Mary Help of Christians at Ivato in a Salesian Family setting, with the Cardinal Archbishop of Tananarive presiding.

25 May. Fr Rodriguez had a meeting with the Council of the Circumscription to exchange impressions on the Visitation, and a further meeting in the evening with the rectors for a further discussion.

28 May. In the early hours the Regional left Madagascar to return to Rome via Paris, for the plenary session of the General Council

The Regional Councillor for Latin America ("South Cone")

22-25 January. Fr Baruffi's first task in this period was to take part in the *4th National Congress of the Past-pupils of Brazil*. It took place at Brasilia and brought together 93 participants from the six Provinces. The central theme of the meeting was: *The organization, identity and mission of the Don Bosco Past-pupils in today's*

world. The Past-pupils will commit themselves to join their own efforts to those of other groups involved in the search for a solution to the problem of the exploitation of juveniles.

28-29 January. He presided at the installation of the new Provincial of North-Eastern Brazil, Fr Raimundo Ricardo Sobrinho, and profited by the occasion to present to the rectors of the Province the letter of the Rector Major with considerations and guidelines following the extraordinary visitation.

2-5 February. He took part in the Assembly of the confreres of the Province of Bahia Blanca, Argentina, at Rawson, in which were examined the pastoral needs of each work of the Province in view of a greater effectiveness.

7-10 February. At Bariloche in the same Province he was present at a course of ongoing formation for Brothers, and reflected with them on the theme: *the identity of the Salesian Brother today*.

12 February. With a meeting with the provincial council, Fr Baruffi began the Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of Belo Horizonte, Brazil. As well as personal contact with every Salesian and meetings with the communities, the Visitor took the opportunity to meet with the different groups of the Salesian Family in

the various works. At the end of the visitation there was a further concluding meeting with the provincial council, and the delegates of the "systems" in line with which the activity of the Province is organized, for a final evaluation.

19-20 March. During the visitation there was a meeting in Montevideo of the CISUR (Salesian Provincial Conference of the South), in which a verification was made of all the interprovincial meetings and courses of ongoing formation which had taken place. There was also an exchange of ideas concerning the preparation of the coming provincial chapters, and the themes for the coming Team Visit were decided on.

22-28 April. Fr Baruffi was present at Campos de Jordão in the presence of São Paulo for the retreat preached by the Rector Major to all the Provincials of America.

25 May. After celebrating the feast of Mary Help of Christians in the salesian parish of Massaranduba, Brazil, the Regional returned to Rome.

The Councillor for the Interamerican Region

19 January. After spending a few days with his family, Fr

Chávez began the Extraordinary Visitation of the Columbian Province of Medellín, which kept him busy till 14 March. He was able to verify the progress of the last six years in both community life and the realization of the mission. The Province has consolidated its presence in schools and training centres for work. It has also started up a new activity in San Buenaventura for the benefit of orphans, and has continued and completed the project for street-children in the "Ciudad Don Bosco" of Medellín, with attention to the boys and adolescents working in the coal mines of Amagá. The work is both consistent and effective.

Emphasis too must be laid on pastoral work in the Colleges, thanks to the impulse given to group activity, which is already bearing fruit in the appearing of vocations.

The Visitation ended with a series of meetings with the various provincial animating commissions, with the presentation of a final report to the provincial council and rectors, and with a meeting with the provincial council to seek ways of giving effect to the indications left in the course of the visitation.

15-21 March. Fr Chávez launched the consultation in the

Province of Peru in view of the appointment of the new Provincial. He had the possibility of meeting practically all the confreres and accompanying them in the process of communal discernment, with the exception of those who could not take part in the meetings because of the consequences of the "El Niño" phenomenon. There was a serious and active participation, which at the same time allowed the results to be collected without difficulty.

After a brief delay of two days, because of problems connected with the obtaining of an entry visa for Brazil, the Regional reached São Paulo to join the American Provincials who were there for the retreat preached by the Rector Major.

29 March. He reached Columbia, to begin the Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of Santafé di Bogotá. This concluded on 29 May when the Visitor presented his report to the members of the Provincial Chapter.

In the two months of the Visitation the Regional was able to observe the rich values of the salesian presence in this Province, which has some outstandingly effective works, like the leper colonies of Agua de Dios and Contratación, the missions in the Ariari Vicariate, the work with street-

children, the Sanctuary of the Infant Jesus (which is an authentic social phenomenon of popular religious devotion which has given rise to an impressive service of human advancement), and finally the new works begun in a high-risk zone of guerilla activity in this area (San Vicente del Caguán) and in one of the poorest areas of the capital (Ciudad Bolívar).

If one of the characteristics of Columbia is the escalation of violence brought about by drug-trafficking, guerilla warfare and paramilitary groups, which frequently leaves adolescents and young adults without protection or an alternative way of life, the Province has certainly shown a great deal of evangelical courage in being present in three of the zones of greatest conflict, with the College of Tibú, the school for poor rural children at San Vicente del Caguán, and the Ariari Missions. The very fact that we are in these places at all is already of great significance.

During the Visitation of the Province of Bogotá, Fr Chávez also made the consultation for the appointment of the new Provincial, with meetings for communal discernment and enriching results. The Visitation was also interrupted for three days to enable the Visitor to be present at a

meeting of *all the FMA Provincials of the Continent* with the Mother General at Saltillo (Mexico) from 18-20 April, at which he gave an introductory Report on the recent Synod for America.

1 June. After an unavoidable delay caused by a strike of flight controllers in Madrid, the Regional returned to Rome for the summer session of the General Council.

Various other activities organized at Regional level, at which the Regional himself could not be present, are referred to in the chronicles of other Councillors.

The Councillor for the Australia-Asia Region

After the winter session of the Council Fr Joaquim D'Souza left for Manila to complete the extraordinary visitation of the Northern Philippines Province, begun in August of the previous year.

31 January. He went on to begin in Papua New Guinea, on the feast of Don Bosco, the visitation of the Provincial Delegation. After the visitation he went by way of Sydney and Mumbai to New Delhi, making brief visits to various houses en route.

28 February – 2 March. At New Delhi he had a meeting with the

executive council of the Indian Provincial Conference.

6 March. Returning to Manila he closed the Visitation of the Northern Philippines Province.

9-12 March. In this period he held meetings similar to that at Delhi with the Provincials of East Asia and Australia.

This was followed by a few days rest for health reasons, after which the Regional went on to Jakarta and Timor to carry out, in the name of the Rector Major, a consultation in view of the eventual erection of the area into a Delegation or autonomous Circumscription.

From Jakarta, accompanied by the Australian Provincial (Fr John Murphy), Fr D'Souza then went to the Island of Fiji to explore the possibility of the foundation of a pre- or post-novitiate at Suva alongside the Pacific Regional Seminary, for the benefit of salesian candidates from Samoa.

22 March. The Regional arrived at Tetere in the Solomon Islands to begin another Extraordinary Visitation, this time of the Province of Japan which has a missionary foundation at Tetere.

25 March. He went on to Tokyo and subsequently visited all the houses in Japan. The extraordinary visitation went on for two months, ending on 24 May.

25 May. Leaving Japan for Seoul, he had a meeting with the Korean Provincial Council on the realization of the priorities of the GC24, and made brief visits of animation to the houses, especially the communities for initial formation. Accompanied by the Superior of the Korean Vice-province he also made a first visit to the missionary foundation at Yanji in China.

30 May. Fr D'Souza returned to Rome for the summer session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the North Europe Region

12 January. Fr Albert Van Hecke left for Zagreb where he began the Extraordinary Visitation of the Croatian Province at Bosnia-Erzegovina. He saw for himself the wounds left on the Church and society by the recent war, and the courageous and promising rebirth of the salesian charism and the expectations of the Church and society with regard to the salesian mission. He found in the confreres a decisive intention to live the preventive system as an effective response to the new challenges of the world of youth and of interreligious dialogue, which is never easy.

5 February. After finishing the Visitation of Croatia and spending two days at the Generalate, the Regional left for Spain where from 5-8 February he took part in the European Meeting on Vocational Pastoral Work. He then returned to Rome for some time.

18 February. Fr Van Hecke left for Warsaw, where he presided at a meeting of the Consulting Group and Provincial Conferences of Poland and the Eastern Circumscription. Among the various themes dealt with were: the verification of the Salesian Bulletin in Polish, the preparations for the centenary of salesian work in Poland, the Federation of Polish salesian schools, some questions about salesian spirituality in the curriculum of studies, the proposal to set up a Polish branch of the Salesian Historical Institute, and the creation of an office for the Conference.

21 February. The Regional moved to Pila to begin the Extraordinary Visitation of that Province which continued till 18 May. It was impressive to see the progress made by the Province in its first twenty years of life through the development of new environments and structures: houses of formation, schools, churches, activities for young people in difficulties, and also some

new and very promising youth movements. The confreres are enthusiastic and have confidence in the future of their Province, in its openness to work for the young, in the renewal and deepening of the formation process, and in dedication to the missions.

14-16 March. Fr Van Hecke was at Bonn where, with the Rector Major, he took part in the final two days of the Seminar for Salesians and FMA working in Eastern Europe, organized at Konigswinter by the "Konrad Adenauer Stiftung" and the Mission Office of Bonn, on the theme: *Jugendarbeit in der Reformlandern Osteuropas*.

30 March - 4 April. He had to interrupt the visitation of Pila once more, to return to Rome for the intermediate session of the General Council.

4 April. He returned once more to Pila to continue the visitation.

14 April. He was present at Lad for the opening of the provincial chapter, which had as its theme: *Salesians and laity: communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco. Verification of the practical obligations emerging from the GC24, and programming the future of the Province*.

20 April. He moved temporarily to Twardogóra for the opening of the provincial chapter of the

Breslau Province, with its theme: *The Educative and Pastoral Community in the realization of the Educative and Pastoral Project.*

25 April. He returned to Swobnica to preside at the clothing ceremony of 16 clerical novices of the Pila Province.

30 April. The Regional went to Ireland to preside at Dublin at the annual meeting of the Provinces of the North European Region. In addition to being an opportunity for deeper understanding and mutual enrichment in the communal maturing of the Region, the gathering had some specific objectives: to recall the contents of the GC24 with regard to the salesian community as the animating nucleus (SCAN); to identify the difficulties and possibilities in the transferring to the new concepts and their realization; and to look for common strategies and processes for the realization of SCAN.

After the meeting at Dublin, Fr Van Hecke returned to Poland for the final part of the Pila visitation which ended on 16 May at Rumia, with the installation of the new Provincial, Fr Jertry Worek.

17 May he returned to Rome.

22-31 May. Finally he made a visit of animation to the Czech Republic where, in addition to visiting salesian foundations and

meeting confreres, he presided at the perpetual profession of two confreres.

The Councillor for the West Europe Region

11 January. Fr Filiberto Rodriguez left Rome for Paris to begin the *Extraordinary Visitation of the two French Provinces: Paris and Lyons.*

The Visitations followed a closely-knit calendar, interrupted only to allow the Regional to preside at previously scheduled meetings of animation of the Region. In the course of his visits, Fr Filiberto was able to appreciate the high quality and sound organization of the work of education; the competent response being given by the Salesians to French society and youth, especially in the centres of professional formation, technical high-schools, agriculture and industry; the commitment of the laity in directive tasks and pastoral activity; and the efforts being made jointly in the two Provinces to form the laity in salesian pedagogy and spirituality.

4-8 February. The Regional took part in the European meeting on *pastoral work for vocations*, organized by the Youth Pastoral Department.

22-24 March. He was in Lisbon for the annual meeting of his Region. The main theme was formation and was animated by the Formation Department.

25 March. Still at Lisbon, there was an ordinary meeting of the Iberian provincial conference, for the verification and programming of the publishing work of the Salesian Catechetical Centre, and the programs of various National Delegations.

1-4 April. He was at Rome for the intermediate session of the General Council, which began a reflection on the reality and challenges connected with the salesian charism in Europe.

12-15 April. He took part in the Lyons provincial chapter.

2-3 May. In the Cathedral of Toulon and the salesian house of La Navarre, Fr Filiberto was present at the celebrations for the closing of the first part of the process for beatification and canonization of Fr Augusto Arribat. Everything went well, and we can count on the example and protection of Fr Arribat in the new stages of the salesian charism in France.

17 May. The Regional was present at Les Minimes, Lyons for the ordination of two deacons

(one for the Province of Lyons, and the other for that of Cracow, Poland). The ordaining bishop was Mgr Pierre Pican SDB, Bishop of Bayeux-Lisieux.

24 May. He was also present in Salamanca, Spain, for the solemn inauguration of the celebrations for the centenary of salesian work there. He took part in the Mass in the Cathedral at which the Bishop presided, and the Regional himself led the Procession of Mary Help of Christians, with a big crowd of the faithful; the route followed was that of the first procession in 1904.

28 May. At Madrid he presided at the annual meeting of the Governing Body of the Missions Office. The work is going well in its many sections and activities.

26-30 May. These were days dedicated by the Regional to the various National Delegations: for Social Communication, Youth Pastoral Work, Salesian Family, Cooperators, and Past-pupils respectively. Special attention is being given to the work in progress in Via Alcalá 164/166, Madrid, where space is being adapted for the National Centre of Youth Pastoral Work, which will be transferred to new offices there at the beginning of the new scholastic year.

The Regional Councillor for Italy and the Middle East

3-4 January. Fr Fedrigotti took part at Zafferana Etnea in an interesting initiative organized by the Sicilian Province: the first meeting of the local councils of the Province. He contributed a conference on the theme: "the local salesian council between tradition and renewal".

9-11 January. A meeting of the CISI Presidency examined the letter of the Rector Major, following the intermediate session of the General Council of the previous September which had given particular attention to the situation in the CISI area. The circumstances of the SEI and LDC were also studied, with reference to personnel and publications, and the possibility of collaboration. The outlines of a new work in the South promoted by the CISI were discussed, with hypotheses centred on the town of Reggio Calabria.

14 January – 25 March. Fr Fedrigotti carried out the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Middle-East Province*, excluding Ethiopia. It proceeded normally with the confreres generously attentive to the spreading of Don Bosco's charism in the delicate cultural and religious situation of the area.

26 March – 6 April. Together with the Provincials of CISI and the Middle East, he took part in a retreat "in the steps of St Paul" (Antioch, Tharsus, Cappadocia, Iconium, Hierapolis, Ephesus, Miletus and Smyrna).

5-6 April. At the end of the retreat there was another meeting of the CISI. Among other items it examined the possibility of realizing the Calabria Project at Lamezia Terme, as an alternative to Reggio Calabria which was finally judged unsuitable for the project. It also examined the situation of the LDC and that in Albania. It took stock of the process of unification that was going on in the Emilia-Romagna area and the dialogue between the Adriatic Province and that of Milan, as well as the results of the consultation of the provincial councils of Venice and Verona on the hypothesis of a future unification.

15 April – 7 May. Fr Fedrigotti made the *Extraordinary Visitation of Ireland*.

9-11 May. The CISI Assembly took place at the CNOS Centre in Rome. It had been carefully prepared by the formation sector in collaboration with COSPES (Association of the centres of scholastic professional and social orientation), on the theme *Consecrated life and affective maturity*. There

was a large attendance of confreres working in the formation field and special attention was given to the situation of young confreres and the emerging phenomena; to the theological, moral, and psychological aspects of affectivity; to the guidance of the Church and the Congregation on the specific theme; to the personal and communal follow-up of the confreres, and to specialist intervention for particular situations.

11 May. A further meeting of the *CISI Presidency* took place. Following on the world meeting organized by the Youth Pastoral Department, the Presidency approved a *Plan of communication and of pastoral formation*. It confirmed the outline of the Calabria Project for Lamezia Terme, and gave stimulus to forms of collaboration with the newly defined

Adriatic Province. It encouraged the overcoming of difficulties in the way of the first course of ongoing formation for third-age confreres (July 1998).

15-31 May. Fr Fedrigotti was back in Ireland for the final stage of the visitation. At the conclusion he noted that the enormous improvement in the Island's economy (referred to by some as the *celtic tiger*) was accompanied by a great and rapid cultural and religious transformation, which was a challenge to the Church and the Congregation to renew its pastoral approach. But he was able also to get to know personally the rich Christian and salesian resources that exist, which provide well-founded hope for a renewed commitment and an effective salesian presence in the Island in view of the third millennium.

5.1 Intervention of the Rector Major at the Synod for Asia

The following is the text of Fr Vecchi's intervention in the assembly of the Bishops' Synod for Asia, on 21 April 1998.

Various paragraphs of the *Instrumentum laboris* (nn. 16, 17, 22, 32, 49, 51...) refer to the part education has played in the history of evangelization and today's image of the Christian community in the Asian continent. And this with regard to some specific elements: the humanistic and didactic quality of education, the promotion of social sectors excluded or ignored by other initiatives, the possibility of communicating the faith to those disposed to receive it, and the personal witness of educators belonging in large part to Institutes of Consecrated Life.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* a particular role is entrusted to consecrated persons in interreligious dialogue and in inculturation, two important aspects of the new phase of evangelization in the Asian context.

With regard to interreligious dialogue, the Exhortation points out some particular forms particularly appropriate for consecrated per-

sons: witness, the 'dialogue of life' brought about more through esteem and friendship than by doctrinal explanations, 'the dialogue of works', carried out through a common concern for life and human advancement, accompaniment in the search for God which is always nagging at the human heart (cf. nn. 102, 103).

With respect to inculturation the Exhortation declares: "The consecrated life makes its members particularly well suited to face the complex work of inculturation, because it accustoms them to being detached from things, even from many features of their own culture" (n.79).

Education therefore appears as a privileged way for the proclamation of the Gospel, and for inculturation and interreligious dialogue, in which consecrated life can make good use of its particular charismatic gifts.

Educational environments provide the occasion for a daily meeting between young people and adults of different religions, on the basis of a common interest in personal and social development and concern for the understanding and communication of culture. In them relationships of friendship and shared responsibility mature which lead quite easily to an ex-

change of experiences and a sharing of plans. For this reason they have been described as workshops of dialogue, of coexistence between different ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups even in areas where such differences are prone to lead to conflict.

There is need of shared reflection from a missionary standpoint on the part of workers in the field of education on the relationship between education and evangelization, so that while respecting the nature and purpose of each of these without confusion, they may converge without separation on the good of the individual, which is salvation. Evangelization must set free all the educative potentiality of Christ's message; and education must help individuals to attain the fullness of their life. This will inspire an educative praxis which respects the freedom and beliefs of each one and at the same time makes a clear proposal.

There are **certain factors** which make an educative presence become a proclamation of the Gospel and a witness to it.

1. The first of these are the relationships between those involved. The subject responsible for the work must be seen and animated as a **community**, in which the

members participate in an ordered manner and share responsibility, facing up also to any differences of opinion.

An important element in this community is the **animating nucleus**, capable of directing the work in line with the principles of a complete humanism and of creating an environment in which evangelical values are experienced even before they are expressed. An animating nucleus of this kind, which includes lay people as well as religious, must not be weakened through an excessive extension of initiatives or a purely technical concept of education.

2. The element of evangelization, inculturation and interreligious dialogue is the **educative project**, drawn up and verified together, according to a view of the person, with elements of the local culture and educative traditions, in conformity with the context and reality of those to whom the initiative is directed. It is an occasion for recovering and giving due value to many "seeds" of the Word, and for exchanging common views of life.

3. The way of evangelization is to predispose and **educate to an attitude of faith**, according to the dispositions of the individuals, be they young or older. This suppos-

es a diversity of approach and proposals, all aimed at teaching personalization: they range from signs provided by the environment itself, to the witness of Christians and in particular of the educators, to dialogue on ethical principles and orientations, to collaboration in works for the benefit of others, to religious dialogue, to the first news or proclamation of Christ for those who are maturing, and to a catechumenal process.

4. The signs have a language and transmit messages. Pedagogy chooses them because they speak efficaciously to the sensitivities of the young. But there are also signs and messages which escape our daily intentions: they stem from the setting and style of the educative work. Without being exclusive but also with unmistakable clarity, Catholic education must show a preference for those who are poorer and not reached by services created by other official or private institutions; it must profess publicly in declarations, organization and options the evangelical principles of non-discrimination, of love for all without distinction; it must maintain with the local context a rapport of openness and multiple collaboration for the social advancement of all the human race.

5. We must think of the field of education from the modern standpoint, which includes in it also adults in need of basic instruction or of necessary updating or of general formation. It goes beyond the classical set-up of elementary and secondary instruction and makes use of a variety of means and channels, including the mass media by means of which it is incorporated in the global culture. The demand of ongoing formation provides multiple opportunities for a deepening of educative, ethical, social and cultural values and, when the occasion arises, of explicit evangelical import with collaborators and parents.

In evangelization too, education must not be considered the business of only specific institutions, but a dimension which is always present, because the salvation brought by Christ regards the life and integral dignity of the person.

5.2 USG statement on relief of external debt

In the American and Asian Synods attention was frequently called to the serious problem of foreign debt, which weighs heavily on poorer countries, on their possibilities of development, and on the very life of

individuals. Many times Pope John Paul II, especially in the course of his apostolic visits to these countries, has raised his voice, pleading with authorities and competent organisms at international level to consider this problem and find means to cancel or at least reduce such heavy debts. This is an important aspect which finds a place in the commitment for justice and the effort at solidarity, and so the Christian community is asked to be the vehicle for a wide sensitization in this regard. The celebration of the coming Jubilee can provide a propitious opportunity.

For this reason the Union of Superiors General (USG) in its meeting of last May has made a declaration as a sign of commitment, in which religious communities are asked to become involved.

The Rector Major, in his letter published in the present edition of the Acts, reflects the voice of the Synods on the problem of foreign debt, and passes on to salesian communities the declaration of the USG, in the hope that all will take note of it and make the effort to collaborate. The text of the declaration is the following:

The undersigned members of the Union of Superiors General, leaders of religious institutes in

the Roman Catholic Church, gathered in plenary meeting at Ariccia, Italy, on May 30, 1998, express their desire to collaborate, under the leadership of the Holy See, in efforts to relieve or cancel the external debt of developing countries in view of the Jubilee Year 2000.

They pledge themselves:

1. to promote this concern among priests, brothers and lay people associated with their institutes;
2. to invite their members to promote this concern among those whom they contact in parishes, schools, and other ministries;
3. to urge their members to collaborate in local and regional initiatives for this objective.

They ask that this resolution be made known to the leaders of the G-8 Nations and to the authorities of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

5.3 Canonical erection of the Vice-province of Ethiopia and Eritrea

Prot. N. 128/98

The undersigned,

Fr Juan E. VECCHI,

Rector Major of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco,

- after considering the development of the salesian works in the two countries of Ethiopia and Eritrea, formerly dependent on the Provinces of Bethlehem and Milan;
- having taken note of the fact that for purposes of more efficacious animation, in 1996 a Delegate was appointed of the Provincials of the works in the above-named countries;
- having heard the opinions of the Provincials concerned and examined the results of a consultation carried out among the confreres working in the countries mentioned;
- on the basis of art.156 of the Constitutions;
- with the consent of the General Council given in its meeting of 3 April 1998, in conformity with Const.132 §1,1 and Const.156;

CANONICALLY ERECTS

by means of this present Decree, the new **SALESIAN VICE-PROVINCE of Ethiopia and Eritrea, with the title of "MARY, PACT OF MERCY" ("MARIA, KIDANE MEHERET")**, with headquarters at **ADDIS ABABA Gotera, "St John Bosco"**, and made up of the following canonically erected houses:

- In *Ethiopia*:
 ADDIS ABABA – Gotera "St. John Bosco"
 ADDIS ABABA – Mekanissa "St. John Bosco"
 ADIGRAT "Bl. Michael Ghébre"
 ADUA "Holy Mary"
 DILLA "St. John Bosco"
 MAKALLÈ "St. John Bosco"
 ZWAY "Mary Help of Christians"
- and in addition the salesian foundation, not yet canonically erected in DEKEMHARE "St. Justin de Jacobis", in *Eritrea*.

The following decisions have been made:

1. Members of the Vice-province are all those confreres, who at the date of the canonical erection live and work in the Houses and salesian works listed above.
2. Members also are confreres in formation coming from the countries of Ethiopia and Eritrea included in the Vice-province, even though they be in formation communities elsewhere.
3. The relationships of the Vice-province with the Provinces of origin will be regulated by an appropriate Agreement, approved by the Rector Major.

The present Decree will come into force on 7 September 1998.

Rome, 29 June 1998.

Fr. Juan E. VECCHI
Rector Major

Fr. Francesco MARACCANI
Secretary General

5.4 Canonical erection of the Vice-province of Indonesia and Timor

Prot. N. 129/98

The undersigned,

Fr Juan E. VECCHI,

Rector Major of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco,

- after considering the development of the salesian works in Indonesia and in particular in the island of Timor-Timur, formerly dependent on the "Mary Help of Christians" Province of Cebu, Southern Philippines;
- having taken note of the fact that for purposes of more efficacious animation, there has been a Delegate of the Provincial in accordance with Const. 159;
- having heard the opinions of

- the Provincial and his Council and examined the results of a consultation carried out among the confreres working in the works mentioned above;
- on the basis of art.156 of the Constitutions,
- with the consent of the General Council given in its meeting of 3 April 1998, in conformity with Const.132 §1,1 and Const. 156;

CANONICALLY ERECTS

by means of this present Decree, the new **SALESIAN VICE-PROVINCE of Indonesia and Timor, with the title of "BLESSED CALLISTUS CARAVARIO" with headquarters initially at DILI, Bl. Callistus Caravario**, Timor-Timur, Indonesia, and made up of the following canonically erected houses detached from the Province of Cebu:

BAUCAU "Mary Help of Christians" (Timor-Timur)

DILI "Blessed Callistus Caravario" (Timor-Timur)

FATUMACA "Our Lady of Fatima" (Timor-Timur)

FUILORO "St John Bosco" (Timor-Timur)

JAKARTA "Sacred Heart of Jesus" (Indonesia)

LAGA "St John Bosco" (Timor-Timur)

LOS PALOS "St John Bosco"
(Timor-Timur)

VENILALE "Bl. Philip Rinaldi"
(Timor-Timur)

The following decisions have been made:

1. Members of the Vice-province are all those confreres, who at the date of the canonical erection live and work in the Houses and salesian works listed above.
2. Members also are confreres in formation coming from the countries included in the Vice-province, even though they be in formation communities elsewhere.
3. The relationships of the Vice-province with the Province of origin will be regulated by an appropriate Agreement, approved by the Rector Major.

The present Decree will come into force on 15 August 1998.

Rome, 29 June 1998

Fr. Juan E. VECCHI
Rector Major

Fr. Francesco MARACCANI
Secretary General

5.5 Appointment of Confederal President of the Don Bosco Past-pupils

We publish the decree of appointment of the Confederal President of the Don Bosco Past-pupils, proclaimed by the Rector Major at the conclusion of the World Assembly of the Confederation which took place in Rome, 1-5 May 1998.

Prot. N. 98/1108

The undersigned

Fr JUAN E. VECCHI

Rector Major of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco

In accordance with the Statute
of the World Confederation
of the Past-pupils of Don Bosco

- after taking note of the nominations submitted by the Confederal Presidency elected by the World Assembly meeting in Rome 1-5 May 1998,
- in virtue of the faculty granted him by the same Statute,

A P P O I N T S

Dr. ANTONIO

GUILHERMINO PIRES

**CONFEDERAL PRESIDENT
OF THE PAST-PUPILS
OF DON BOSCO**

for the six-year period
1998 – 2004
with all the rights and duties
inherent in his office
from 5 May 1998.

While offering my heartfelt thanks to the elected members of the Confederal Presidency for their generous collaboration, I wish them and the President a fruitful commitment in the animation of the Confederation at world level, for an ever more flourishing development of the mission of the Past-pupils, in accordance with the spirit of Don Bosco.

Rome, 5 May 1998

Fr Juan E. Vecchi
Rector Major
of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco

Fr Francesco Maraccani
Secretary General SDB

5.6 Our dead confreres (1998 - 2nd 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 AHUMADA Luis Ricardo	Ramos Mejía (Bs. As.)	13-06-98	85	ABA
L ARICCI Ettore	Arese (MI)	11-06-98	82	ILE
P ARNABOLDI Paolo	Roma	11-04-98	84	ILE
P BASTARRICA CELAYA José Luis	Logroño	08-04-98	83	SBI
P BIGIARETTI Francesco	Manaus	02-06-98	94	BMA
P BOLLEN Henri	Hoboken	01-05-98	85	BEN
P BOMBLED Joseph	Blandain	21-05-98	86	BES
P BROGGIATO Antonio	Negrar (VR)	17-04-98	83	IVO
P BRUCCOLERI Giuseppe	Palermo	01-07-98	66	ISI
P CAETANO João	Vila di Conde	21-04-98	72	POR
P CASTILLO Ubaldino	Santafé de Bogotá	03-05-98	80	COB
P CHIAROTTO Angelo	Torino	19-06-98	86	ICP
P CONTRERAS Claudio	Vigo	04-06-98	78	SLE
P CORNEJO DE LA TORRE Oscar	Los Angeles (USA)	26-03-98	55	MEM
P COZZI Stefano	Ravenna	09-04-98	73	IAD
P D'ASSARO Vincenzo	Don Bosco (Bs. As.)	21-05-98	61	ALP
P DEMLEITNER Karl Josef	Lichtenfels, Baviera	26-06-98	93	GEM
P DI RIENZO Nicola	Napoli	01-05-98	72	IME
P DURANTE Francesco	Lima	21-06-98	93	PER
P FASSO Igino	Campo Grande	25-05-98	92	BCG
P FERNANDES Porfirio Augusto	Poiaries da Régua	23-06-98	80	POR
P FUEMBUENA Rafael	San Isidro (Bs. As.)	25-06-98	86	ABA
P GAIBA Francesco	Loreto	28-06-98	88	IAD
P GARCIA SANTOS Ramón	Bangkok	21-04-98	66	THA
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
P GENOVESI Tullio	Messina	30-05-98	85	ISI
P GONDER David	New Rochelle	05-06-98	56	SUE
P GORLERO Vittorio	Torino	09-05-98	77	ICP
L HO Anthony	Hong Kong	07-04-98	59	CIN
P HUIJSDENS Jan	Leusden	20-04-98	79	OLA
P INTRONA Domenico Carlo	Cape Town (Sud Africa)	23-06-98	71	AFM
P JANOWITZ Josef	Essen	22-05-98	86	GEK
P KALETA Roman	N'Djamena (Ciad)	23-04-98	30	PLN
L KAREL Jozef	Pezinok	02-06-98	68	SLK
P LACH Jan	Grabowno Wielkie	13-05-98	67	PLO
P LAMOUR Maurice	Saint-Brieuc	14-05-98	86	FPA
P LEMENU Pierre	Vielsalm	14-04-98	74	BES

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P LOZANO José Luis	Madrid	15-06-98	76	SMA
P MAROCCO Michelangelo	Torino	19-04-98	70	ICP
P MARTINEZ LOPEZ Roberto	Montevideo	20-05-98	81	URU
P McCARR Patrick	Dublin	17-06-98	78	IRL
P MENENDEZ ROMERO Carlos	México	25-05-98	91	MEM
P MUÑOZ DARRIGRANDE Alberto	Santiago de Chile	15-04-98	92	CIL
P PASZENDA Stanisław	Klobuck	19-04-98	62	PLO
L PEREIRA António Lourenço	Vila do Conde	17-05-98	80	POR
P PEREÑA LUIS Luis	Alcalá de Henares	29-04-98	62	SMA
P PÉRILLEUX André	Wien (Austria)	12-05-98	77	BES
P PIECHUTTA Konstanty	Helenenberg	12-04-98	84	GEK
P PONTREMOLI Giovanni	Novara	28-06-98	89	ICP
P RANGUGNI Agustín Aquiles	San Isidro (Bs. As.)	28-06-98	80	ABA
P RASETTO Vincenzo	Huancayo	07-06-98	85	PER
P RATTI Ezio	Varese	30-06-98	85	ILE
L RAVIZZINI Giuseppe	Santo Domingo	22-05-98	76	ANT
P ROLLÓN Américo Pedro	Santa Fe	08-05-98	76	ARO
L RUPPRECHT Willibald	Burglengenfeld, Baviera	05-06-98	85	GEM
P SACCO Pietro Emilio	Americana	18-04-98	76	BSP
P SANDER Edmund	Santiago de Chile	06-06-98	83	CIL
L SCHRÖER Albert	Jünkerath	28-05-98	91	GEK
L SCHUHBECK Georg	Buxheim, Baviera	03-05-98	83	GEM
P SERRANO COTORÉ Alberto	Sikasso (Mali)	17-04-98	56	AFO
L SUNGMUR George	Shillong	07-05-98	82	ING
P TIGNONSINI Pietro	Nave (BS)	09-06-98	87	ILE
L TORASSO Giacomo	Albano (Roma)	02-07-98	80	RMG
P TRIMBOLI Santi	Messina	30-06-98	86	ISI
P VALLE RODRIGUEZ Mariano	La Coruña	18-04-98	94	SLE
P VAN DOOREN Sjef	Stokkum	10-05-98	75	OLA
P VATEL Daniel	Caen	16-04-98	71	FPA
P VAULA Stefano	Torino	19-04-98	91	ICP
P WEINERT Edmund	Poznan	04-05-98	72	PLO
P WIDART Léon	Malmédy (Belgio)	28-06-98	91	BES
L YAÑEZ MOYA Germán	Barcelona	16-03-98	77	SCO