



# acts

**of the general council**

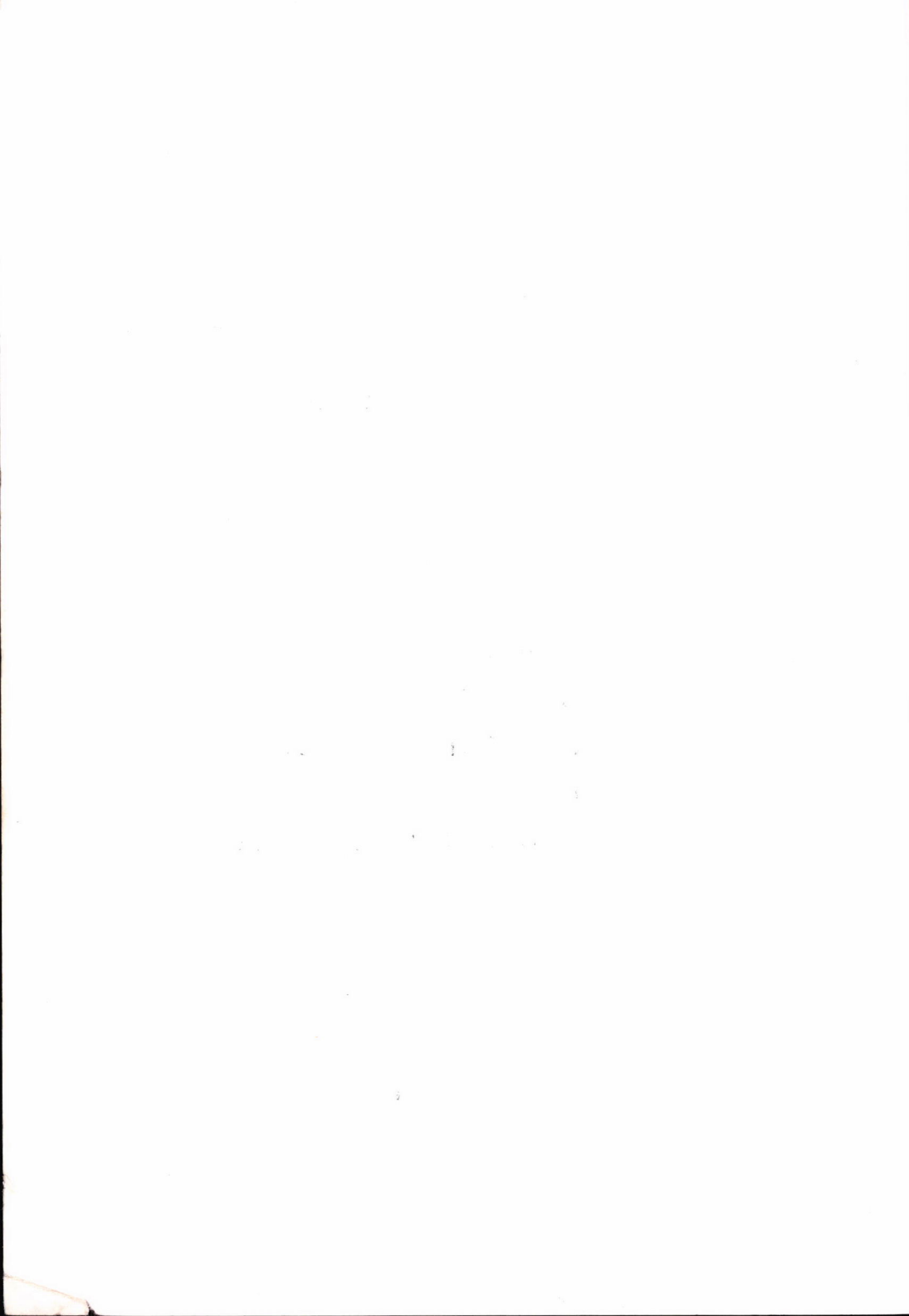
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year LXXIX    october-december 1998

**N. 365**

official organ  
of animation  
and communication  
for the  
salesian congregation

Direzione Generale  
Opere don Bosco  
Roma





# acts

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

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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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### **“THE FATHER CONSECRATES US AND SENDS US”<sup>1</sup>**

I. A CONSECRATED LIFE- 1. A pressing invitation – 2. A key-word – 3. The joyful experience of having received a gift – 4. Acknowledgement of God's initiative – 5. A project of life in God – 6. Public profession – 7. Some consequences.

II. OUR APOSTOLIC CONSECRATION – 1. Unique nature of “salesian” consecration – 2. “Consecrated” uniqueness of our apostolic mission – 3. Service and prophecy – 4. The many gifts of our consecrated community – 5. Some consequences – 6. The guide of the consecrated community.

Rome, 8 September 1998  
*Feast of Our Lady's Birthday*

My dear confreres,

I am glad to be able to send you my greetings, together with those of the members of the General Council, at a time when some of you are beginning a new year of pastoral activity and others are gathering the final results of the previous one. I send a special word of nearness and encouragement to communities who are in difficult situations because of war and conflicts of various kinds, especially in Africa. I ask you to remember them in your prayers.

The preceding letter on the animating nucleus has provoked some healthy reflection. It has also given rise to a certain concern, which has been expressed to me by some confreres, and so I take the opportunity to go more deeply into a

<sup>1</sup> cf. Cost. 3

theme which is becoming of primary importance at the present time: the capacity of the salesian community for animation.

## I. A CONSECRATED LIFE

### 1. A pressing invitation.

A question often raised when dealing with this theme concerns its importance, incidence and influence in our community work of animation, and the direction given to education and pedagogical practice. It is not related primarily to the time that consecration leaves available for dedication, a factor which could be supplied by the greater use of lay resources, nor even to competence in group dynamics or in education, easily found nowadays among the laity, but rather to the specific quality that consecrated life brings to communion, to the educative and pastoral plan, and to pedagogical practice.

To these issues the **GC24** gave great attention. Even if it did not develop them in a unified and organic manner, it left us a series of pointers which give us cause for serious thought. Without pretending to be complete, I think they can be summed up in the following points.

A first point: the consecration, lived with joyful authenticity, infuses into the salesian educative community certain sensitivities: the primacy of God in life<sup>2</sup>, the importance of spirituality in the work of education<sup>3</sup>, attention to the salesian spirit<sup>4</sup>, a vision of human growth in line with a paradigm of new humanity, openness to an experience of God for young people and adults<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> cf. CG24, 54

<sup>3</sup> cf. ib.

<sup>4</sup> cf. CG24, 88

<sup>5</sup> cf. CG24, 152



A rapid glance at these references leads to a second point that calls for attention: the identity of the consecrated person must be seen as "a specific and dynamic force for the education and animation of the EPC"<sup>6</sup>. It behoves consecrated persons, therefore, to consider their identity more deeply<sup>7</sup>, as the ultimate reason for the roles they have to play and as the possibility of achieving the best results in conformity with the objective proposed by the Congregation.

Such a reflection becomes urgently necessary not less because of the discovery of the vocation of the lay person<sup>8</sup> and on the insistence on its greatest possible development. It must prompt consecrated persons to cultivate and share the gifts deriving from their particular vocation, aware of "what we have in common with the laity, as well as our differences", in the knowledge that there is a point where everything comes together: the oratorian heart and style of the Good Shepherd<sup>9</sup>.

A third point: what we have said should lead to the overcoming of a certain confusion on the part of some consecrated persons with regard to their own participation in the educative community and in the light of the interventions open to the laity<sup>10</sup>. Their partnership should consist more in the communication of the spirit<sup>11</sup> than in the material performance of daily work. The relationship with the laity should be founded on the sharing of gifts<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore, to succeed in the realization of this project, we must insist on an initial formation<sup>13</sup> and on a continuing growth which will help the Salesians "to deepen the identity of

<sup>6</sup> CG24, 45

<sup>7</sup> cf. CG24, 140

<sup>8</sup> cf. CG24, 45

<sup>9</sup> cf. CG24, 102

<sup>10</sup> cf. CG24, 45

<sup>11</sup> cf. CG24, 88

<sup>12</sup> cf. CG24, 109-110

<sup>13</sup> cf. CG24, 167

their consecration and to develop solid convictions about the educative value of consecration itself"<sup>14</sup>.

The influence of consecration in community animation and in the orientation of education finds particular development in GC24 nn.149-155, of which the quintessence would seem to be the statement: "Don Bosco wanted consecrated persons at the centre of his work, persons oriented to the young and their holiness. He wanted his religious to be a precise point of reference for his charism"<sup>15</sup>.

This desire of his is attributed to divine inspiration; it is therefore decisive for the mission, which consists not only in temporal advancement, but also in leading the boys to holiness: "Don Bosco was led by God to form a community of consecrated persons which would be a leaven for a multiplicity of services, the spiritual animation of those who wanted to dedicate themselves to education, and a guarantee of continuity in the mission to the young"<sup>16</sup>.

The charism therefore is not expressed in its completeness and authenticity if it leaves out the laity: but still less if it omits the specific contribution of those who are consecrated.

And so guidelines like this one follow, for the salesian community: "It should frequently verify the incidence of its consecrated and communal life; it should exploit occasions for presenting and explaining to lay people and youngsters the specific aspect of consecrated life in respect of its educative importance"<sup>17</sup>.

The same kind of problem arises **from religious communities in general**, and not only from our own. It is true that education, and especially the kind carried out through schools, is an activity useful for evangelization, but more than a few

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> CG24, 150

<sup>16</sup> CG24, 155

<sup>17</sup> CG24, 167

religious wonder what place in it is taken by a radical option for the Kingdom.

Faced by the delegation of principal tasks to the laity, and by the assigning to them of our own pedagogical tradition, there are some who feel themselves rather perplexed about their own contribution, beyond the possibility of the complete dedication and competence which such dedication calls for. And this even after having established a proper priority among obligations as indicated by the GC24: formation, orientation, educative identity.

From the standpoint of the young, there are many who emphasize how the latter benefit by the professional approach and generosity of our service, but they do not always get a clear idea of the reason and meaning lying behind it.

On the other hand, the fact remains that in some structures the splendour of the consecrated option cannot be made to stand out because of the weight of practical activities: we get bogged down in the means, rather than stressing the ends. So too in the fulfilment of certain organizational or directive roles the unity between professional approach and oratorian heart, which defines the image of the Salesian, is not attained.

With respect to the community itself there are some who bewail not the loss but the weakness of expression, of meaning and of more immediate manifestation of consecration, like brotherly relationships and daily prayer. We recognize that this is due in large measure to the multiplicity of commitments inspired by pastoral charity, it is in fact an impoverishment of the witness of consecration and for those who are younger an obstacle to its joyful living.

The GC24 gave a lot of attention, and the Provincial Chapters will doubtless do likewise, to the relationships to be established with the laity, to the fundamental ways in which religious will be effective in the educative community, to the principal objective of their interventions and the quality of what they do in general. I will not dwell on these points at

greater length. I consider them already realized, or at least brought sufficiently to your attention. I dealt with them in a preceding letter: *Experts, witnesses and craftsmen of communion*<sup>18</sup>.

The discourse on our consecration leads to the deep significance of such references, taking us back to their more interior and personal source. This is the sense in which we have taken it in our programming for the present six-year period<sup>19</sup>.

## 2. A keyword.

The discussions of recent years have brought to light different positions concerning consecrated life and its place in the Church. There are various keywords which lead us to what could be called the heart of the matter: *charism, sequela Christi, mission*.

The Synod on consecrated life was aware of these differences and tried to smooth them out. It asked the Pope to give a precise answer to certain questions so that discernment could take place amid the looming challenges and develop the lasting values of consecrated life, even by means of new expressions.

Among the questions to be clarified there was the distinctive element: what it is that determines the identity of consecrated life, and hence also its specific contribution to the life of the Christian community and to pastoral work.

It is now well known, because it has already been the object of numerous commentaries, that the Apostolic Exhortation places it in *consecration*. This was already present in the teaching extending all the way from Vatican II to the Synod on Consecrated Life. But it had been impaired by a restricted

<sup>18</sup> AGC 363

<sup>19</sup> cf. Supplement to AGC 358, p.16 (Strategies n.32, Interventions n.34)



interpretation of consecration itself, by the new profile of consecrated life in the Church understood as the people of God, and by the progress of secularization, which has led to a change in the significance of what is "sacred".

The declaration *Essential elements of the teaching of the Church on the religious life* (31 May 1983), declares: "At the foundation of religious life lies consecration. By insisting on this principle, the Church puts the emphasis on the initiative of God and on the new and different relationship with him implied by religious life"<sup>20</sup>. Two fundamental elements therefore determine the reality of a consecrated life: the initiative of God, felt by the subject as a call or appeal, and a new and singular relationship with him as the basis for the orientation and organization of the subject's existence.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* (25 March 1984), which aimed at fostering the fruitful exchange then in progress, said in addressing religious: "The Church thinks of you, above all, as persons who are 'consecrated': consecrated to God in Jesus Christ as his exclusive possession. This consecration determines your place in the vast community of the Church, the People of God. And at the same time this consecration introduces into the universal mission of this people a special source of spiritual and supernatural energy"<sup>21</sup>.

*Consecration* has therefore become the keyword summing up the condition and path of holiness of those who dedicate themselves, by public profession, to the radical following of Christ. All projects of existence which are in line with this proposal are called *consecrated life*, even though among them there may be notable differences as regards manner, organization and immediate purpose.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* takes up the argument directly and speaks of it with studied clarity, assign-

<sup>20</sup> *Essential elements of the teaching of the Church on the religious life*, 5

<sup>21</sup> RD, 7

ing to consecration other qualifying and distinctive elements of this kind of existence. At n.72, under the heading "Consecrated for mission" it says: "In the image of Jesus, the beloved Son 'whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world' (Jn 10:36), those whom God calls to follow him are also consecrated and sent into the world to imitate his example and to continue his mission"<sup>22</sup>.

Of such consecration, which is defined as "new and special", the sense is clarified and misunderstandings removed. There is continuity with baptismal consecration because the latter is assumed in radical form. At the same time there is an innovation, a 'leap', an exodus, an intervention of God, since this kind of existence is not necessarily included in the grace of baptism. It implies a personal call or vocation.

The objective excellence of consecrated life does not exclude other objectives which are excellent in their own way (lay, priestly), nor does it lead to a spiritual hierarchy. But it gives rise to an enriching difference in communion, and so represents a typical contribution in terms of sign, proclamation, witness of Christian life and service to the Church's mission.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* emphasizes that no other element, apart from or separated from this one, can provide the correct physiognomy or justify the presence of religious life in today's world: not educative or social commitments, not voluntary work in situations of poverty, not struggles for great causes of humanity; only the fact that one has felt called to witness to the primacy of God and to accept the indispensable centrality of Christ in the orientation and organization of one's own life. And because they cannot provide the original feature, so other motivations are insufficient for assuming a consecrated way of life. And so the weakness is

<sup>22</sup> VC, 72

evident, especially at the present day, of a vocation prompted solely by enthusiasm for work with the young, the advancement of the poor, and similar purposes. Without more solid and definitive roots such motivations soon fade away.

All this calls for some comment.

Not everyone has understood the implications of this choice and insistence. In various meetings and gatherings I have heard reservations expressed in this regard, and it is useful to look at the underlying motives, because here and there such reservations can be found lurking even in our own environments.

Some may think that we are going back to a way of thinking of religious as persons publicly constituted in a different social situation, an idea abhorrent to the mentality of the present day. This is totally excluded. No prerogatives or status privileges follow from our choice of God in either secular settings or in the Church. And it is worthwhile recalling that our way of life gives us neither protection or defence, but rather leaves us exposed.

Then there are some reservations that follow from a suspicion that consecrated persons consider themselves 'superior' and are thought to be so by others. The "objective excellence" of consecrated life, the "new and special consecration", the word "more" (more radical, more intense, more near to, more conformed) which is repeated so often in describing the commitment of the religious as regards the obligations of every Christian, give rise to suspicion. And there is also the fear that religious may appear to be organized as a separate category, in contrast with the present ecclesial vision of communion to be realized in immediate settings, like the local Churches and parish communities.

Two other difficulties are raised by some people. One of them is of a pastoral kind: that the assertion of a first and almost isolated personal relationship with God once again puts religious at the centre of their own perfection, detaching them

from the fact that they are in and for the world. The other is spiritual in nature: that it gives rise to an intimist or dualist vision (sacred-profane, spiritual-corporal, relation with God and action in the world) of Christian experience. These two aspects concern us closely because of the apostolic objective of our Congregation set out in art.6 of the Constitutions and on account of the spiritual activity which inspires pastoral charity.

Neither of the meanings which provoke such suspicions are included in the term consecration, according to the deeper studies made in recent years. Rather the total sense of consecration is highlighted. It comprises at one and the same time all the elements of the project of a life in God: evangelical counsels, apostolic mission, fraternal communion, spirituality. It is not an organizational element above and different from all these, but the event which is at their foundation. It is the grace and relationship which embraces all of them.

This is familiar to us because we find it in our Constitutions: "Our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers"<sup>23</sup>.

Consecration does not consist in an external way of life but in a grace which transforms from within. Our Rule asserts that we have been consecrated not by a person or human institution, not in virtue of some gesture (even a liturgical one), but with the gift of the Spirit: "The Father consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young"<sup>24</sup>.

This is a theme which is taken up continually in our Constitutions in other words which are equivalent: vocation, covenant with God, total donation, love of predilection, radical

<sup>23</sup> C 3

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*



option. They all indicate the same thing: a very particular relationship of God and with God which marks our personal experience and our work of education.

To express this comprehensive meaning within consecrated life (following of Christ through the vows, life of communion, concrete form of mission), many types or forms exist. Consecration has multiple expressions, not just a single one. People speak of ancient, modern and future forms of religious life. It is well to understand this, so as not to confuse consecration with only its strictly 'religious' aspect, creating a kind of dualism regarding pastoral commitments. This is still more true when the latter (as in our case) are carried out in a secular environment and require a professional approach and secular relationships as well.

For our personal unity, for our witness, for the contribution we must make to the educative community, it is to our purpose to look again at some aspects of consecration. Nowadays, rather than as a single 'moment', it is seen as a 'continuum' which embraces the whole of our life; rather than a 'state' in which one becomes established once for all; it is considered a gift, a path to be followed, a relationship to be cultivated. "The entire life dedicated to the service of God establishes a special consecration"<sup>25</sup>.

Consecrated life comprises the personal experience of the call or vocation, the welcoming in faith of God's initiative, the choice of a particular project for being a disciple or follower of Christ, recognition on the part of the Church of the action of God in the individual, and the public insertion of the chosen project in the mission.

I think it will be useful to think over these aspects and passages once again, and to relive them. They are not only of doctrinal value and enlightening, but are a condition for the lively manifestation of consecration in our environments.

<sup>25</sup> *Essential elements of the teaching of the Church on the religious life*, III, 4

### 3. The joyful experience of having received a gift

"A *call* and the interior *attraction* which accompanies it", says the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* speaking of consecration<sup>26</sup>. "Those who are called to the consecrated life have a *special experience of the light* which shines forth from the Incarnate Word"<sup>27</sup>. "Those who have been given the grace of this special communion of love with Christ feel as it were *caught up in his splendour*"<sup>28</sup>.

Many oblique references in the Apostolic Exhortation endorse this subjective element, which is the sign and first step of consecration: the appeal of the beauty which attracts, the feeling of having been reached by a particular manifestation of Christ<sup>29</sup>, being taken up into the horizon of eternity<sup>30</sup> or enveloped in the brightness of truth, of having experienced the God of love, the interior happiness of new knowledge, the rapture of wisdom.

Consecration consists in the fact that God makes himself felt in our life in an unusual and even unique way, even to the extent of enveloping it completely and becoming its principal incentive, the One to whom we listen most eagerly and love to look at. And this not for any religious or ethical duty, but as life, sense and joy.

This attraction or falling in love with God is a fact and experience which we can relive from the past. It marks the progress of our vocational decision. We can remember when and why we made our decision for him, just as surely as a husband and wife recall when they met and how their mutual attraction developed.

<sup>26</sup> VC, 17

<sup>27</sup> VC, 15

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *cf.* VC, 14

<sup>30</sup> *cf.* *ibid.*

For some it may have been a sudden flash at a moment of particular spiritual intensity, for example a retreat. For most people it will all have happened gradually: a first taste through contact with religious environments or persons, in which we discerned particular values; then, little by little we came to discover the source from which the values proceeded; we shared in the experience of those who had impressed us, through friendship, collaboration and confidences. We discovered a panorama of life that was new and full of meaning. And finally, we felt ourselves captured, in line with St Paul's expression: "Christ Jesus has made me his own"<sup>31</sup>.

It is the biblical experience of belonging to God and being unable to detach ourselves from him, even though aware of our weakness and infidelity: "Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed (...); within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot"<sup>32</sup>.

Sometimes we hear personal stories of this kind at youth gatherings when a young religious relates to companions how and why he or she decided to enter religious life.

The accounts vary widely, both as regards anecdotes and circumstances. But underlying all of them there is a common design: first a brief glimpse of the worth of Christ, of God the Father for our own life; reflection led us to choose them as the "love" of our own existence, preferring it to any other possible human experience. That is how it began. The rest of the story we hear from religious, including our own confreres, who have responded joyfully to the call.

Consecration does not consist principally in a signed statement, in an ensemble of external signs, in a social state, in separation from the world; but in the fact that God has entered into the life of a person and has taken the first place

<sup>31</sup> Phil 3,12

<sup>32</sup> Jer 20, 7-9

there, living in him and making him his confidant and partner.

It is not something exclusive to religious, nor even to Christians. Wherever God intervenes, by creation or salvation, he consecrates with the presence of his love and bestows an inviolable dignity. The first consecration is human existence: it is the first act of love which establishes the inviolable character of the person, his superiority over everything, and even the fundamental traits of our being.

Through faith and baptism, which are God's self-communication through the ministry of the Church, our belonging to him becomes something conscious and is transformed into the principle of new personal development. We have ourselves expressed this so many times to the young in speaking of the baptismal consecration which makes us children of God, members of his people, and temples of the Spirit.

The unique thing about the consecrated person in the religious life or in the "world" is that he feels all this as the principal element, an indispensable point for his own self-realization. God reaches him at the point when he is planning his own life and, through the gift of the Spirit, draws him to himself in a radical and exclusive manner: this is the fact which gives rise to the consecration which the Church will discern, make public, and confirm by inserting this gift into its own communion and mission.

The recent congress of young religious, which took place in Rome in October 1997, expressed this first element of the consecration in the motto: *Vidimus Dominum*. We have had an experience of a meeting, an unveiling, a "vision" of the Lord.

The eager enthusiasm of this experience must not grow less as we grow older or acquire deep-rooted habits. It is destined rather to increase and fill the whole of life. If it fell short, religious life would lose its motivation and be drawn into functionalism, i.e. into nothing beyond the correct fulfilment of one's duties.



What would happen to us would be what takes place in old couples who continue to live together in peace, but do not expect either anything new nor further happiness.

And I want to add that this is something which is indispensable nowadays. We are living in times when the “subjective” is coming to the fore; communication leads to emphasis on “emotionalism”; the young go where their “heart” leads them; precision becomes less and less important, as something having no relevance to life. To the young religious, the Pope said: “This wisdom (of the consecrated life) is the *zest* of the mystery of God, the *flavour*”<sup>33</sup> of divine intimacy; but it is also the beauty of remaining together in his name”

#### 4. Acknowledgement of God's initiative

In line with this intuition, relish, clear perception of the presence of God and of the attraction of Christ together with our own joyful and welcoming acceptance, there begins to take root in us the conviction of being on the receiving end of God's love and attention, not in a general way as an individual in a crowd, but personally: “I have called you by name”<sup>34</sup>.

“He chose us before the foundation of the world for adoption as his children”<sup>35</sup>. Scripture is full of such passages describing God's attitude in our regard.

The first step is his. We did not go to him; he came to us and entered into our life. The category of “gift” for interpreting the fact, not only of vocation but of existence itself, is the dominant one and is used continually in the Apostolic Exhortation.

Striking is the use of the verb “consecrate” in the passive

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Message to Congress VIDIMUS DOMINUM* of young religious, 29.9.97.

<sup>34</sup> Is 43,1

<sup>35</sup> Eph 1,4

voice. Frequently it is said "we have been consecrated". Consecration is not an effort on our part to attain a certain degree of virtue, or to put the thought of God at the centre of our life. It is rather the consequence of a fact which is within us and at the basis of our project. Consecration is a visit, a gift, a coming of God towards us, an inrush of his grace into our life. In the Gospel the initiative is expressed through the glance Jesus bestows on certain people, the call, the invitation, the fascination to which he gives rise, the practical involvement and questioning, his visit to a house.

You see the same kind of thing in the vocations of the prophets. They are sudden and unforeseeable. It is not that the prophet goes in search of God, but that God seizes him and takes possession of him. Amos says he was tending his sheep when he heard God's voice<sup>36</sup>. Similar sudden calls, albeit in widely differing circumstances, are recounted by the other prophets. Usually this element is placed first for theological reasons of causality.

The initiative is taken by the Father who places us on the way to Christ. "This is the meaning of the call to the consecrated life: it is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. Jn 15:16), who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion"<sup>37</sup>. The initiative, in history, also belongs to the Son. Jesus calls and invites: "Of some he asks a total commitment, one which involves leaving everything behind (cf. Mt 19:27) in order to live at his side and to follow him wherever he goes"<sup>38</sup>. The initiative belongs to the Spirit who, from the depth of mind and heart, evokes openness, clear understanding, relish, ideas, tendencies and love for God and his work. "It is the Spirit who awakens the desire to respond fully; it is he who guides the growth of this desire,

<sup>36</sup> cf. Amos 1,1

<sup>37</sup> VC,17

<sup>38</sup> VC,18

helping it to mature into a positive response and sustaining it as it is faithfully translated into action"<sup>39</sup>.

It is a matter of being ready to listen, to respond, to allow oneself to be taken over, to accept willingly. The initiative and possibilities do not lie in us. We need to feel a presence who has made us the object of his predilection and to respond with love. The consecration is founded totally on this relationship. It is not mainly an effort of overcoming ourselves, but a confrontation, a combat with God. In the biblical image of Jacob who struggled with God, the dominant idea is the desire for the closeness and blessing of the Lord, from whom we cannot separate ourselves, even though at times his presence may provoke resistance in us. The image is a vigorous expression of a relationship felt as vital, even though in a life which has its problems.

This initiative of God must not remain a personal "secret", a theological doctrine, but become an acknowledgement or proclamation which explains to the young why we made our choice of life. We should reawaken it above all in the inevitable moments of trial which we often try to resolve by our own unaided efforts.

## 5. A project of life in God

From the two facts described above, which existentially are only one (presence of God and welcome, vocation and response, call and following, gift and correspondence with it, revelation and adherence), there follows a third: an orientation and choice of life.

There has matured in us the feeling and conviction that we are his, that "in him we live and move and have our being"<sup>40</sup>,

<sup>39</sup> VC,19

<sup>40</sup> Acts 17,28

that he is the first and only one of importance, not in abstract or in general for the world or for the human race, but for us.

On him we have concentrated our hopes and expectations. We seek him "at daybreak"<sup>41</sup>, i.e. continually, as a source of meaning, as a confidant, as a companion.

From this stems a bond which gradually fills us with light and peace, even psychologically, and characterizes us before the world. The consecrated person is one who has put God and religious values, the faith and what it offers, at the centre. "The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup"<sup>42</sup>.

This becomes not only a vague desire but a formal intention: the effort to attain and live the mystery of God not as a brief daily or weekly pause, e.g. in the Mass or prayer, but as a permanent relationship able to inspire decisions and way of life.

For this reason we adopt a concrete proposal, a visible way of life, which bears the sign of God. We are incorporated in a community which has already made the same option and has set out a plan for its development.

This kind of community life too is "consecrated", not by virtue of material separation from the world, by signs and external practices (this would be an alien vision of the Christian faith), but because the communion arises from the ongoing action of the Spirit, life is planned under the inspiration of the gospel, and the Church recognizes it as one of its authentic and visible expressions. Our Constitutions express it in art.50: "God calls us to live in community... (In them) we become one heart and one soul to love and serve God and to help one another"<sup>43</sup>.

In this project emphasis is laid on the desire to be conformed to Christ, expressed in the evangelical counsels we have taken up by vow. Even though precise in their specific

<sup>41</sup> Ps 62,2

<sup>42</sup> Ps 16,5

<sup>43</sup> C 50

object, they have a meaning which is open towards generosity, and a limitless creativity.

They express the quintessence of the gospel and are a sign of the life to which the gospel gives inspiration. Nowadays they are exposed to more serious questions and to new challenges. And it is quite other than superfluous to reflect on them again in the light of the tendencies, manners and usages of the present day to rediscover their positive force, challenge and prophecy. The challenges in fact give rise to new expressions and bring out new messages. Understanding them in the evangelical sense, choosing them as a way of life, deciding to profess them publicly, being creative in expressing them at the present day, is a gift which proceeds from the Trinity and reflects the mystery of donation.

To imitation must be added two other requirements. In the first place there is the rapport, friendship and intimacy with Christ. The assumption of his preferences and attitudes would not be sufficient. A personal relationship is needed. Jesus is a living person to meet and live with. Between him and the consecrated person a deep rapport is established. This we are taught by the life of the disciples. Jesus in fact had listeners, admirers, followers, disciples and some who were particularly close to him and on terms of intimacy. He said of them: "You are my friends"<sup>44</sup>. They were moved to share their life with him and to stay together. "Master, where are you staying?"<sup>45</sup> Once again we should meditate on the fact that consecration grafts us more intimately into the life and paschal mystery of Christ.

Nowadays, when all institutional bonds seem weak and all formal memberships seem transitory and of little consequence, this personal experience becomes a convincing testimony and a guarantee of fidelity.

<sup>44</sup> Jn 15,14

<sup>45</sup> Jn 1,38

At this point a comment may be opportune: it is fitting that affective manifestations of friendship with Christ be given, in addition to effective ones. Two extremes need to be avoided: to convert love into a superficial sentiment, a simple movement of sensitivity; and at the other extreme to make our heart arid through forgetfulness or intellectualism. If the will frequently finds itself held back in the love of God, one of the reasons is that our human sensitivity has become atrophied. As long as faith or the thought of God fails to reach our feelings, they remain marginalized and ineffective. There were some saints who showed great tenderness in their love for God. We may recall St Francis of Assisi but, not less though with a different style, St Francis de Sales from whose spirituality we take our inspiration.

In addition to imitation and intimacy there is also active participation in Christ's cause, i.e. to spend ourselves for those things for which he worked and suffered. We shall deal later with this at greater length, when we focus on the prevalently apostolic character of our consecration.

This process of friendship, imitation, participation, discipleship, is called in the Apostolic Exhortation "conforming one's whole existence to Christ"<sup>46</sup>. "By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, 'that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world' (LG 44)"<sup>47</sup>.

This aspect too of consecration provokes in us some practical and helpful questions. Does the heart of the project, the option for Christ, preserve within us its central position, even to the extent of giving light and colour to all the rest?

Do we succeed in getting over to our young people and collaborators that our life is lived under the impulse of a great

<sup>46</sup> VC,16

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*



“love”, which seemed beneficial to us even from a human point of view?

## 6. Public profession

These three facts: call-response-project, presence-welcome-choice, invitation-correspondence-covenant are expressed by profession. In it the individual “consecrates himself”, in the common expression for offering himself, devoting himself, making himself completely available. As in Baptism, the Lord consecrates the person whom the Spirit has prompted to offer himself and gives him new grace to enable him to walk with Christ in newness of life<sup>48</sup>.

The oldest formulas are trimmed down to the essentials. Those of the present day, on the other hand, tend to be rather long and analytical. But all of them emphasize that the object of the consecration are not things, nor activities, nor moral obligations, but the person; that the ultimate aim is not a task but the love of God who is perceived and the desire to correspond with it; that the principal subjects are the Lord and the one making profession: “God my Father, you consecrated me to yourself”. (...) “I offer myself totally to you”<sup>49</sup>.

“Religious profession is a sign of a loving encounter between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds by giving himself totally to God and to his brothers and sisters”<sup>50</sup>. The demands of consecration are therefore total, exclusive and perpetual: all, only and for ever. There was a period in which the formula used was “until death”. It was not an indication of time but of intensity: until the holocaust, until the consummation.

<sup>48</sup> cf. RD, 7

<sup>49</sup> C 24

<sup>50</sup> C 23

Profession is of unique importance in the organization and development of our spiritual life. It is not a passing act, a rite which is performed and done with, leaving obligations to be respected, but the beginning of a relationship which will be prolonged all through life, like that of matrimony. It should foster attitudes and expressions, and give direction to life. Hence it is not only a plan for sanctification, a contract of membership in a community, but especially a source of grace, as is for newly-weds their initial promise of mutual belonging to each other.

On the grace received and on the obligation of corresponding to it the whole of life will be built. Its influence on daily life makes all the difference between the authentic Salesian and his halfhearted confrere. Hence it is more than fitting that there be an immediate preparation, especially for perpetual profession, which has by now become common in the Congregation. It should not be reduced in time and content but should emphasize both the deeper meaning and the appreciation of the experience already gained.

Profession is the public recognition on the part of the Church of God's invading presence in the life of a person, and of the will of the individual concerned to live such an event in the Christian community and at the service of the Kingdom, and hence not in an intimist and individual form. The Church recognizes him and incorporates him in the communion and mission of the people of God. It authenticates the gift, and serves as the mediator of the consecration<sup>51</sup>. And so the liturgy enhances profession with a special celebration: it invokes on the individuals the gift of the Holy Spirit and associates their oblation to the sacrifice of Christ, while the numerous presence of the community at the act gives to it a charismatic and ecclesial importance.

This action of the Church is to be linked with a point vigor-

<sup>51</sup> cf. *Essential elements of the teaching of the Church on the religious life*, I, 8

ously discussed nowadays in certain circles, especially from a practical point of view: the indispensable nature of consecrated life for the quality of communion and mission in the Church. We read in the Apostolic Exhortation: "The consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature"<sup>52</sup>.

"The idea of a Church made up only of sacred ministers and lay people does not therefore conform to the intentions of her divine Founder, as revealed to us by the Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament"<sup>53</sup>.

Profession is not a generic promise of love, subjectively conceived and expressed, but the assumption of a real project, raised up by the Spirit, lived by the Founder to a degree of holiness, and recognized by the Church as an efficacious way for the *sequela Christi*. It leads therefore to a "return to the Rule"<sup>54</sup> which gathers together the spirit, discipline and customs already tried out for the realization of the project.

Interest in spirituality has become a phenomenon of the present day. Some go looking for books which put it forward and explain it. In the Constitutions it is found already studied by successive generations who have lived it; it is handed on to us in a magnificent manner in particular formulas which reflect this long existence. A rapid reading, or hearing it read in community, do scant justice to the depth and rich nature of the text. A deeper reading, which gives due value to the whole and to individual expressions, which compares the meaning of those expressions with the history of the charisma and with personal life, will help us to understand and appreciate the wisdom of the process offered by profession.

We know that "our living rule is Jesus Christ, the Saviour

<sup>52</sup> VC, 29

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> VC, 37

announced in the Gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world, and whom we find present in Don Bosco<sup>55</sup>. For this very reason "we willingly accept the Constitutions as Don Bosco's will and testament..., we meditate on them with faith and pledge ourselves to put them into practice; they are for us, the Lord's disciples, a way that leads to Love"<sup>56</sup>.

From what we have said so far it is evident that life becomes ever more authentically consecrated through God's call or invitation, the experience of his felt presence, the will to respond, a concrete plan of life which puts Jesus Christ at the centre of life, and the action of the Church which inserts the whole ensemble into its own communion and mission.

Consecration embraces the whole of life and is realized after the manner of a crescendo, a covenant, a pact of love and fidelity, the final communion.

## **7. Some consequences.**

We can now draw some important conclusions for our work among the young and among lay people.

Consecrated persons take up sanctification as the main aim in life. This is common to all forms of consecrated life. In their way of life, of relationships, of work, they want to live and in some way communicate the mystery of the liberating God who is close to us, by "conforming one's whole existence to Christ"<sup>57</sup> They want to be a living memorial of Christ<sup>58</sup>.

The Constitutions tell us that holiness is the most precious gift we can offer to the young<sup>59</sup>. But it is difficult for them to build their humanity on this alone. Discordant and contradic-

<sup>55</sup> C 196

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> VC, 16

<sup>58</sup> *cf.* VC, 22

<sup>59</sup> *cf.* C 25

tory messages and suggestions reach them from outside. It is difficult for them to evaluate them, make judgements and especially decide on their path in life. The libertarian atmosphere all around makes it difficult to listen to the voice of conscience and to establish mature moral criteria.

It is not easy for them either, in the secular context, to perceive the transcendence of Christ and believe that he is alive today and not just an edifying story from the past.

Placed in this manner in a strict relationship with the mission, holiness becomes the chief contribution of Salesian religious to education and human advancement. In fact it has a temporal value not only because of works of charity for the benefit of the poor, but also for the outlook, the meaning and the dignity it gives to human social life.

The existence of consecrated persons, therefore, has a primacy without parallel. Their project of community life ensures a right order of priorities: the contemplative element of prayer and interior life, the apostolic element of self-donation for the Kingdom, and the ascetical element of penance and exodus; and all these lived in an intimate rapport and collaboration with Christ under the guidance of the Spirit.

Another consequence, linked with the preceding, is that consecrated persons are seen as experts in the **experience of God**. Such experience is at the origin of their vocation. Their plan of life and what they usually do tends to cultivate this and foster it. All Christians, on the other hand, should want to have a certain experience of God; but they can give their attention to it only at intervals and in less favourable circumstances, and so they run the risk of neglecting it altogether.

Those who are consecrated offer themselves as confidants for all in the world who are in search of God. To those who are already Christians they offer the possibility of having a new religious experience in their company; those who are not believers they join in their process of searching.

Nowadays this kind of service is becoming widespread and much sought after, as is shown by the opening of convents and monasteries to those who want to use them for days and periods of reflection. We, on the other hand, are called to provide a similar service among young people.

There is a law of life which is applicable in all circumstances: no value will survive in society without a group of people who dedicate themselves completely to promoting it. Without medical personnel and the organization of hospitals good health would not be possible. Without artists and the corresponding institutions the artistic sense of the population would decline. The same kind of thing happens with the sense of God: religious, whether contemplatives or not, form the group of mystics who are able to help those at least who are close to interpreting life in the light of the Absolute and experiencing it.

This applies to all the essential aims of religious life. And so the Founders placed the sense of God above all the features and activities of their institutes. Believers and non-believers alike see mediocrity in consecrated religious as a deformity, and the religious themselves feel an unfillable void if this dimension disappears.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* sees religious life as a privileged setting for dialogue between the great religions<sup>60</sup>, because at its origin is an option which, in general terms, is shared by all deeply religious persons.

The salesian Constitutions recall the same point in art.62: "In a world beguiled by atheism and the idolatry of pleasure, possession and power, our way of life bears witness, especially to the young, that God exists, and that his love can fill a life completely"<sup>61</sup>.

A demonstration of this professional profile of ours is our

<sup>60</sup> cf. VC 101,102

<sup>61</sup> C 62

personal experience of God, made conscious, sought after, more deeply analyzed and matured as adults; it is shown also by the ability to initiate others, and especially young people, along the same lines. They are looking for some moment of spirituality, even though it be out of curiosity or a passing whim. This is clear from the way they frequent retreat houses. It would be a sad state of affairs if those consecrated were more concerned about the administration of such houses, than about being qualified to guide others towards the spiritual life.

## II. OUR APOSTOLIC CONSECRATION<sup>62</sup>

### 1. Unique nature of "salesian" consecration

Consecrated life is realized in a unique fashion in the salesian charisma. We have already made a few brief references to the point, to preserve unity among what we were saying. Now we can focus more directly on the point.

Our Constitutions tell us that ours is an apostolic consecration: "Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life"<sup>63</sup>. God's call reached us through the experience of the mission to the young; for many this was the spark that began the fire of all that followed.

It is in the mission that the gifts of consecration are made, appear in their charismatic uniqueness and grow in us. There is a single movement of charity which draws us towards God and moves us towards the young, especially the poorer ones among them, which prompts signs of love and correspondence with the Father and urges us to provide the services of which the young are in need.

<sup>62</sup> cf. C 3

<sup>63</sup> C 3

The two dimensions are in fact related like concentric circles: we contemplate God in his providing presence and in his work of salvation, we discern him in events, we can understand his sentiments and actions in the light of the image of the Good Shepherd who goes in search of his flock and gives his life on the Cross. We live the work of education with the young as an act of worship and possibility of an encounter with God.

If one of these elements were eroded or absent, our joyful educative experience and our plan of spiritual life would lose its zest: in a word, the particular grace of our consecration would fall back to the common level, and our charism would lose its value.

It is true that our spirituality is balanced on the other side by our activity. In fact "as he works for the salvation of the young, the Salesian experiences the fatherhood of God, and continually reminds himself of the divine dimension of his work"<sup>64</sup>.

*Da mihi animas, apostolic spirituality, pastoral charity, oratorian heart*: these are all phrases which provide a measure of the originality and unity we want to give to our life. Very true of us is what *Vita Consecrata* says of consecrated persons in general: "the task of devoting themselves wholly to 'mission' is included in their call"<sup>65</sup>, just as it is true that in the fulfilment of the mission we find the material, motivation and stimulus to live in depth that love of God who "provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them"<sup>66</sup>.

It must be emphasized that our mission is centred in the area of youth, and follows the way of education. Here the charism is manifested and we find once again a secret of our

<sup>64</sup> C 12

<sup>65</sup> VC, 72

<sup>66</sup> C 20



vitality. This gives us ample scope nowadays for creativity regarding the application of our resources, the reformulation of the projects, and the renewal of activities.

Far from us, therefore, should be any dichotomy between interior life and pastoral commitment, between religious spirit and educational work, or the escape to any other forms which are not in line with those three words of Don Bosco: *work, prayer, temperance*.

A clarification is needed nonetheless, but I will not delay on it because I think it is obvious: the mission does not consist in the professional work we accomplish. A religious, man or woman, is an educator like all others, but not in the same way as those others. The mission is not even just the pastoral service one wants to offer. It is a spiritual experience; the feeling of collaborating with God, of being "sent" by him through the experiences in which we see the expression of his will, in the first place religious profession in which we have manifested our intention to follow his call and to be united with him in his work for the benefit of the world and of every individual.

The purpose of the mission goes beyond the results, excellent though they may be, obtainable by professional work. It consists in living, bearing witness to, and proclaiming the Kingdom of God: the possibility of life for all, in particular for the poor, the revelation of God's love for each one, the meaning of life. The kind of life we take up and the work we do serve as ways and means to this end.

This is the thread of the story Don Bosco tells of his life in the Memoirs of the Oratory starting from his first dream. "The Lord sent me to look after boys. I must therefore cut down on other work and keep myself fit for them"<sup>67</sup>. This was an enduring conviction which became ever more deeply rooted in him as time went on and events became more complicated.

<sup>67</sup> BM 7, 171

"The conviction of being under a unique kind of divine pressure dominated the life of Don Bosco; it was at the root of his most daring decisions and ready to break out in unusual ways. The belief of being the Lord's instrument for a very particular mission was deep and well founded within him. It produced in him the religious attitude characteristic of the biblical servant, of the prophet who could not fail to fulfil the divine will"<sup>68</sup>.

This "interior and further dimension" distinguishes the one who is sent from the competent and conscientious executive, from the convinced professional satisfied with his particular craft; it is at the heart of the attitudes which shape an apostolic spirituality. It frees us from excessive attachment to success and satisfaction, from desires (sometimes subconscious), from self-affirmation and from individualism. It keeps us awake to the essential dimensions of our work and infuses a sense of serene trust.

## **2. "Consecrated" uniqueness of our apostolic mission**

Many are involved in the apostolate, including the youth apostolate and that of education. Nowadays many of them perform it with the salesian spirit.

The mission of religious however has certain characteristics of its own, which make its service part of ecclesial communion, and different from a similar material service offered in another condition of life.

It is of interest to give some more thought to this statement because it touches us closely: as educators we do all that would be done by any competent Christian educator; as priests we do all that would be done by a diocesan priest, supported if you like by a pastoral practice and by a particular spirituality. But the mission is carried out through life before

<sup>68</sup> Stella P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. II, p.32

through work, especially nowadays when the common view is that work is perceived as a means, and not as having to give sense to life.

A characterizing element of the mission of consecrated persons is specifically the choice of life, not only as a source of energy for the work, but as a message and service in itself. "By the action of the Holy Spirit who is at the origin of every vocation and charism, consecrated life itself is a mission, as was the whole of Jesus' life"<sup>69</sup>.

Before and more than *doing* anything, the mission of consecrated life consists in living in a certain way in the Church and in the world, in the place chosen in it by God. In other words, one does not embrace consecrated life only to do excellent things from a religious or promotional standpoint, which can be done in other ways at the present day, but because one has perceived and wishes to manifest the presence of God in history and in life, in the areas and ways involved in the particular vocation.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* explains here and there the reasons behind this assertion. By assuming the "form of life in Christ", consecrated persons become for the Christian community, and for those in the world who are wondering about these things even vaguely, a reference to the fact of Jesus. The religious dimension, which they express in concentrated form, recalls the need for the *reditus ad Deum*, a return at least to the thought of God.

In this sense consecrated persons are already a proclamation, message and a service. They have something to say to man reminding him of the dimension which Scripture calls "heart": interior life, conscience, spirituality.

In situations in which the tendency is to consider only the material conditions of life, even with the good intention of transforming them, consecrated life keeps alive the need to

<sup>69</sup> VC, 72

consider another dimension without which all external progress, albeit necessary and demanding, can become largely insufficient.

Personal and collective existence is ruled by a constellation of values assumed by all: respect for other people, work, health, honesty and sincerity, social responsibility. 'Constellation' implies that among them there is a hierarchy which enables them to be seen as a system. Each one focuses on some of his own preference and in harmony with these organizes all the rest.

Consecrated persons place at the centre the religious value and the confession of Christ, and from this they move on to others, maintaining the first as the justification and matrix of all they do. And so they take up education, attend to the sick, and undertake research. Every branch of human activity is open to those who are consecrated, provided their inspiration and motivation are those of persons who have made God their principal choice and option. It is an abnormality when another dimension gains the ascendancy and the religious spirit becomes only marginal.

Religious have a mission to encourage and support all who commit themselves in some way for the benefit of others, even independently of the faith. I have in mind young people, even non-practising ones, who approach us to become involved in our initiatives, drawn by the kind of life they see in us. For those already living the faith, the witness of consecrated persons gives meaning to their dedication to their brothers and sisters, recalling that in the work of salvation everything comes from the divine banquet which is received, lived and freely given.

Finally we emphasize the perspective of the "*going beyond*"; it is a service of vision and hope concerning what lies beyond earthly life. It is a matter of living the yearning of the Church for the fullness of life, the desire for the motherland which fills the Christian heart, the expectation of the coming

meeting with the Lord which is the essential content of faith and which opens the windows towards transcendence for all.

"Thus it can be said that consecrated persons are 'in mission' by virtue of their very consecration, to which they bear witness in accordance with the ideal of their Institute"<sup>70</sup>. This is its main aspect. The conclusion seems to be that pastoral work, educational or progressive, without the manifestation of the radical choice of life following Christ, cannot delineate the proper mission of the religious. On the other hand, if such work is taken up in the light of consecration, it becomes an efficacious expression and under certain conditions releases extraordinary energies of charity with particularly eloquent messages.

### 3. Service and prophecy.

"When the founding charism provides for pastoral activities, it is obvious that the witness of life and the witness of works of the apostolate and human development are equally necessary: both mirror Christ who is at one and the same time consecrated to the glory of the Father and sent into the world for the salvation of his brothers and sisters"<sup>71</sup>.

We just said that, under certain conditions, educative pastoral work frees up energy and gives out messages.

The first of these conditions is the **prophetic character**. It is of the whole Church and for all ages; but it is urgently needed at the present day and is particularly indicated for religious. They become a sign and suggestion for orientation, rather than a mere solution for a human need; they do not supply for what others ought to be doing, but offer that which is their own: the gospel. Jesus performs cures, but he also "re-

<sup>70</sup> VC, 72

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

veals new dimensions of life". "opens up horizons of God", says and does things which are "incomprehensible" and "daring", open to criticism and apparently useless at the time but which lay down new criteria of existence.

In the Apostolic Exhortation no less than ten numbers are dedicated to this aspect in the chapter on mission<sup>72</sup>, and they provide us with a criterion for the setting up of our own work or works.

In a world marked by communication, to be able to produce a message would seem to be one of the principal elements of pastoral work. What is important in fact is not only what is realized materially but also that to which it gives rise or stirs up, what it hints at to raise questions, the ideas it inculcates, what it points to, the challenges it launches. It has been said that consecrated life must not only respond to challenges, but itself launch new ones: to the "closed" outlook, to the seeking of instant pleasure. It is interesting to read the signs of the times, but we need to write them anew. We must enter into dialogue with the current mentality, but we must insert in it elements which would not logically be there at all.

The prophetic dimension must not be confused with simple contestation, in particular within the Christian community, with the theatrical gestures so willingly amplified nowadays by the mass media with its flare for the spectacular. But it is true nonetheless that prophecy implies something new, a break with what is taken for granted, the overcoming of immediate and restricted visions so as to go *beyond*: it confirms what is small and hidden but nevertheless true, as Jesus did with regard to the widow's mite, the radical assumption of what is of daily occurrence, but fertile just the same.

The functions of prophecy and prophets can be seen in the history of God's people; they are not far removed from our own needs and experience: prophecy brings back to mind, raises

<sup>72</sup> cf. VC, 84-93

questions, indicates an orientation, interprets events, strengthens and supports, infuses hope, and brings people to their senses and to conversion.

It is not an easy job being a prophet; and so those who attempt it lightheartedly and with vanity end up in discouragement or fall back on other positions.

Elijah can serve as a paradigm of prophecy. Of him it is said: "He lived in God's presence and contemplated his passing by in silence; he interceded for the people and boldly announced God's will; he defended God's sovereignty and came to the defence of the poor against the powerful of the world (cf. 1 Kg 18-19)"<sup>73</sup>.

The problem for religious, including Salesians, is how to give expression to this dimension effectively. It requires fidelity to the message, to the style of life and of initiatives at the present moment in history. The prophets spoke in the context of their own society and events, transcending them but without ignoring or diminishing their import. It means that the proclamation must be authentic and the signs and words intelligible.

One of the main difficulties of consecrated life in the face of today's world is the feeling of being culturally extraneous, and this can weaken prophetic thrust and lead to forms of frustration, resignation, discouragement, withdrawal and even abandonment.

Hence among the many interesting and often original suggestions contained here and elsewhere in the Apostolic Exhortation, attention is called to "a greater cultural commitment". To be prophetic consecrated life must be able to shake up this world which is distancing itself from the gospel. And for this it must be able to read, evaluate, assume, give new meaning to and challenge cultural currents or fashions, in their roots in addition to their manifestations.

<sup>73</sup> VC, 84

Following the three elements of consecration, some prophetic processes can be proposed. The *specific mission* becomes prophetic when it plans and realizes a different and "more" evangelical manner of facing up to the questions typical of the area of its particular commitment; not just provide a stopgap, sop or simple maintenance.

In this sense we have to ask ourselves today what we can put into education and into our presence among young people to produce that impact of novelty in the expression of love that Don Bosco was able to do in his own context.

Prophetic testimony demands not only dedication and competence in one's own work, but also the commitment to think creatively and give cultural motivation to new and more evangelical ways of presence and action, so that the gospel can be leaven in every situation.

The *radical following of Christ* must lead to a discernment of current values and a proposal which represents an alternative kind of education.

It may produce a criticism which calls in question certain orientations or exaggerations of our society. This demands vigilance and evangelical persistence. It implies frank critical action in face of the exaltation of the sexual instinct disconnected from any moral norm, and from the "culture of transgression" which leads to very real aberrations; of the quest for money at all costs (think of the grave instances of exploitation!), which leads to social insensitivity and the practical abandoning of the poor to their fate by both governments and public opinion; and finally as regards the exaggerated and narcissistic desire for success, of making the grade at any price, of becoming someone of importance, of having power.

But contestation is not sufficient in itself, and is still less so if it appears as wholesale condemnation. With a fulfilled and serene life and commitment to cultural reflection, the consecrated person proposes ideals on which people can base their happiness and which offer the wisdom contained in the



gospel. We do this by way of guidance and an educative program assumed in the first place by ourselves.

The following is an interesting note in this connection: "While those who follow the evangelical counsels seek holiness for themselves, they propose, so to speak, a *spiritual therapy* for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created and in a certain way they make visible the living God"<sup>74</sup>. It is a therapy for treating insatiable desires, the state of emptiness, seeking immediate satisfaction, selfishness.

Attention, reflection, interpretative capacity and dialogue, should together give rise to the ability and readiness to enter into communication with and confront secular culture, if it is true that the gospel is an enrichment for mankind, and the closer we get to Christ the more we become men and women<sup>75</sup>.

*Fraternal life in common* becomes prophetic when it refines a critical conscience in the face of individualism. With it we unite ourselves with those who elaborate a "culture of solidarity", contributing our own experience and reflection. This is particularly striking when, as we set out in the preceding Letter, it leads to the expansion of communion and the spirit of reconciliation, welcoming the most needy and exchanging the gifts of the charisma in the educative community.

#### 4. The many gifts of our consecrated community

Another original aspect of the contribution our experience as consecrated persons can provide, if it is lived in depth and radiantly expressed in our educative work, stems from the form of our community. In it there are gifts and personal charisms which are assumed and given new significance by consecration. And there are tasks interpreted and lived in the light of the consecration.

<sup>74</sup> VC, 87

<sup>75</sup> cf. GS, 41

In particular the salesian community is enriched by the significant and complementary presence of the salesian priest and the salesian brother<sup>76</sup>. Together they provide an unusual complementarity of energy for witnessing and the educative mission.

We may wonder what exactly the figures of the salesian brother and the salesian priest demonstrate in the experience and witness of apostolic consecration; what does the lay character emphasize in 'consecration', and what does 'consecration' give to the lay state, both of them moulded and fused by the salesian spirit. Similarly we may wonder what the ministerial priesthood highlights in salesian consecration and what the latter gives to the ministry.

The original value is not found in external additions of status or category of members, but in the resulting physiognomy of the salesian community itself.

The **salesian brother** "combines in himself the gifts of consecration with those of the lay state"<sup>77</sup>. He lives the lay state not in secular conditions but in the consecrated life; as a salesian religious he lives his vocation as a layman, and as a layman he lives his community vocation of a salesian religious<sup>78</sup>.

"To his consecrated brethren", declares the GC24, "he recalls the values of the creation and of secular realities; to the laity he recalls the values of total dedication to God for the cause of the Kingdom. To all he offers a particular sensitivity for the world of work, attention to the local environment, and the demands of the professional approach associated with his educative and pastoral activity"<sup>79</sup>.

In him professional techniques, secular fields of work,

<sup>76</sup> cf. GC24 174; C 45

<sup>77</sup> GC24, 154; cf. 236

<sup>78</sup> cf. *The Salesian Brother*, Rome 1989, n.119

<sup>79</sup> GC24, 154

practical forms of involvement show their basic orientation towards the ultimate good of mankind, especially the young, and towards the Kingdom. "Everything is open to him, even those things which priests cannot do", but everything is placed in the light of the radical love for Christ, polarized in the direction of evangelization and the eternal salvation of the boys.

"The presence of the lay Salesian enriches the apostolic activity of the community. It reminds the priest members of the values inherent in the lay religious vocation and recalls them constantly to an active collaboration with lay people. It also recalls to the salesian priest the vision of an apostolic goal and ideal that is complex in its reality, because it goes beyond priestly and catechetical activity in the strict sense"<sup>80</sup>.

Especially in certain contexts and in face of a certain way of perceiving and conceiving the priest as a sacred or cultist figure, the style of consecration of the salesian brother proclaims in a concrete manner the presence and communication of God in daily life, the importance of becoming disciples before being teachers, the duty of witnessing to a personal experience of faith over and above functional or ministerial commitments.

Certain attitudes, which are taken for granted in the priest, because they are thought to be part of his "job", are more challenging when they are found in the lay religious too.

The figure of the **salesian priest** combines in itself the gifts of consecration and those of the pastoral ministry. The priesthood has in him a particular expression which stems not only from his specifically priestly identity but also from the fruitful fusion with the salesian apostolic consecration.

Ecclesial reflection has made it clear that the priesthood is not something generic, neither as the exercise of the ministry

<sup>80</sup> *The Salesian Brother*, n.133

nor as a grace. Its practice and spirituality are shaped by his specific vocation.

Contributing to the sign have been those who coined for Don Bosco's biography the title: "A priest educator", or "A priest for the young". The charism has given rise to a unique manner of being a priest and of exercising the ministry.

The priest is a sacramental mediation of Christ, to whom the Salesian is conformed in pastoral charity and in the desire to save the souls of the young in an educative context. His word not only reflects the word of Jesus, but shares in it. In the world of education the use of the word takes place in situations and circumstances, themes and forms which are "sui generis". They range from the homily to personal and friendly conversations, from catechesis to the classroom. He uses the pulpit, the teacher's desk and the playground. He adopts forms of preaching, of greeting and of giving advice. He brings light to the problems of the young and heals their wounds.

The salesian priest's activity of coordination and animation is a participation in the pastoral ministry of Jesus and of the Church. He makes use of the grace of the latter to unite the community and direct it towards the Father. In the environment and in the educative community such a ministry has requirements, objectives and typical methods.

Nonetheless the service of sanctification has in the field of education, with poor and needy boys and with collaborators, its particular processes which are most significant and fruitful in the sacraments, but are not limited to them. It is all a matter of initiation into the life of Christ.

In the salesian community clerics and laymen build and bear witness to a model brotherhood, eliminating the separation based on roles and ministries through their ability to share different gifts in a single project. This relationship is the source of mutual enrichment and stimulus for a harmonious experience, in which the priesthood does not eclipse the

religious identity and the lay characteristic does not conceal the radical nature of the consecration. All this is an antidote to the over-clericalization of the religious priest, which is deplored in some areas of consecrated life, or to the over-secularization of the lay religious.

We shall have to be particularly careful to encourage in priests a sensitivity to the lay dimension in the history of the Church and of salvation, and to foster in brothers an experience which is not generic but nourished by pastoral charity. In this way the grace of unity will be evident in the life of every confrere, in the characteristics of the community, and in the fulfilment of the mission.

In the Congregation there are just over 11,000 priests, all of them raised up by God as educators of the young. What would happen if all of us revived and practised our "typical" priesthood with intensity? And here I am not talking about taking up a ministry outside the setting which has been entrusted to us, but specifically of using all the resources of the priesthood in the youth environment and in the educative community.

Similarly we have a far from indifferent number of consecrated laity: about 2,500 of them. What an influence it could have on the young and on educators if they lived out their lay state to the full in the light of the love of God and their fellow-men! Their significant and credible presence makes clear to the young the values of following Christ and being his disciples, things they frequently identify with the priesthood. "To those who do not feel themselves called to the religious life it offers a more immediate model of the Christian life, of sanctified work, and of the lay apostolate. It provides the salesian community with a particular apostolic incarnation in the world, and a particular presence in the Church's mission"<sup>81</sup>.

<sup>81</sup> *The Salesian Brother*, n.133; cf. GC21, 195

## 5. Some consequences.

What we have been saying has many practical applications in three areas. I refer to them only briefly so as to prompt further reflections.

The first is our **religious community**. The signs of the following of Christ must be evident and recognizable in the primacy we give to the religious spirit and the spiritual life. These are manifested in calm, regular and participated prayer. Nowadays, as we said earlier, convents and monasteries are inviting Catholics and others to an experience of prayer. It was typical of Don Bosco and his Salesians to pray with the young and the ordinary people. It would be interesting if our prayer could be so educative that we could share it, in particular circumstances, with anyone who wanted to join in.

Consecration is also manifested in dedication to a communal work which is well ordered and prepared, and carefully carried out. I was struck when reading the Rule of a religious institute by the following points about work: "It is obedience and a prolongation of the Eucharist and of the Divine Office, and the normal object of our offering; hence it is well prepared, cared for, and carried out with religious zeal"<sup>82</sup>.

Consecration is also shown in evangelical temperance. Today there is a request in many places for a return to daily austerity in the face of the spreading of consumerism, inequality and waste. Temperance embraces all the visible manifestations of the vows. Consecration flourishes especially in unity of spirit and action; it is the sign that Jesus himself recommends to his disciples, the sign that Don Bosco most wanted to see in his communities.

The second area for offering the gifts of consecration is the **educative and pastoral community**, in which it leads to an emphasis on the primacy of spirituality as the principal source

<sup>82</sup> Little Family of the Annunciation, Document 10/25

of energy for the educator. We frequently say that the preventive system is both spirituality and pedagogy, and that between the two there is so close a connection that it is not possible to give effect to the second unless the first is realized. This conviction corresponds to a statement of Don Bosco: "The practice of this system is wholly based on the words of St Paul who says: *Love is patient and kind; love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things*"<sup>83</sup>. The preventive system, said the GC24, has a religious soul<sup>84</sup>. It is a pedagogy of the Spirit. The human and professional dimension must be exploited to the full, but all must be leavened by the orientation towards God and the faith.

The third area on which consecration can make itself felt, is the **educative environment**. Here much can be taken up from what we have already said about prophecy. Through word and example young people can see in our life a critique and a pointer: criticism of the excesses of the transgressive mentality, the pursuit of material goods which can impoverish others, purposeless freedom; a proclamation of new and original ways in which the individual can achieve self-realization, the real goods proposed by the Beatitudes, and self-donation as the mainspring of life.

The clearest manifestation of our presence as consecrated persons in educative environments is their pastoral leavening. From the outset the educator aims at revealing the love of God to the young, whatever the starting point and the route to be followed. He does this through an opening up to the faith, preparing the young for a meeting with the living Christ and sustaining a process of growth through catechesis, the sacraments and participation in the Church. A neutral education or one without reference to Christ would have no meaning for us. Our consecration invites us therefore to rethink and realize *evangelizing by educating*.

<sup>83</sup> cf. Constitutions SDB (English edtn.) p.248

<sup>84</sup> cf. GC24, 100 and passim

## 6. The guide of the consecrated community.

The development of the gifts of consecration and the communication of its riches to the educative community and the young are entrusted to the shared responsibility of the community. The animation of the latter is also shared, but it has in the rector its point of reference and the one bearing the main responsibility. He is at one and the same time the religious Superior, the director of the apostolic work, and the spiritual father of the community.

Much thought has been given to his figure and role, and rightly so, on account of the evolution that has taken place in communities and in the arrangement of activities. Both figure and role matured in Don Bosco himself, who was a rector for a long time and in the most creative phase of his life. Of our Father is remembered in particular his concern for spiritual good, the kindness which inspired his relationships and the wise guidance given to individuals and groups: three points which characterized his fatherliness. They were expressed in many of his actions and attitudes.

Rightly does our text *The Salesian Rector* note that the first task of the rector is "to stir up in the individual members the awareness of who they are; to bring their abilities and charisms to the fore; to help them to keep alive the spirit of the theological virtues. (...) In other words to create an environment and conditions which will enable every Salesian, in submission to grace, to mature in his vocational identity and reach the fullness of 'union with God' so characteristic of Don Bosco. All this presupposes a certain technical ability on the part of the one who must organize and direct the community, but animation is more than this: it is a spirit and even a spiritual art"<sup>85</sup>.

Recent General Chapters have insisted on a "spiritual" an-

<sup>85</sup> *The Salesian Rector*, Rome 1986, n.105



imation, able to present once again in contextualized form the motives which are at the basis of our life, in order to foster an ever more conscious and complete response to the Lord. The present situation of our communities, their role in the new operational setup, the need to animate a community of consecrated persons, the insistence on the local community as the place for ongoing formation, all require the Superior to give priority to certain aspects of his service. They are set out well in our Manual, but it is well to read them also in the Synodal text: "The one who presides over the community should be considered, first of all, a master of the spirit who, while exercising a function or ministry of teaching, carries out a true spiritual direction of the community, an authoritative teaching made in the name of Christ, with regard to the Institute's charisma. He serves God to the extent in which he promotes the authenticity of community life and serves the brethren by helping them to realize their vocation in truth"<sup>86</sup>.

We need to recognize the positive signs there are in the Congregation in this connection, such as the willingness to accept the responsibility of direction often in conditions of scarcity of personnel, the ongoing formation which is going ahead almost everywhere, the new care for the expression of brotherly unity, and interest in understanding possible methods of spiritual direction.

Going back to the points developed in the first part of this letter, I feel it a duty to ask rectors to give animation to consecration, reawakening in the confreres the happy experience of their calling, emphasizing the initiative of God in the life and action of the community, and putting forward the project once again in its various aspects with a deepening of the significance of profession.

There are some elements that must be preserved so that

<sup>86</sup> Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the world, *Instrumentum laboris*, 59

no community is without the Word of God, prayer meetings, fellowship in the experience of consecration, and shared responsibility in communal witness and action.

I recall the usefulness of the discernment which leads, in a spirit of sincerity and conversion<sup>87</sup>, to the seeking of the will of God in questions which regard the apostolic project<sup>88</sup>, the life of the community<sup>89</sup>, the gifts and abilities of confreres<sup>90</sup>, vocational clarification<sup>91</sup> and cultural opportunities.

The Constitutions tell us that in line with our traditions, "communities are guided by a member who is a priest, and who by the grace of his priestly ministry and pastoral experience sustains and directs the spirit and activity of his brothers"<sup>92</sup>.

It is not only a juridical requirement, but concerns the substance, ways and means that are associated with the rector's service of authority. He is asked to dedicate to it all the gifts and energies of his priesthood and to animate specifically as a priest and not just as an expert. For the community and for his educative environment he must be a sacramental mediation of Christ. The religious community and educative environment are the field where the Lord calls him to reap the fruits of his priesthood.

\* \* \*

Every day at the end of meditation we renew our entrustment to Our Blessed Lady, invoking her under two linked titles which sum up salesian history and spirituality: Mary Immaculate and Mary Help of Christians. It is a practice we have continued everywhere with affection and heartfelt devotion.

<sup>87</sup> cf. C 91

<sup>88</sup> cf. C 44

<sup>89</sup> cf. C 66

<sup>90</sup> cf. C 69

<sup>91</sup> cf. C 107

<sup>92</sup> C 121

At the end of these reflections I find myself spontaneously moved to join you in spirit in reciting together this prayer of entrustment.

The Constitutions, following a spiritual tradition, see in this image of Mary the representation of our apostolic consecration: "Mary Immaculate, Help of Christians", they say, "leads us to the fullness of our offering to the Lord and gives us courage for the service of our brethren"<sup>93</sup>. The two aspects fuse together in a single movement of charity.

May she teach us to live in these days of ours the unconditional following of Christ and the constant and devoted service of which she is the Mistress and example<sup>94</sup>, and to communicate to the young the joy that is to be found in following Jesus.

A handwritten signature in black 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 triangular shape. The rest of the name "uan Tucki" is written in a more compact, cursive script.

<sup>93</sup> C 92

<sup>94</sup> cf. VC, 28

### 2.1 THE PROVINCIAL DIRECTORY

Fr Luc VAN LOOY

*Vicar General*

For nearly all the Provinces and Vice-provinces 1998 is the year of the Provincial Chapter. This is indicated also by the fact that in the plenary session of the General Council of June-July 1998, the Rector Major and his Council examined and approved 39 capitular documents, making the necessary observations, while others are now arriving and will be examined in the plenary session of December 1998 – January 1999.

As was foreseen, the Provinces have used the opportunity to verify the process of the involvement of lay people in the salesian mission, in accordance with the GC24, but have also examined particular situations and needs in the life and mission of each Province. Only a few Provinces “in case of necessity and because of particular problems” – as was said in the indications given in AGC361 – have revised the *provincial directory*.

The approval of the Chapters by the Rector Major applies especially to those decisions which become binding on the Province as applications of the Constitutions and General Regulations or of the guidelines of the General Chapter, in the context of the Province itself. They are the capitular deliberations and norms contained in the provincial directory, and form part of the proper law of the Province.

As is well known the *Provincial Chapter* is the representative assembly of the confreres and communities of the Province (cf. C 170), which has a specific authority, given to it

by the Constitutions, for giving guidelines and establishing norms concerning the manner of life and salesian mission in the Province on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity. In fact, in line with art.124 of the Constitutions, higher authority "leaves to the initiative of lower levels whatever can be decided and done by them according to their respective competence".

Through communal reflection and consent expressed by voting, as indicated by the Constitutions, the Provincial Chapter can thus give directives and lay down practical guidelines, which acquire force of law in the Province after the approval of the Rector Major with his Council.

Not all capitular deliberations, however, enter into the directory, but only those which have a normative and not just a transitory character, i.e. those which have a stable and lasting influence on the life and mission of the provincial community, and merit inclusion in what can be called the particular code of the Province. It is the Provincial Chapter which decides what deliberations shall form part of the directory, keeping in mind nonetheless that on various matters the General Regulations require the Provinces to lay down norms and insert them in the directory: it is clear that norms of this kind must necessarily be included in the directory.

*The celebration of the Provincial Chapter*, every three years, is an opportunity also for verifying and updating the proper law, i.e. the law the Province imposes on itself in matters in which it is competent, through the elaboration or revision of the provincial directory (cf. C 191), which becomes effective in the Province after its approval by the Rector Major and his Council.

This does not mean, however, that every Provincial Chapter – despite its power to do so – must proceed to a complete revision or redrafting of its own directory which, as already stated, should have a character of stability for the life of

the Province. Ordinarily the Chapter will restrict the verification and updating of the directory to the elements considered necessary, either for the application of the recent General Chapter, or because of urgent questions of special importance. Only in particular circumstances and for serious motives does a wider revision of the directory become necessary.

The study of the directories made in the recent session of the General Council has brought to light a wide range of interpretations given by Provinces to the nature of the directory. Some, in fact, have produced a long and detailed document, including at times inappropriate material, while others have been satisfied with the essential norms, in a succinct text limited to the indispensable indications.

It may be useful therefore to dwell briefly on this aspect.

### *The nature of the directory*

As we have already stated, the directory represents a text of *particular law* (cf. C 191), containing norms indicating how general legislation – Constitutions and Regulations – is to be applied in the local reality, in the particular context of each Province. Its purpose is not to repeat in different words the same things that are laid down in the General Regulations, but to indicate how general principles are to be applied, or give specific indications in what the Constitutions and Regulations leave expressly to provincial legislation.

*The ordering of some areas of the life* of the confreres and communities, in fact, is left deliberately to the judgement of the Province by the General Regulation, specifically to promote decentralization. The Province therefore, through the deliberations of the General Chapter, will see to it that these norms are laid down (cf. R 58, 65, 72, 74, 87, 88, 106, 190).

The fundamental principle is that of helping the confreres, and not laying a burden on them, with norms that correspond to the local context, and the reality of the Province. It is a

matter of a code of norms which regulate life and which, though having a certain stability, can be verified and updated by subsequent Provincial Chapters.

It must be emphasized that the Provincial Directory does not take the place of the General Regulations, nor does it interpret them. All it does, when indicated and necessary, is provide particular norms for their application in the Province. It goes without saying that particular law is subordinate to congregational law, and hence cannot be at variance with the common law indicated in the Constitutions and Regulations. It can be more specific, more concrete, set in a particular context, but not wider; and it cannot extend the frame of observance laid down in the common law of the whole Congregation.

From these remarks on the nature of the particular code of the Province, it is clear that *not everything need go into the directory*. There is a difference between what is matter of law, precise and approved, and the indications of ways and processes the Province wants to follow, but which of their nature do not have the structure of a rigid juridical norm. And so, the Provincial Educative and Pastoral Plan, for example, is not matter for the Provincial Directory, even though it is of great importance for the life and orientation of the Province. This permits an easy and more frequent verification of the Project, since it does not have to pass through all the channels of approval.

On the other hand, the particular law must contain the norms for formation in the Province in an appropriate part of the directory (*formation section*), in which the indications given in the *Ratio* (FSDB) are applied to the local context. Art.87 of the Regulations says quite clearly that the norms concerning the process of formation in the Province form part of the provincial directory and must therefore be approved by the vote of the Provincial Chapter and of the Rector Major with his Council.

*Some concrete points*

To help the Provinces and Provincial Chapters to verify what items must go into the provincial directory, I think it will be useful to look briefly at what the General Regulations say must be contained in the directory, leaving to the Provinces the manner of application.

The following is a rapid list of *norms which must be included in the provincial directory*:

- The life of poverty (R 58)  
The Provincial Chapter must lay down a modest level of life, regulating in particular the use of personal instruments which confreres can take with them on changing house. Vacations of confreres are also regulated by the Provincial Chapter. It will also give indications of solidarity between the houses of the Province and the help to be given by the communities to the general needs of the Province (without detriment to what is attributed by R 197 to the Provincial with his council).
- The verification of poverty (R 65)  
The communities must verify the state of poverty, witness and services they provide. The Provincial Chapter must lay down the times and methods for doing this.
- The annual retreat of the confreres (R 72)  
The arrangement of the retreats is laid down by the Provincial Chapter and introduced into the directory.
- The life of prayer (R 74)  
The manner of performing the practices of piety is laid down by the Provincial Chapter and introduced into the directory.
- Salesian formation (R 87-88. 106)  
All the norms for the formation process in the Province, which apply the *Ratio*, form part of the provincial directory, including those referring to ongoing formation.



- The functioning of the Provincial Chapter (R 167,4)  
This includes everything concerning the organizational aspects of the Chapter, but not its nature.  
It belongs in fact to the Provincial Chapter itself to draw up the laws for its functioning in an appropriate set of rules which each Chapter can revise and update. Such norms can become part of the provincial directory, thus acquiring greater stability. But in this case it must be remembered that norms fixed in the directory become applicable only after the approval of the Rector Major with his Council.
- Local provincial administration (R 190)  
These administrative indications can indeed be laid down by the Provincial Chapter, but the latter can also delegate the task to the Provincial with his Council. In either case, they become part of the provincial directory.

*The following norms may be placed in the directory, but there is no obligation to do so:*

- The manner of making the consultation for the appointment of rectors (R 170)  
The subject laying down how this shall be done is the Provincial with his council, but the Provincial Chapter may give (and hence may also refrain from giving) indications in the provincial directory concerning the competence of the Provincial and the reserve to be exercised in the consultation, and always within the limitations fixed by the Constitutions interpreted by the Rector Major with his Council.
- The figure and tasks of those responsible for various sectors of activity in the communities (C 185).  
It belongs to the Provincial Chapter to define the figure and tasks of those responsible for the principal sectors of activity in the houses, but it is not necessary that these be introduced into the directory. The Provincial Chapter can decide whether to include them or not.

*Norms concerning the following do not form part of the directory:*

- The delegate to the General Chapter (R 162)

The manner of substituting at the General Chapter is laid down by the Provincial Chapter, but it is clear that this indication serves only for those chapters which will be followed by a General Chapter and does not represent a norm of particular law for the life of the Province. Hence it is not to be put in the directory.

*Useful documentation of the theme of the provincial directory.*

Finally I think it may be opportune to indicate some texts which explain the nature and content of the provincial directory, to which recourse may be had when the directory is being revised:

- Elementi giuridici e prassi amministrative nel governo dell'Ispettorato, Rome 1987 (in Italian): n.22: the powers of the Provincial Chapter; nn.43-45: material concerning the formation directory.
- The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco, pp. 964-965.
- L'Ispettore Salesiano (in Italian): n.314, on the life of prayer; n.365, on the formation sector; n.382, on the provincial directory.

I think that these indications, which are essential, can prove useful not only to those who in Provincial Chapters are directly involved in the elaboration of the directives and norms of law in the provincial environment, but to all the confreres who can in this way become more aware of the value of the directory in the application of the Constitutions and Regulations for the life and mission of the Province.

## 2.2 THE FORMATION OF CATECHISTS IN MISSION TERRITORIES

Fr Luciano ODORICO

*Councillor General for the Missions*

During the detailed missionary visits that have been made in every continent, it has frequently been found necessary to stress the importance of the formation of catechists. I intend therefore in this number of the AGC and in the next edition to make some reflections on two themes which I consider urgent:

1. *The formation of catechists in mission territories;*
2. *The formation centres for catechists in mission territories.*

We must always keep in mind that in our salesian missions the catechists are our first lay collaborators, to whom we have to dedicate our special care and attention. They are the ones "who deserve in a quite special way, this title of 'catechists'"<sup>1</sup>.

I am concerned to emphasize the principal points of the serious formation they need and to indicate the respective structures.

The theme is not a new one; indeed it constitutes one of the most demanding and qualifying tasks of the pastoral work of the Church and of its mission *ad gentes* in particular. I am glad to be able to share with you this joy and concern. I quote in this connection the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* to emphasize its importance:

*"Catechists are specialists, direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers who represent the basic strength of Chris-*

<sup>1</sup> CT 66

*tian communities, especially in the young churches... their work is becoming more and more difficult and demanding as a result of ecclesial and cultural changes. What the Council suggested is still valid today: a **more careful doctrinal and pedagogical training, continuing spiritual and apostolic renewal, and the need to provide «a decent standard of living and social security for them»**.*

It is interesting to note that in nearly all the documents a separate chapter is used to emphasize the importance of the spirituality of the catechist, which can help him to be aware of the importance of his mission and sustain him in his work. This is a sign also of the maturity of the Christian community because it points to the need for holiness.

### **The person of the Catechist**

The text we have just quoted from *Redemptoris missio* already gives an inkling of what must be the essential contents of the formation of the catechist: human and integral, spiritual and apostolic as well as doctrinal and pedagogical. The challenge is that of a *harmonious formation* of the whole person of the catechist, avoiding parallelisms and watertight compartments between the spiritual, secular and apostolic dimensions.

Nearly all the documents insist on the human and Christian qualities of the catechists, on the criteria for their selection and the mandate to be entrusted to them, on their ability to teach, educate and bear witness to the faith, beginning from those who share the life and profession.

Nowadays the figure of the “good-will” catechist has become a thing of the past, in face of the demands of the Chris-

tian communities themselves and the requirements of an evangelization and catechesis of quality. His formation, therefore, must aim at personalizing to the maximum his cognitive and pedagogical abilities, and above all his *interior apostolic conviction*; in other words, the aim is to form “a successful catechist who is dynamic and responsible, who works with enthusiasm and finds joy in the exercise of his task”<sup>3</sup>. One must aim therefore at unity and harmony in the person of the catechist, built on a “deep familiarity with Christ and with the Father” at a spiritual and apostolic level, and one of commitment in the world<sup>4</sup>.

Some of the documents specify in greater detail the *qualities needed in a catechist*, and give such a lengthy list as to provoke the question: who then can be a catechist today? Is it not a fact that he will gradually acquire his particular physiognomy in the course of his catechetical work and spiritual growth within the Christian community?

A fundamental problem is the *selection of the catechist*, which depends on many factors, such as: the clarity of motives, the human maturity<sup>5</sup> of the candidate and of the ecclesial community, his age, sufficient intellectual formation, the ascendancy of his Christian family life, the number of persons available for this ministry, and the adequate remuneration of full-time catechists<sup>6</sup>.

The sound selection of catechists depends also on the esteem and respect which pastors and community have for the role and work of the catechist, a specific role among other non-ordained lay ministers, and from the desire of all for a ministerial church of quality<sup>7</sup>. This will be authentic when every

<sup>3</sup> Congtn. For Evangelization of Peoples (CEP), Guide for Catechists, Rome, EDB 1994, 17

<sup>4</sup> cf. CT 5-6.9; CEP 20

<sup>5</sup> cf. CEP 21

<sup>6</sup> cf. Gal 6,6; 1 Cor 14,18-19

<sup>7</sup> cf. CEP 17

charism is true to itself and does not try to invade others<sup>8</sup>. The catechist (*diadaskalos*) is a certified teacher of the faith; i.e. he is an essential participant in the Church's fundamental mission of teaching all nations<sup>9</sup>, a mission which ranks among the most noble because it is in continuity with the work begun by the one "Teacher", Jesus Christ<sup>10</sup>.

In many countries the *permanent catechist* is an important figure in the absence of the missionary; he is integrated into the communal structure of the village, respected, recognized as having authentic responsibility for the life of the community and a *non-ordained minister* for certain sacramentals; he is also consulted in case of disputes. But this should not make us lose sight of the fact that the importance of his role does not stem from human recognition, but from the demands inherent in his mission of being the first witness to the Gospel he proclaims.

Summing up, the selection of catechists requires on their side a strong identity of ecclesial membership, and an intense spiritual life in listening to the Word of God, and also that they be mature in a human sense, adults in the faith and professionally prepared.

### **The formation of the Catechist**

It should be said first of all that the formation of catechists depends directly on the Church at every level: Christian community, Diocese, Bishops Conferences, because it is the Church that calls and sends them. Catechists are before all else a gift which the Spirit makes to his Church.

In general, this formation covers three aspects which by

<sup>8</sup> cf. 1 Cor 12, 29-30; Rom 12,3

<sup>9</sup> cf. Mt 28,20

<sup>10</sup> cf. CT 6; cf. also Jn 7,16

now have become classic: 1. the *person* of the catechist; 2. the *knowledge* of the catechist; 3. the *savoir-faire* of the catechist. And to these I would add a fourth: the *duration* of this ministry. This is a far from indifferent criterion to ensure the best possible specific ongoing formation for each one and to exploit the solidity and quality of the objectives pursued<sup>11</sup>.

With respect to *knowledge* and *savoir-faire*, these do not depend only on the transmission of facts and technique. They require primarily an overall context in which personal experiences, the involvement of the catechist in working with others, the ability to dialogue, mental openness, the smoothness of the Christian life which facilitates freedom of expression and intervention, and also a project of personal life, all come together and interact.

The *knowledge of the catechist* concerns: 1. his formation and human maturity; 2. his capacity for discernment, strengthened by his lived experience and teaching ability; 3. direct biblical, doctrinal and liturgical knowledge of an organic and systematic kind; 4. knowledge of those he has been sent to teach and of their culture.

The *savoir-faire of the catechist* on the other hand refers to: 1. pedagogical competence; 2. initiation to catechetical methods; 3. knowledge of various more specific methods, like the initiation to prayer, to group dynamics, to the use of symbols, catechumenal processes and those of youth pastoral work, etc.

Some programs, starting always from *spirituality* as the main axis of the life and formation of the catechist, insist on a *global vision of formation*, which extends even as far as the human sciences (methodology, psychology), to civic and cultural formation, to a commitment to the building up of society and working for the development of free time and wise living.

A *transverse dimension* of knowledge and *savoir-faire* is the

<sup>11</sup> cf. CEP 29

*cultural preparation* of pastoral workers, and hence of catechists. The message must be inculturated in line with the human texture where it must be proclaimed, if it is to stimulate the listener not only to understand the message and make it his own, but also express it in his own *language* and by giving to his style of life the dynamism of the paschal mystery.

One can never be sufficiently insistent in recalling that the study of the problem of religious sects reveals a strong absence of catechesis, especially in the outskirts of cities. This important challenge calls for the personal commitment of the catechist to a solid ongoing doctrinal formation, and specifically in some transverse sectors or *areopagi* like military areas, prisons, hospitals, among refugees, etc. It also demands a generous and dynamic *missionary mentality* among the Christian community.

### **Organization of the formation**

In the greater part of formative programs consideration is given in the first place to the *basic and initial formation* of the catechists. In some areas there is an insistence that catechetical activity be preceded by a previous formation period of at least 30 hours.

There are also courses of formation for animators of groups of catechists at local and diocesan level.

In addition to the overall formation of the catechists, there is particular insistence:

- on *witness* of life,
- on their sense of *membership of the Church*, both local (direct involvement, residence, etc.) and diocesan (fidelity to the directives of the Bishop and to ecclesial practice),
- on their capacity to *bring together and animate the group of catechists*, and to program catechesis according to age and transverse sectors of existence: education to love, incultura-



tion, the problem of evil and suffering, biblical formation and other areopagi in line with the widely ranging problems of every context or geographical area.

More often than not the formative programming covers a cycle of up to three years, either in three-monthly sessions (especially for catechists in rural areas) or systematic monthly or weekly courses. But a great deal depends on the personnel made available by the Diocese or on the art of wooing the help of priests, men and women religious, and lay persons qualified in this sector. Almost always the meetings for formation finish in prayer gatherings, the sharing of experiences, of growth and spiritual maturing.

Many centres of formation are sensitive to the social and cultural reality, to the continuity and gradual nature of courses, to direct experience in the community, to dialogue, and to the person of the catechist himself<sup>12</sup>.

### The spirituality of the catechist

"The mission of an educator in the faith requires in the catechist an *intense spiritual life*. This is the privileged dimension of his formation"<sup>13</sup>. As for the missionary, we may say that the true catechist must be a person of faith, called to realize his vocation "with the fervour of the saints"<sup>14</sup>.

Before bearing witness to the effort at a *constant conversion* to the God of Jesus Christ whom he proclaims, the catechist in order to be an "educator to the faith" must be aware:

- of his own duties as a citizen, of his responsibility for his own family and for the human and Christian education of his children;

<sup>12</sup> cf. CEP 28

<sup>13</sup> CEP 22; cf. RM 90

<sup>14</sup> CEP 6; cf. EN 80

- of his need to be accompanied spiritually by a “fellow-traveller” and to foster the life of prayer;
- that he must not speak in his own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ, the one and only “Teacher”<sup>15</sup>;
- that he must exercise his ministry as one “sent” by the Christian community;
- that he must listen to the Word of God in the Church, so as to bear faithful witness to it<sup>16</sup>: before being a “minister of the Word”, the catechist is “one who is sent”;
- that he must nourish his faith and spiritual life at the source of grace, through *prayer and an intense sacramental life*;
- of his duty to integrate in his life the double fidelity to God and to the whole of man<sup>17</sup>, making of inculturation a priority option of his ongoing formation;
- of the purpose of catechesis itself, which is to put people in intimate communion with Christ<sup>18</sup>.

In his *ability to listen to the Word of God*, the catechist discovers also his vocation as a gift of the Spirit, a source of amazement and of response in the similarly generous and gratuitous gift of himself in return<sup>19</sup>. Such a vocation must therefore be systematically offered and stimulated by the Christian community.

The disciple is not above his Master<sup>20</sup>, and the catechist finds in his attitude of *servant* the source of his *spiritual fertility* and of the *deep joy* which the proclamation of the Word produces in him.

Another important element of the spirituality of the cate-

<sup>15</sup> cf. CT 8

<sup>16</sup> cf. EN 15.16; CT 6

<sup>17</sup> cf. CT 55

<sup>18</sup> cf. CT 5

<sup>19</sup> cf. Mt 18,8

<sup>20</sup> cf. Mt 10, 24-25

chist is his awareness of membership of the Church, in a wide missionary sense, with a universal openness and solid attention to those who are poorest. This is verified with the active and responsible participation of the particular community, the missionary zeal with which he carries out his own work, solidarity with the Bishops of the Church of whom he acts as a spokesman, zeal for unity, the welcoming of all persons in Christ, in whom no one remains *a priori* excluded, surprise in face of everything that is true, pure and authentic in every individual, group and culture, without making absolute his own.

The spirituality of the catechist cannot overlook his relationship with *Mary*, "mother and model of the catechist"<sup>21</sup>, the first to bring Jesus to the world; the first among the disciples to be evangelized. *Model*, because she nourished in her heart the highest indication of listening to the Word. *Mother*, because after forming her Son to his human knowledge of the Scriptures<sup>22</sup>, she was the most expert at being educated by him.

## In conclusion

It is encouraging to note how in reading a cross-section of the documents we receive in the Department, there is a unanimous missionary tendency and joy in speaking of catechists, of the efforts in our missions to prepare them and follow them up, of the need that is felt for updating their formation, especially at the level of the inculturation of the Gospel.

We have presented the ideal of an adequate formation of the catechists. Through my experience of missionary visits I have frequently become aware that there are different levels of preparation. I appreciated all of them because they were prompt responses to urgent needs and the fruit of much sacri-

<sup>21</sup> CT 73

<sup>22</sup> cf. *ibid.*

fice on the part of the missionaries. The directives given earlier must not discourage the efforts at present being made; they are meant only to indicate possibilities for a greater development.

The catechists are the first witnesses and evangelizers indispensable for a solid implanting of the Christian community, especially in the young Churches. The recent GC24 endorses the role of the lay person as "the subject of evangelization with full title among the People of God"<sup>23</sup>.

A missionary reading of the first area of intervention among the priorities programmed for the present six-year period refers to the *relationship between Salesians and laity, in particular the catechists*. We must not forget to present this ministry, to invite the faithful to respond generously to this need of the Church, and to foster all initiatives of formation and follow-up in this connection.

This privileged attention to the mission of the Church demands on our part the development of a deeper mentality about the ecclesiology of communion, of the people of God and of an updated missiology.

<sup>23</sup> GC24 15

**THE PROFESSION OF FAITH AND THE OATH  
OF FIDELITY TO BE MADE ON TAKING  
UP AN OFFICE TO BE EXERCISED  
IN THE NAME OF THE CHURCH**

*The Secretary General*

The Apostolic Letter *AD TUENDAM FIDEM*, promulgated by John Paul II as a *Motu proprio* on 18 May 1998, and published in the English edition of the *Osservatore Romano* of 15 July 1998, introduced some modifications to certain canons in the Code of Canon Law and the Code for the Eastern Churches, in respect of the *Profession of faith* and the *Oath of fidelity*, to be made by all who take up an ecclesial office and exercise it in the name of the Church.

The text of the Profession of faith attached to the Apostolic Letter corresponds fundamentally to that published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1989, and included in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS 81 [1989] p.104). This text was published, with a presentation, in AGC 331, pp.42-46. As was stated by the Congregation of the Faith in its note of presentation, the text of the *Profession of faith* was substantially the same as the formula in use from 1967 with some slight modification, while the *Oath of fidelity*, understood as complementary to the *Profession of faith*, was of new composition.

While we refer to the above-mentioned AGC 331 for a commentary on the general norms relating to this obligation and to those who are bound by it in accordance with the Code and

also our own Constitutions (religious superiors, parish priests, teachers of theology and philosophy, Rectors of ecclesiastical Universities, and all who are promoted to the diaconate), we reproduce below the formula for the *Profession of faith* and for the *Oath of fidelity*, as they appear in the appendix to the Apostolic Letter *Ad tuendam fidem*, the contents of which have now become a specific part of some canons in the Code of Canon Law.

The publication of the Apostolic Letter with its reminder of these norms, which emphasize communion in the exercise of ministries and ecclesial offices, is an occasion also for us to remind all those to whom they apply, under various headings, to be faithful to these requirements, which are not a mere formality. For us Salesians they are an expression of the fidelity and communion with the Church and the Pope referred to in art.3 of our Constitutions.

Here, therefore, are the texts – in Latin and in an English translation – of the *Profession of faith* and of the *Oath of fidelity*. For the *Oath* the text is given with the variations in paragraphs 4 and 5 foreseen for religious.

#### LATIN TEXT

#### *Professio fidei*

Ego N. firma fide credo et profiteor omnia et singula quae continentur in Symbolo fidei, videlicet:

Credo in unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem, factorem coeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum, et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula, Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero, genitum non factum, consubstantiallem Patri per quem omnia facta sunt, qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de coelis, et in-

carnatus est de Spiritu Sancto, ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est; crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato, passus et sepultus est; et resurrexit tertia die secundum Scripturas, et ascendit in coelum, sedet ad dexteram Patris, et iterum venturus est cum gloria iudicare vivos et mortuos, cuius regni non erit finis; et in Spiritum Sanctum Dominum et vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit; qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur, qui locutus est per Prophetas; et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam; confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum, et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum, et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.

Firma fide quoque credo ea omnia quae in verbo Dei scripto vel tradito continentur et ab Ecclesia sive sollemni iudicio sive ordinario et universali Magisterio tamquam divinitus revelata credenda proponuntur.

Firmiter etiam amplector ac retineo omnia et singula quae circa doctrinam de fide vel moribus ab eadem definitive proponuntur.

Insuper religioso voluntatis et intellectus obsequio doctrinis adhaereo quas sive Romanus Pontifex sive Collegium episcoporum enuntiant cum Magisterium authenticum exercent etsi non definitivo actu easdem proclamare intendant.

### *Iusiurandum fidelitatis in suscipiendo officio nomine Ecclesiae exercendo*

Ego N. in suscipiendo officio ... promitto me cum catholica Ecclesia communionem semper servaturum, sive verbis a me prolatis, sive mea agendi ratione.

Magna cum diligentia et fidelitate onera explebo quibus teneor erga Ecclesiam, tum universam, tum particularem, in qua ad meum servitium, secundum iuris praescripta, exercendum vocatus sum.

In munere meo adimplendo, quod Ecclesiae nomine mihi

commissum est, fidei depositum integrum servabo, fideliter tradam et illustrabo; quascumque igitur doctrinas iisdem contrarias devitabo.

Disciplinam cunctae Ecclesiae communem fovebo observantiamque cunctarum legum ecclesiasticarum urgebo, earum imprimis quae in Codice Iuris Canonici continentur.

Chistiana oboedientia prosequar quae sacri Pastores, tamquam authentici fidei doctores et magistri declarant, aut tamquam Ecclesiae rectores statuunt, atque cum Episcopis dioecesanis libenter operam dabo, ut actio apostolica, nomine et mandato Ecclesiae exercenda, salvis indole et fine mei Instituti, in eiusdem Ecclesiae communione peragatur.

Sic me Deus adiuvet et sancta Dei Evangelia, quae manibus meis tango.

*N.B. The general form of the fourth and fifth paragraphs (i.e. for non-religious) is as follows:*

Disciplinam cunctae Ecclesiae communem sequar et fovebo observantiamque cunctarum legum ecclesiasticarum, earum imprimis quae in Codice Iuris Canonici continentur, servabo.

Chistiana oboedientia prosequar quae sacri Pastores, tamquam authentici fidei doctores et magistri declarant, aut tamquam Ecclesiae rectores statuunt, atque Episcopis dioecesanis fideliter auxilium dabo, ut actio apostolica, nomine et mandato Ecclesiae exercenda, in eiusdem Ecclesiae communione peragatur.

ENGLISH TEXT

### ***Profession of Faith***

I, N., with firm faith believe and profess each and everything that is contained in the Symbol of faith, namely:



I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

With firm faith, I also believe everything contained in the Word of God, whether written or handed down in Tradition, which the Church, either by a solemn judgement or by the ordinary and universal Magisterium, sets forth to be believed as divinely revealed.

I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals.

Moreover, I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic Magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act.

***Oath of fidelity on assuming an office to be exercised in the name of the Church***

I, N., in assuming the office of ....., promise that in my words and in my actions I shall always preserve communion with the Catholic Church.

With great care and fidelity I shall carry out the duties incumbent on me toward the Church, both universal and particular, in which, according to the provisions of the law, I have been called to exercise my service.

In fulfilling the charge entrusted to me in the name of the Church, I shall hold fast to the deposit of faith in its entirety; I shall faithfully hand it on and explain it, and I shall avoid any teachings contrary to it.

I shall foster the common discipline of the entire Church and I shall insist on the observance of all ecclesiastical laws, especially those contained in the Code of Canon Law.

With Christian obedience I shall follow what the Bishops, as authentic doctors and teachers of the faith, declare, or what they as those who govern the Church, establish. I shall also—with due regard for the character and purpose of my institute—faithfully assist the diocesan Bishops, so that the apostolic activity, exercised in the name and by mandate of the Church, may be carried out in communion with the Church.

So help me God, and God's Holy Gospels on which I place my hand.

*(Variations in the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the formulary, for use by members of the Christian faithful in general (i.e. non-religious):*

I shall follow and foster the common discipline of the entire Church and I shall maintain the observance of all ecclesiastical laws, especially those contained in the Code of Canon Law.

With Christian obedience I shall follow what the Bishops, as authentic doctors and teachers of the faith, declare, or what they, as those who govern the Church, establish. I shall also faithfully assist the diocesan Bishops, so that the apostolic activity, exercised in the name and by mandate of the Church, may be carried out in communion with the Church.

## 4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

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### 4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

In June and July the main occupation of the Rector Major was that of presiding at and animating the plenary session of the General Council, but in addition to this work he was able to make certain significant visits and attend celebrations, among them the following:

**7 June.** Fr Vecchi was at **Reggio Emilia** for the inauguration of the new buildings of the city's oratory, which has been entrusted to the Salesians. At 10 a.m. there was a meeting with the civic authorities and friends, including the Bishop Emeritus of Reggio Emilia (who had brought the Salesians to the city, and the present Mayor. To their greetings the Rector Major replied with an address on: *"Does the oratory still have a meaning at the present day?"* At 11 a.m. Mass was celebrated in a large marquee by the Bishop Emeritus, in the presence of the present Bishop who preached the homily. Fr Vecchi gave a message directed especially to the young people present.

The eucharistic celebration was followed by the blessing and inauguration of the new buildings.

**13-15 June.** The Rector Major visited **Poland** to take part in the **centenary celebrations of salesian work in that country.**

13 June. Accompanied by the Regional (Fr Albert Van Hecke), the Superior of the UPS Vice-province (Fr Ludwig Schwarz), and other Salesians he arrived at Cracow, where he had a meeting with the Provincials. In the afternoon he went on to **Oswiecim**, the mother-house of the Salesians in Poland, where they began work 100 years ago. He was received by the Rector, confreres, numerous members of the Salesian Family and the boys of the technical school with their band, and delivered a first address of greeting, expressing his satisfaction and emphasizing the significance of a centenary (*"the small seed has produced much fruit"*). During the Mass of Our Lady which fol-

lowed, Fr Vecchi referred in his homily to the intimate family nature of the celebration, and went on to present the figure of *Mary Help of Christians as the one who had brought together all that had happened in the last hundred years, who had accompanied the Salesians in their progress, stirred up vocations, supported them in trials, and was now giving them courage to face up to new situations.*

In the evening there was a prayer vigil, with an act of entrustment to Our Lady of Jasna Góra, after which Fr Vecchi gave the salesian "Good-Night".

**14 June, Sunday.** From early morning Salesians, FMA and members of the Salesian Family were arriving from all the Polish Provinces. At 10 a.m. at the entrance to the Institute there was the ceremony of the blessing of the monument to Don Bosco and a plaque recalling the Salesians and FMA who gave assistance to the prisoners in the concentration camp, sadly remembered as Auschwitz-Birkenau. Some of them had been prisoners themselves. Fr Vecchi briefly recalled the *importance of remembering and the message of fi-*

*delity inculcated by the celebration.*

The culminating moment was the solemn celebration of the Eucharist in the big playground. Cardinal Macharski of Cracow presided, and celebrating with him were the Rector Major, three Bishops (including the Salesian Bishop of Sosnowiec, and some 250 salesian priests.

The Cardinal's greetings were followed by other addresses by Bishop Rakoczy, the Mayor of Oswiecim and the Provincial of Cracow. Some young girls of the FMA brought flowers to the main participants. The liturgy was in Polish and Bishop Smigielski SDB preached the homily.

The Rector Major spoke at the end of the Mass. After greeting the religious and civil authorities he emphasized that the *celebration was an invitation to a deep act of thanksgiving, and that this was the feeling filling the hearts of the Salesians: thanksgiving to God in the first place who had headed us in the direction of Poland, and had then accompanied and sustained us by sending us abundant vocations; gratitude to the Polish Church which had welcomed the salesian charisma, made good*

*use of it and provided it with space in its own environment; and gratitude to all who had fostered or supported the work of the Salesians. He pointed out also that a centenary celebration awakens many memories: in the story of salesian work in Poland there have been persons outstanding for their initiative, and there have been saints and martyrs. But there have also been so many humble persons who have carried out day by day a constant work of assistance and education of the young, and them we remember too.*

After referring to the figure of the salesian brother, or lay salesian confrere, who continues to play an important role in trade schools and in the world of work, *Fr Vecchi concluded by declaring that in the coming hundred years and in the next millennium the Salesians intended to be present in the new problems of youth, always with the spirit, style, love and energy of Don Bosco, which can be summed up in the three words: Reason, Love and Faith.*

After lunch the Rector Major returned to the Sanctuary to receive the Promise of a large group of new Cooperators, and

after a brief visit to the new part of the school returned to the provincial house at Cracow and left for Rome on the following day.

**12 July.** Another significant event: a visit to **Boretto**, where Fr Vecchi's parents were born for the inauguration of the **Don Bosco Oratory**.

At midday, after presiding at the celebration of the Eucharist in the parish church the Rector Major blessed the oratory premises. This was followed by a round table organized by the youth pastoral department of the diocese on the theme: *Oratory, School and Education*. At the table with Fr Vecchi was the Hon. Albertin Sogliani, Under-Secretary for Public Instruction in Italy.

**10-13 July.** At the Generale, interspersed among the work of the Council, the Rector Major and some Councillors were able to take part in sessions of the **Meeting of Salesian University Institutions (IUS)**, convoked by the Rector Major and coordinated by Fr Carlos Garulo. The meeting, the second of its kind following that in Brazil in August 1995,

had as its purpose the examination and approval of a *Common Program for the promotion of Salesian University Institutions in the three-year period 1998-2001*. Those responsible for such Institutions, either as regards the academic sector or the salesian religious aspect, took part in the meeting and gave their contributions; they produced a common statement, subsequently approved by Fr Vecchi.

After the conclusion of the work of the plenary session of the General Council, the Rector Major spent the end of July and early August in rest and relaxation in the Emilian Apennines.

**10 August.** After returning to Rome he left for **Central America** to visit the Province of the Divine Saviour, which includes six countries of the area, on the occasion of the celebration of the **centenary of salesian work in El Salvador**.

A technical stop of his flight at Madrid enabled him to make a short visit to the Don Bosco Theological Institute, before reaching **Panama**, for the first stage of his visit. At the airport he was met by the Archbishop,

the Provincial, several confreres and some youngsters.

**11 August.** A busy day. After a visit to Bro. Francesco Cherin, a very old and sick confrere, Fr Vecchi went to the gymnasium to meet the youngsters of the Don Bosco Technical Institute and the girls of the Mary Help of Christians Institute of the FMA. There were addresses of greeting, dances, songs and musical events and at the end the Rector Major gave a message to the young people. He reminded them that *life is the most precious gift God has given us; he emphasized that the salesian environment is a special gift and grace from Mary most Holy to the young people present; he recalled that they had a wonderful group of educators and that not all youngsters had the same opportunity of **education** to growth in knowledge, conscience and social sense in the style of Don Bosco.*

A second significant event was a meeting with the salesian confreres, with whom Fr Vecchi conversed, replying to their questions, and referring to some of the arguments dealt with in the recent plenary session of the General Council.

Later in the morning he visited the Archbishop of Panama, repaying a visit of the Archbishop to Turin at the end of the Synod for America, when the Archbishop went to visit the salesian holy places.

After lunch with the confreres, the FMA and the Archbishop, Fr Vecchi made a brief visit to the Panama Canal Zone; he was received by the President and others responsible for the administration, who explained to him various technical aspects of the great work.

Then back to Panama City where he gave a press conference, followed by a concelebrated Eucharist in the **Basilica of Don Bosco**, which was filled to overflowing. The Minister of Justice of the Panama Republic was present, with other members of the government. During the celebration ten new Cooperators made the Promise.

*In the homily the Rector Major emphasized his impression of the great devotion of the Panamanian people for Don Bosco. He pointed out that Don Bosco is a Saint, i.e. a person who put Christ at the centre of his life, listened to him and put his words into practice, passing on a*

*message for the Church and for the world. Don Bosco's message comes to us from his life and apostolate. He tells us of the **importance of youth** in the life of the individual of the Church and of society.*

At the end of the Mass the Minister of Justice, in the name of the President of the Republic, bestowed on the Rector Major the *Grand Cross of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa* (the Spanish explorer who discovered the Pacific Ocean). It is the greatest honour of the Panamanian Nation.

Supper with the confreres and Salesian Family, with the Apostolic Nuncio and civic authorities present as guests, brought to a close the first stage of Fr Vecchi's journey.

**12 August.** The Rector Major left Panama at 5 a.m. for **San José di Costa Rica**, to spend a day with the Salesians and young people of that country.

The first event was with the youngsters of the Don Bosco Technical School in San José, gathered in the spacious gymnasium. There were the 1,400 pupils of the school and a further 400 representatives of the FMA Institutes of the city. It was the usual happy collection



of greetings, songs and music by the youth band and orchestra. Afterwards he met the confreres and five novices, to whom he spoke of the main impressions he had gathered from many centenary celebrations.

*First among these is the great strength of **unity** shown in the Congregation. It is a fraternal and practical unity brought about by fidelity to the Constitutions and the same mentality and spirit which is apparent everywhere. Secondly there is the impression of a great **love for Don Bosco**, who is everywhere loved and honoured in an incredible way. Third is the impression of the **relevance of the salesian mission**, manifested by the continual request for new foundations, and this not only in missionary countries. Fourth is an ever growing **trust and confidence in our educative system**, our way of meeting the problems of the young. And a fifth impression concerns the **strategic importance of formation**.*

After the meeting with the confreres Fr Vecchi was taken by car to a densely populated area of the city where a new

work is rising: the **CEDES** (Salesian Centre of Education). Waiting there were many people, especially collaborators and supporters of the new work, among them engineers, chain-store owners and business men, whom Fr Vecchi thanked for the collaboration they are giving to this work for the benefit of the young.

In the afternoon he went to **Cartago**, a small town some 20 km. from San José, where the novitiate is situated. The house was formerly the aspirantate, and now, in addition to the novitiate, it provides hospitality for retreats and is the headquarters of various groups of the Salesian Family, many of whose members were present with the novices at the meeting with the Rector Major.

Returning to San José he went to the Don Bosco College in the "Zapote" quarter, an institute with about 1,000 pupils, ranging from elementary to pre-university levels. Here Fr Vecchi celebrated the Eucharist with some fifteen other priests. *In the homily he greeted all presence and highlighted the importance of the presence of the Salesian Family. He recalled that it corresponded to a great dream of*

*Don Bosco: to gather together many forces to reach the greatest possible number of young people, to tell them that life is precious, that God loves them and has a plan for them to remind them of the dignity they have.*

At the end of the Mass the youngsters gathered around the Rector Major in the gymnasium for the usual celebration during which, among other things, he replied to their questions.

After supper, before returning to the Technical School for the night, Fr Vecchi went with some confreres and representatives of the Salesian Family to the FMA Institute to honour the Servant of God Sister Maria Romero Meneses, and pray at her tomb.

**13 August.** The Rector Major, accompanied by the Provincial, reached Managua in **Nicaragua**. Waiting to meet him at the airport were Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo SDB and various Salesians from the houses of Managua, Masaya and Granada.

The first visit was to the salesian house in Managua known as the "Central Juvenil Don Bosco"; as well as a parish and youth centre, it comprises various workshops where some 600

poor youngsters learn a trade. After a brief tour of the workshops Fr Vecchi went on to the church where the Salesian Family had gathered for a Mass in honour of Don Bosco.

There followed the customary meeting with the confreres and the fraternal lunch to which were invited, together with the Salesians and FMA, various representatives of the Salesian Family and friends.

At 5.30 a.m. the next day, the Rector Major, accompanied by the Provincial, left Nicaragua for Tegucigalpa in **Honduras**, to visit the salesian works in that country.

Accompanied by the confreres and friends who had met him at the airport, he went first to the **San Miguel** Institute, a great work which has some 2,000 pupils in the primary and secondary sections and a further 150 in workshops for cabinet-making, mechanics, welding and other trades. In the gymnasium there was the usual meeting with the young people, in the usual atmosphere of friendship and festivity. In addition to the pupils of the Institute, a group of girls of the FMA were present, together with the FMA novices and many lay teachers.

After the event in the gymnasium the Rector Major went to the house of the community where he celebrated Mass with the confreres. This was followed by a visit to the workshops, to the church dedicated to Don Bosco, and by lunch with the Salesian Family at which was present also Mgr. Hector Enrique Santos, salesian bishop-emeritus of Tegucigalpa.

In the afternoon, after calling at the Cathedral, he visited the very large parish of Mary Help of Christians in a very poor area of the city; it has 125,000 inhabitants.

From Tegucigalpa a 25-minute flight took Fr Vecchi to **San Salvador**, for the **official commemoration of the centenary**. At the airport he was received by the Rectors of the houses of El Salvador, and by various salesian bishops of the zone, gathered with Cardinal Obando in the diplomatic lounge.

From the airport the Rector Major went to the **Santa Cecilia College at Santa Tecla**, where he received the formal salute of a guard of honour made up of senior students of the College, and had supper with the authorities, the first

item in the centenary celebrations.

Among the authorities present were the President of the El Salvador Republic and his wife, the Vice-President with his wife, the Mayor of Sancta Tecla, the Minister of Public Instruction, and leading businessmen. There was Mgr. Fernando Sáenz Lacalle (Archbishop of San Salvador), Cardinal Obando Bravo SDB (Archbishop of Managua), Mgr. Giacinto Berlocco (Nuncio Apostolic to El Salvador), three salesian Bishops (Mgr. Alfonso Santos SDB, Mgr. Oscar Julio Vian SDB, and Mgr. Elias Bolaños SDB) and many other personalities.

Giving the "Good-Night" at the end of the evening, after thanking those present beginning with the President of the Republic, the Rector Major took as his starting point the topic of conversation during the meal and the story of salesian work in El Salvador, and gave his impressions: *the growth of the work in Central America which had spread from the first foundation in this city; the harmony – almost a 'marriage' – between the Salesians and the Salvadoran society, manifested today in the personalities pre-*

*sent; the secret which brought the Salesians close to this society and useful to it: their manner of approaching and dealing with the young.*

**15 August, Saturday.** Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady. In the morning, after greeting the pupils of the Santa Cecilia College in the theatre, where they were being entertained by the "Salesian Magician" (Fr Silvio Mantelli of Turin), the Rector Major went to the parish of Mary Help of Christians, where he was received by the parish council and a crowd of youngsters. In the crypt of the church he prayed at the tombs of the Salesians who have died in El Salvador, and the various benefactors of the salesian work who are also buried there.

Immediately after he went to the Sports Stadium for the celebration of the Eucharist and the meeting with the young. The stadium was filled, with about 7,000 young people who gave Fr Vecchi an enthusiastic welcome as he drove around the arena.

The Rector Major presided at the Mass, at which Cardinal Obando, the Apostolic Nuncio, the Salesian Bishops, the

Provincial and some fifty other priests concelebrated. In his homily, after greeting the Cardinal, the bishops and priests present and all the young people, Fr Vecchi declared that *the coincidence of the centenary of the salesian work in El Salvador with the day on which the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady into heaven was indeed significant.*

*The Solemnity recalls the role played by Mary in the story of Don Bosco and of the Congregation. Don Bosco said, and the Salesians never forget it, that everything was done by Mary and she has a special place in the history of our missionary expeditions. She can be said to be the **inspirer of the preventive system.***

Referring to **salesian spirituality**, Fr Vecchi declared that *Mary is the fundamental text for understanding it and living it. Don Bosco had proposed Mary to us as our Teacher and Helper. She helps us and enlightens us by pointing out to us the pillars which are the support of salesian spirituality.*

*The first is the value of **life**. The second is **Christ**, the meaning and fullness of life as*

he himself has shown us. The third is the **Church**, and the final pillar is **apostolic commitment** in the service of the Church and for the world, in the work of evangelization and in self-donation to others with the strength and grace that comes from Christ.

The Mass was followed by songs and dances, and Fr Vecchi replied to questions put to him by the young people.

Immediately afterwards Fr Vecchi went to the **Ciudadela Don Bosco** at San Salvador, an imposing work consisting of a series of small blocks in the midst of green surroundings which, between them, include primary and secondary schools, a centre of professional formation, a parish, youth centre and the Don Bosco University. The student population at the various levels reaches a total of about 2,000. There Fr Vecchi had lunch with the Cardinal, the Apostolic Nuncio and the Salesian Bishops.

In the afternoon he had an informal conversation with the confreres before returning to the Santa Cecilia College where a symposium was in progress on: *The Holy Spirit in the Preventive System*.

**16 August, Sunday.** After celebrating Mass with the community of Santa Cecilia, the Rector Major had a meeting with the Provincial Council. Then, before leaving the city, he went to the neighbouring oratory to greet Bro Julio Gaitán, a coadjutor who has worked in the oratory for 48 years and is now completely blind.

Leaving Santa Tecla Fr Vecchi went to **Santa Ana**, where he made brief visits to the two salesian works: the **St Joseph College**, and the **Ciudad de los Niños**, which has some 330 pupils, all boarders and most of them war-orphans or children of broken families. The Rector Major was received by the band, visited the various premises and then had lunch with all the Salesians.

After lunch he left immediately for the city of **Guatemala** where he arrived after a three and a half hours journey. He went first to the provincial house and then to the **Theologate** where the members had gathered for the **Provincial Chapter**.

After supper and the recital of Compline Fr Vecchi gave the "Good-Night" in which he expressed some of *his impressions*

*on this visit to the countries of Central America. He emphasized that there had been an excellent penetration of salesian work into the texture of civil society; evidence of this was the conferring of the Grand Cross of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa in Panama, and the presence of the President of the Republic in El Salvador. But this was just the tip of an iceberg: what was impressive was the esteem of the people for the salesian work, and their participation in the various initiatives.*

*He had been impressed by his meetings with young people, both those which had been organized and the more spontaneous ones as well. He had felt their trust, confidence and harmony with what we are putting across to them.*

*The meetings with the Salesian Family, and in particular the one at Santa Cecilia, had revealed a high level of collaboration on the part of all the Groups. It only remained to thank God and the confreres for what had been done and to continue with enthusiasm towards the second centenary.*

**17 August.** Fr Vecchi presided at the eucharistic cele-

bration in the parish church of the theologate. Then at 9 a.m. he gave the first conference of a two-day retreat of the capitulars: taking various points from the recent plenary session of the General Council, he spoke of the community and of certain concerns in its regard in these times of new evangelization.

Immediately afterwards he visited the **Don Bosco College** in Guatemala City, where he was welcomed by the 2,000 pupils who frequent the primary and secondary sections. His meeting with the youngsters took place in the large gymnasium.

He returned to the Theologate for lunch, and in the afternoon gave the second conference to the capitulars on a theme based on the impressions he had acquired from the centenary celebrations he had attended in various parts of the world: *the unique figure of Don Bosco with his patrimony of humanity, educative ability and holiness; the place of the Congregation in the field of youth; the present-day relevance of the preventive system, and our capacity for contact with youngsters; the unity of the Congregation.*

After the conference Fr Vecchi returned once again to the Don

Bosco College for a meeting with the Salesian Family; some 300 members were present belonging to various groups.

**18 August.** After the eucharistic celebration with the capitulars the Rector Major gave the third conference of the retreat, taking up the question: *To what kind of life of prayer is the Salesian called? His models are Jesus Christ and Don Bosco.*

After the conference, the Provincial thanked Fr Vecchi for the gift to the Province which his visit had been.

Fr Vecchi took his leave of the capitulars with a final farewell and good wishes, and went off to visit the **Postnovitiate**, where he was received by some thirty postnovices who had been joined by the students of theology. This was the meeting with the confreres in formation, and to them the Rector Major spoke of the *kind of Salesian for the future*. Lunch followed at which were present 16 "Daughters of the Resurrection", a congregation founded in 1977 by Fr George Puthenpura SDB.

Later in the day, after a final meeting with the Provincial, Fr Vecchi left Guatemala to return to Rome.

**3 September.** The Rector Major left Rome for Milan, where on the following morning he took part in a day of study and reflection with Salesians and lay teachers of the schools and professional training centres of the Province in view of the new scholastic year. Some 600 were present in all and Fr Vecchi spoke on the theme: *How the educative community can educate to the faith in the schools and professional training centres.*

**5 September.** After returning to Rome, the Rector Major left once again for a significant visit to **Albania**, for the profession of the novices, the first group to have made their novitiate and profession in Albania itself.

At Tirana he was enthusiastically received by the Salesians, FMA and young people, and blessed a church still being built in the "Breglumasi" area of the salesian parish dedicated to St John Bosco.

Returning to the salesian house he presided at the Holy Mass, at which were present Salesians, FMA, collaborators and friends, and during which the new Rector was installed, Fr Matteo Di Fiore. In the homily

Fr Vecchi began from the flourishing and interesting moment the Congregation was experiencing in Albania. He emphasized that the profession of the first five novices marks the beginning of the realization of the hopes which the Salesians had when they came to this country, and that it is gratifying *to see the work of God at the moment of sowing and then at the moment of reaping; this helps us to work in the beginnings with hope and trust that what we are starting will eventually bear fruit.*

The day concluded with a supper which brought together Salesians, FMAs and volunteers in a happy family gathering.

**6 September.** Sunday. After visiting the new house of the FMA at Tirana, the Rector Major went on to **Scutari**, for the profession of the five novices. He was welcomed by the novices themselves with their director Fr Rudi Borstnik and Fr Pasquale Samarro, who had preached the profession retreat. Later they were joined by Fr Michele Gentile and Fr Zef Gashi, who had been appointed Archbishop of Bar and was to be consecrated in St Peter's by Cardinal Tomko on 19 September.

Both the house and Fr Rudi Borstnik himself still bore signs of the aggression that had taken place on the night of 22 March by an armed mob.

In the afternoon in the Cathedral the Rector Major presided at the Eucharist during which the novices made their profession. Before the celebration Fr Vecchi was able to greet the Archbishop of Scutari. Many people were present at the function: FMA, men and women religious of various Congregations, relatives of the novices, members of the Salesian Family and friends. In the homily Fr Vecchi drew on the liturgical texts and the rite of profession, and emphasized that the celebration *recalled to those who felt themselves called to follow a vocational path the need to be faithful to their vocation and to be expressive of it. He reminded parents and educators that God speaks to the hearts of the young and that they are able to respond: the adventure of following Christ can be a powerful attraction for young people! To the latter, in particular, he recalled that God had a plan for them, and that they needed to open their hearts to his call and to a life of generosity.*



**7 September.** After visiting the new house of the FMA, still being built, and the recently finished seminary, the Rector Major with Salesians, FMA young people and friends went to the sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Good Council on the outskirts of Scutari for the celebration of Holy Mass. In the homily, speaking of the marriage feast at Cana, the Rector Major dwelt on the *motherly presence and action of Mary, who goes ahead of us and accompanies us in the life of families, of nations (with specific reference to Albania), and of the Church.* Before leaving for the airport he once again thanked all the confrere for their generous and self-sacrificing work, and expressed particular gratitude to the Italian Southern Province which had begun the work in Albania with great effort and trust.

**8–11 September.** Returning to Rome, the Rector Major became involved at once in the work of the so-called **intermediate meeting of the General Council.** Present also were the Vicar General, the heads of the various Departments, and also Fr Albert Van Hecke, because

the main item on the agenda was a study of salesian work in the countries of Eastern Europe. Starting from what had been realized in these countries in recent years, the Council analyzed the present salesian state of affairs and prospects for future development, giving indications and suggestions. Among other arguments dealt with were the unification of the two French salesian provinces, the Press Office and public relations of the Generalate, and indications for the “team Visits” to be made in the period 1999–2000. The meetings ended in the evening of 11 September.

## 4.2 Chronicle of the General Council

The summer plenary session of the General Council, the fifth of the present six-year period, began on 2 June 1998 and ended on 24 July after 30 full sittings and other meetings of groups and sections.

As always a lot of work went into dealing with numerous practices coming from the Provinces: appointment of provincial councillors and approval of Rectors, the opening

and canonical erection of houses (6 new houses were opened; there were 6 canonical erections and 5 closures), matters concerning individual confreres, and economic and administrative items.

Much consideration was given to themes regarding the government and animation of the Provinces, and to some matters of a more general character concerning the Council itself or the Congregation as a whole. The main points are listed below.

### *1. Appointment of Provincials.*

The appointments were fewer than in recent plenary sessions but the same careful procedure was followed: careful analysis of the consultation made in the Province, discernment in the Council, a straw-vote on the main candidates, and a definitive vote followed by the consent of the designated candidate. The new Provincials appointed (in alphabetical order) were: Camilo Castrellón, for Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia; Santo Dal Ben, for Peru; Jam Komárek for Prague, Czech Republic; Alfredo Roca, Superior for the new Vice-province of Ethiopia and Eritrea; and Andrew Wong, Supe-

rior for the new Vice-province of Indonesia and Timor.

### *2. Reports on Extraordinary Visitations.*

There were numerous reports on the Visitations made in recent months, and their examination is an important opportunity for the Council to make a detailed reflection on the reality, community life, effectiveness of the mission, the provincial plan and the prospects for the future.

The reports were examined on the visitation of the following provinces or circumscriptions (in alphabetical order):

Brazil-Belo Horizonte, Brazil-Manaus, Colombia-Bogotá, Colombia-Medellin, Croatia, France-Lyons, France-Paris, Ireland, Italy-Milan, Japan, Madagascar, Middle East, North Philippines, Poland-Pila, Rome-Generalate, Tropical Equatorial Africa.

### *3. Informative reports of individual Councillors.*

As in every plenary session the Councillors in charge of Departments, as also the Rector Major and Vicar General, gave brief reports on the activities carried

out by them personally or by their Departments in the animation of the Provinces and of the Congregation at world level.

These reports are for information to keep the Councillors updated about the activities of each sector, but also to help to coordinate and, if necessary, bring to light particular aspects which need deeper examination on the part of the whole Council.

#### *4. Study themes and practical decisions.*

In the course of the session the Council also took up other themes referring more generally to the government and animation of the Congregation, with particular attention to the programming of the six-year period, and the life and activity of the Council itself. Some practical decisions were made, linked with the matters dealt with. The principal points of reflection were the following:

##### *4.1 Verification of the action of animation and government of the General Council in the period 1996-1998*

At a little over two years from their taking office, the Rector

Major wanted the Council to undertake a verification of what they had done in this period for the animation and government of the Congregation. There was first a personal reflection on a list of points proposed by the Vicar General, and then a working-group drew up a synthesis of the results, which was submitted to the full Council for examination. It included the following main points:

- (a) The life and mission of the entire Congregation: a wide glance at the reality of the Congregation in its various contexts, and at the main challenges which emerge.
- (b) The programming of the six-year period: how it is being given effect, and what incidence it is having on the animation of the Provinces.
- (c) Particular projects mentioned in the program and presented in the Council: to what extent have they been given effect so far.
- (d) The life and activity of the General Council: verification of the work within the Council and in the various sectors of activity, and indications for greater efficacy in animation.

#### *4.2 Plan for the renewal and relaunching of the Salesian Bulletin in the world.*

One of the projects in the six-year program concerns the renewal and relaunching in the world of the Salesian Bulletin in its various editions and languages. In the past two years the Department of Social Communication, with the coordination of a "Central Director of the Bulletin" appointed specifically to follow up the project, has drawn up a plan for renewal and relaunching which the General Councillor concerned has presented to the Council. The latter, after a careful examination and discussion of various points, approved the general lines of the project, and the implementation will be taken care of by the Department, always in association with the Rector Major. Some of the practical objectives of the plan aim at greater visibility for the Bulletin (publication at least every two months; two editions in Africa, one French and one English); others aim at greater shared responsibility for the publication (with a possible world committee) and greater organizational efficacy (editorial board

and council of administration for each Bulletin).

#### *4.3 Salesians and the Internet*

This theme, which was already studied in the intermediate meeting of the Council of April 1988, is fundamentally concerned with three points:

- (a) The formation of Salesians and collaborators in this field.
- (b) The study of an Internet site for our Headquarters; it is a question of renewing the present site, and including in it the salesian reality, with updated information.
- (c) The proposal to produce a *CD-rom* interactive and didactic with the Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco in the original edition.

#### *4.4 The structure of Central government*

The General Council has continued its study of the theme concerning the structures of government at central level, following the indications received from the GC24 (n.191), a study which was begun in the summer session of 1997 (cf. AGC 361, n.4.2) and followed up in the intermediate session of April 1998.

In this session the results achieved in the first phase were examined, with the help of consultants *Cooper & Lybrand*, experts in the field of business enterprise, and plans were drafted for a further phase of the work.

#### 4.5 *Refugees Project*

After a first reflection made in the session of January 1998, and following an international meeting organized by the Missions Department which took place at the Generalate on 4-5 February on the reality of refugees and the activity being carried out by the Salesians in various parts of the world, the Councillor for the Missions proposed to the General Council (which approved them) some practical proposals for a better strengthening and coordination of salesian activity in this field. It is a matter of the *Refugees Project* which was included in the six-year program. Geographically the proposals extend to the following countries:

America: Guatemala and Mexico; Africa: the Zone of the great lakes; East Africa: Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia-Eritrea; West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone; Europe: Albania.

#### 5. *Joint meeting of the FMA and SDB General Councils.*

In the afternoon of 22 December the periodic meeting of the two General Councils took place at Castelgandolfo-“Santa Rosa”, the house of the FMA. The theme for the meeting, agreed beforehand, concerned a point of common interest: *Relationships of collaboration between SDB and FMA at provincial and local level.*

Opening the meeting the Rector Major and Mother General emphasized that the argument responded to a felt desire that our service might become broader, more complete and fruitful, through greater reciprocal collaboration, and that for this to take place it was necessary that we have a greater and better knowledge of each other, but also that we give fresh life to the gift of the Spirit, present in our charism and history.

The work then continued in two stages:

- the first, beginning from some positive experiences of collaboration (four experiences were considered, two presented by the FMA and two by the SDB), an attempt was made to iden-

tify *conditions which favour collaboration*;

- the second was a period of reflection for reaching some *agreed criteria* for a wider and more fruitful collaboration.

The conclusions of the meeting were gathered together by two members (one FMA and one SDB) and set out in a joint communication from the Rector Major and Mother General, which was transmitted to the two Institutes as a *process for collaboration*. The communica-

tion will be found at n.5.1 of the present issue of the AGC.

We must recall, finally, another significant event in the life of the General Council: the *spiritual retreat*, which took place at Chianciano Terme, 21-27 June, at the retreat house of the Benedictine Sisters of the Holy Face, with the preaching and animation of Fr Anthony McSweeney, a former Superior General of the Priests of the Blessed Sacrament, who developed the theme: *The Eucharist and the gift of the Spirit*.

## 5. DOCUMENTS AND NEWS ITEMS

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### 5.1 "FOR A PROCESS OF COLLABORATION"

***A communication from the Rector Major and the Mother General to the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.***

Rome, 24 July 1998

#### **1. Our mission for the jubilee: communion**

Preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000 is for the whole human race an invitation to communion, a call to recognize and build up the great human family as the family of sons and daughters beloved and saved by God. It is an historic and ecclesial journey that the Spirit is directing towards unity, in the richness and the harmony of the gifts proper to each individual and to the various groups. As living members of the Salesian Family we find ourselves part of this experience, and we hear the call to make our charism of communion for the salvation of young people more evident.

This was Don Bosco's thinking and intention for us.

In this way of thinking of communion in diversity, Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello began the experience of unity and collaboration between Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Today we want to take on, at ever greater depth, the charismatic character and the requirements of collaboration.

Mother Mazzarello looks to Don Bosco as to the one who inspires her life, and the life of her sisters in a decisive manner: "We live in the presence of God and of Don Bosco", "Don Bosco is a saint and I feel it." (*Cron* I, 150).

And Don Bosco recognizes the value of the wisdom and holiness of Mother Mazzarello. He appreciates her gifts, her creativity, her ability in discernment, her feminine imprint on the shared charism. This is how he speaks of her to Don Cagliero who was then the Director of the Institute:

"You know the spirit of the Oratory, our preventive system and the secret of making ourselves liked, listened to and obeyed by the boys, loving them all and humiliating no one, and assisting them day and night with fatherly concern, patient

love and constant kindness. Well now, good Mother Mazzarello has all these qualities and therefore we can place our trust in her government of the Institute and government of the Sisters... their congregation is the equal of ours; it has the same aim and the same means which she inculcates in the Sisters by her example and her words ..."

(Maccono F, in *Santa Maria D. Mazzarello Confondatrice e prima superiora generale delle FMA, 1,274, Turin 1960*).

A glance at our origins helps us to be a family, and to work sharing the same charism.

As this century comes to an end, we feel that our communion can indeed be the primary mission, the primary gift that Salesians and FMA offer to the Church and to the young.

## 2. A sign of communion

The meeting of the two General Councils – which took place at Castelgandolfo on 18 June 1998 – is seen in this perspective. It gives continuity to a process of exchange of ideas and fraternity which has seen us come together on several occasions with the intention of

looking for ways and opportunities for communion.

The theme of the last meeting "*Collaboration between SDB and FMA at provincial and local level*", reflects the desire of everyone to give life to the common charism in a spirit of unity and therefore in the most complete way.

Aware of the wealth of collaboration already taking place between FMA and SDB we began our period of reflection by looking at four positive experiences at different levels.

- *local*: the Oratory/Youth Centre at St Mary's (Australia);
- *provincial*: provincial animation (Barcelona, Spain);
- *national*: national pastoral centres (Italy);
- shared responsibility in missionary organization: the Catechumenate with the Yanomami (Venezuela).

For each of the experiences the planning stages were explained, what had facilitated collaboration, the difficulties met with and the ways used to overcome them.

In the light of these experiences and of some suggestions put forward in the meeting, the shared reflection confirmed our



firm belief in the charismatic gift of communion and helped us to identify criteria and interior attitudes which can guide and foster unity and collaboration.

### **3. At the roots of collaboration**

In the "global village" in which we find ourselves living, the Church is present as a sign of unity and of peace, the anticipation and joyful proclamation of the Family of God, called to form the heavenly Jerusalem. As sons and daughters of the Church we too – living members of the Salesian Congregation and of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians – are called to be visible signs of that unity which comes from the Father and is manifested in the context of the one mission. The Son wants us to be like branches which recognize each other and are united in the one Vine. The Spirit who in enriching us with his gifts, has wanted us to be different – by education, sensitivities, sex, culture, personal and congregational history – calls us to become integrated as members of the Body of Christ and as groups of the Salesian Family.

Called to the same mission,

derived from the same Founder, enriched with the same spiritual patrimony, recognized in every part of the world for the same unmistakable style of educational method, we are invited to see in these lines of our features a strong appeal to fraternity.

This shows itself in the lively desire for unity on the part of so many FMA and Salesians; in the desire of young people to see us together, and in their increased joy when this occurs; in the togetherness and shared enrichment every time that a positive experience allows us a genuine exchange of gifts.

### **4. Interior attitudes**

The fact of receiving from the Lord a single vocational grace that is missionary and in communion, and the fraternity which unites us, become the ordinary perspective in which we look at each other, discovering ourselves to be certainly different, but also interesting and "surprising," as is every gift.

It is easy then to overcome the platitudes and the stereotypes, prejudices and lazy thinking – regarding men and women, Salesians and Sisters for example – in order to encounter,

with humility and gratitude, the individuality of the other person which is an invitation to discovery, to dialogue, to integration, and as always a challenge to continued growth.

This leads to the living of mature relationships, in which trust is given and received, and possible critical situations are calmly dealt with. Clarity and sincerity make progress in a dialogue in which each one's point of view is expressed in a straightforward manner and one listens carefully to what the other person is saying.

In this way impatience, which runs the risk of cutting corners and upsetting people, is avoided and one experiences daily the art of starting afresh, knowing that communion is a long process not arrived at immediately but nonetheless indispensable and in the end comforting.

Taking care to avoid falling into facile generalizations and paying attention to the individual with respect also leads us to recognize calmly the differences in the procedures and in the structures of our communities and our Institutes, the different ways of exercising authority, the special originality in the involvement in pastoral ac-

tivities, the particular skills acquired in dealing with boys or girls. Instead of the risk of a levelling down and a sameness—within an atmosphere of meeting and friendship — progress is made in the discovery of diversity as a shaft of the active and creative presence of the spirit.

## 5. Operational criteria

If our interior attitudes are marked by educational and apostolic fraternity, this will also be expressed in the way of managing the whole range of collaborative relationships.

Work cannot absorb the entirety of our relationship. It will extend also to the finding of occasions to pray together, to celebrate together — especially on *Dies Domini* — strengthening what is at the root of every collaboration that is a fraternity capable also of maturing in the joy of friendship.

We are together in the effort to understand the situation of youth and of the people of God we are called upon to serve and educate. Our different ways of seeing things will allow us the better to get together to understand the real situation in

which the ones we aim to help are living.

Together, from the start, we will know how to propose a scheme for a project which – even though carried out in different places or communities – will nevertheless be easily recognizable by the way it is conducted and shared. In it we will demonstrate not only our efforts at collaboration but also those in creating space and opportunity for wholehearted co-responsibility starting with the other members of the Salesian Family.

The overall sharing of the project will not make unproductive (nor, even less, superfluous) the necessary verification which – in addition to setting it in motion – will also be a source of nourishment for our fraternity. Working with determination and reflecting methodically on our own educational experience are attitudes associated with salesian history from the very beginning.

A genuine fraternity does not exclude but rather requires clarity in tasks and responsibilities, respect for the role assigned to each one and flexibility, openness in financial management, united with pru-

dence and respect for the laws in administration.

The presence and the sharing in a common project by the competent superiors will assist in overcoming inevitable difficulties and give the necessary continuity to decisions in pastoral activity and planned projects.

## 6. Some possible suggestions

The meeting of which we have spoken gave us the chance to demonstrate the “family spirit” that Don Bosco has left us as a precious heritage. It is a joy which – throughout the world – we are called to rediscover, in order to give life to our fraternity. Many confreres and sisters have learned how to live and to think together from the first years of their salesian life when – even before it had a name – the “Salesian Family” was already an experience that was lived and intimately savoured.

It also seems important to us to recognize and to encourage whatever – at the level of collaboration and shared responsibility – is already being lived in so many parts of the world: the four experiences provided as examples and studied by the two General Councils are signs of

this. There are national and regional meetings of Provincials and Superiors; important sharing in pastoral work at national, provincial and local levels; cooperation in missionary projects, editorial partnerships, fruitful agreements in educational and pastoral association.

In this context it will probably not be out of place to suggest a closer study of the possibility of other forms of cooperation and partnership: further meetings between Departments of the General Council, meetings at different levels on vocational and formation procedures, shared tasks in oratories and other frontier works, where the presence of SDB and FMA augurs well for a more effective educational atmosphere.

And all this without forgetting that our fraternity is a precious feature of communion for the entire Salesian Family, which will grow to maturity together with our progress but which could also suffer on account of our tardiness.

## **7. Moving towards the jubilee**

The Lord of life is calling us – at the beginning of the third

millennium – to live with renewed enthusiasm the gift of communion inherent in our vocation.

It is matter of giving a new impetus to a history which comes from afar, and receives its force from the holiness of Don Bosco and Saint Mary Mazzarello.

But this charismatic experience too walks with the feet of the men and women that are we, and therefore is realized according to our maturity, our progress in continuous human and salesian growth. Forming to communion, encouraging every possible collaboration, taking the necessary time so that we learn the patient art of collaboration and forgiveness and of starting again, are some of the tasks which we can take up in view of the Jubilee.

We entrust them to Don Bosco and to Mary Mazzarello. We pray that our saints may transform a little of their heavenly communion into the earthly communion that we so greatly desire.

We are with you in our friendship and a special prayer.

Fr Juan E. Vecchi  
Mother Antonia Colombo.

## 5.2 Decree of Approval of the Volunteers With Don Bosco as a Public Association of the Lay Faithful

*We print, in an English translation, the decree by which the Archbishop of Caracas, Mgr. Ignacio Velasco Garcia, gives ecclesial recognition – in accordance with canon law – to the Volunteers With Don Bosco as a Public Association of the Faithful, in the particular Church of Caracas.*

*It is followed by the letter of the Rector Major to the members of the Volunteers with Don Bosco, executing the Archbishop's decree.*

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE, CARACAS

### DECREE CONCERNING THE "VOLUNTEERS WITH DON BOSCO"

At the threshold of the third millennium, the Church is witnessing an extraordinary outburst of new forms of apostolic consecrated life as it treads in the steps of the great founders and embraces the spiritualities originating from them.

These new forces are appearing in the local churches. Diocesan bishops are assuming responsibility for them and giving their approval to enable them to operate in communion with the Church as they carry out their mission according to their particular spirituality and charism.

Among the great founders who have left their mark in the Church is Don Bosco. On the branch of the Salesian charism have already sprouted different groups of religious and secular consecrated life as well as various associations and movements.

In the particular churches of Venezuela the Salesian charism is widespread and varied. It is here that another aspect of this charism has arisen and manifested itself when some young men requested the Salesians to guide them along the path of consecrated secularity according to the spirit of Don Bosco.

Under the guidance of some Salesian priests and in agreement with the local superiors, the young men banded together in an Association known as the «Volunteers With Don Bosco»

and committed themselves to a rule of life spelling out their form of lay consecrated life in the spirit of St. John Bosco.

With the passing of years the young men embarking on this journey have grown in number and consolidated their experience. The Rector Major of the Salesians, by virtue of the bond with the charism of Don Bosco and the guidance given by the Salesians, has now presented me with a request to grant recognition to the "Volunteers With Don Bosco" as a public association of the lay faithful in the Church. The members of this association have the explicit intention of being recognized subsequently as a lay secular institute of diocesan right, and still later of pontifical right. For this reason the Rector Major has presented to me the documentation concerning both the historical beginnings of this form of lay secular consecration according to the spirit of St. John Bosco and the actual state of this Association which now comprises young men from several countries.

I have examined the documentation and considered the advis-

ability of giving official recognition to the youth movement of the "Volunteers With Don Bosco". I am aware of the responsibility placed on the ministry and care of the diocesan bishop by the new forms of consecrated life. On the basis of the request presented by the Rector Major, I now, through the present Decree in accordance with canon 312 §§1, 3, erect the above-mentioned Association as a public association of the lay faithful, in this particular church of Caracas, Venezuela.

Through this same decree I approve the Constitutions of the said Association. I declare them to be in conformity with the mind of the Church and with canonical legislation. They spell out the rule of life for the incipient Secular Institute.

To the extent possible, the Association will have the juridical form of an incipient Secular Institute. In particular:

1. The Association has a juridical personality as set out in canon 313.

2. The members must receive a regular and sufficient formation, following the common praxis of secular institutes and

in line with their own Constitutions. When they are found ready, they will be allowed to pronounce private vows.

3. The members of the Association must take steps to nominate someone who will be responsible and communicate his name to me so that I can confirm him in office, in accordance with canon 317 §1.

4. After hearing the opinion of the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation, I nominate the Salesian priest, Corrado Bettiga, as "pro tempore" Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Association. He will be assisted locally by other Salesian priests.

5. With its erection in this particular Church, the Association can recruit members from other dioceses where they will be accepted as members of a public association of the lay faithful, according to what has been laid down in the present decree.

I entrust the execution of the present decree to the Rector Major of the Salesian Society. He will make it known to all the members of the Association, the "Volunteers with Don Bosco", and implement it according to the indications I have given.

Given, sealed and signed at

Archbishop's House, Caracas on the twenty-fourth day of May, one thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight, the feast of Mary Help of Christians.

✠ Mgr.

Ignacio Antonio Velasco Garcia  
Archbishop of Caracas

\* \* \*

#### LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

My Dear Volunteers With Don Bosco,

I want to convey to you my real sense of joy at your approval as an Association in the Church. My personal joy is also an expression of that of the whole Salesian Family.

With this letter of mine I want to inform you officially and to promulgate the decree of the Archbishop of Caracas. It is up to you to implement it according to the contents themselves.

In the years 1992-1994 your first and different experiment was followed personally by my predecessor Fr Egidio Viganò, who gave it official recognition in September 1994. The progress of the Volunteers over

more than ten years, sustained by the guidance of Salesian confreres, has now reached a fundamental stage: recognition on the part of the Church.

On the basis of the proposals received from many of you to take the necessary steps to obtain recognition, I made a request to the Archbishop of Caracas last April. The reason I approached the Archbishop of that particular Church is twofold: the first group of Volunteers was actually established in Venezuela, and at present, compared with those in other countries, it is the largest group. In addition, the fact that the Archbishop of Caracas is a Salesian is significant. His reply bears the equally significant date of May 24<sup>th</sup>, the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians.

I want to emphasize for you the importance of this event.

*Ecclesial.* The recognition is a public matter and is valid for the whole Church. Through it you are given your particular place and "citizenship". While you continue along the road to becoming, as you intend, a secular Institute, your task in the Church is already to follow a

way of life which reflects that of the consecrated lay state, and is enriched by the spirit which you have chosen as your particular characteristic, the spirit of Don Bosco.

*Salesian.* This in fact provides the second important reason. The salesian charism is being spread thanks to this new and now official presence. The intention clearly expressed by the first young people who in different parts of the world approached the local Salesians with their request, was that of leading the life of consecrated lay people, but according to the spirit of Don Bosco. I do not know the details of the first experiments, but from some contacts I have had with you, it seems to me that this characteristic was very evident and encouraging.

Having said this, I invite you to an ever more lively and continuing commitment to the communion that means fidelity. I would like to consider it once more in relation to the terms ecclesial and salesian.

Ecclesial communion begins with baptismal consecration and increases by means of what the Holy Spirit produces with dif-



ferent vocations, and through what the Church recognizes as new experiences, which become part of her mission. The teaching of the Church on secular Institutes is already an accepted doctrine and a clear description to which those who find themselves at the first stages and in need of help and support may refer in order to draw living strength. The Church entrusts them to those who have already had some experience so that once communion is strengthened they can go ahead more easily.

The salesian communion is not only with the Congregation but with other groups in the Salesian Family to which you belong. You already describe this communion in your Constitutions, but now it is a question of intensifying it further, also through more direct involvement in the various activities of the Salesian Family.

I know that in December you will be meeting here in Rome for a shared period of reflection and for some procedures required by the Decree of Approval. I will have the opportunity to get to know you and to meet you then,

but even now I want to assure you of a remembrance for each one of you in my prayers, and it is my hope that each one will make his own contribution to the spiritual and numerical growth of the Association.

Yours in Don Bosco,

Rome, 12 September 1998

Fr Juan E. Vecchi

Rector Major of the Salesian Society

### 5.3 New Provincials

*The following are brief biographical notes on the new Provincials, appointed by the Rector Major with his Council in the summer session, June-July 1998.*

1. *Fr Camilo CASTRELLÓN, Provincial of Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia.*

Fr Camilo Castrellón Pizano succeeds Fr Luis Alfredo Cárdenas in the guidance of the "St Peter Claver" Province of Bogotá, Colombia. He was born on 22 September 1942 at Bogotá and has been a Salesian since 29

January 1963, when he made his first profession at the end of his novitiate at Tena. After philosophical and pedagogical studies and practical training, he made his perpetual profession on 24 December 1968, and studied theology at Bogotá, where he was ordained priest on 2 December 1972. Subsequently he completed his studies and gained the Licentiate in Educational Sciences at the UPS in Rome.

Then followed a period of intense educative and apostolic work in the houses of the Province, and in 1985 he was called to the provincial house as a member of the pastoral team. In 1988 he became a provincial councillor, and in 1993 Rector of the great foundation of the "Niño Jesús" in Santafé de Bogotá, an office he still held when appointed Provincial.

2. *Fr Santo DAL BEN, Provincial of Peru.*

Fr Santo Dal Ben is the new Provincial of Lima, Peru. He succeeds Fr Juan Vera Alva.

He was born in Italy at Musile di Piave, Venice, on 13 November 1950, and made his novitiate at Albaré, Verona, where

he also made his first profession on 16 August 1968. Immediately afterwards he left for Peru, where he completed his post-novitiate studies and did practical training. He returned to Italy for the study of theology at Turin-Crocetta, and was ordained in his native parish on 23 September 1978.

Returning to Peru, he completed also his civil studies and obtained his teaching diploma; he was then engaged in educative and pastoral work. Soon he was given responsibilities in the field of formation and in 1983 was appointed Rector of the post-novitiate at Magdalena del Mar, a post he held for nine years. In 1988 he began a six-year period as a provincial councillor.

In 1992, after Magdalena del Mar, he was Vice-Rector for some months in the "Mary Help of Christian" community of Lima, of which he subsequently became Rector, a post he still held when appointed Provincial.

3. *Fr Jan KOMAREK, Provincial of Prague, Czech Republic.*

As successor to Fr Benno Benes as Provincial of the "St John Bosco" Province of Prague,

the former Vive-provincial has been appointed, Fr Jan KOMAREK.

He was born at Zlín in the diocese of Olomouc on 7 February 1957. He came in contact with the Salesians during the period of occupation, and made a clandestine preparation for becoming a Salesian, making his first profession on 11 September 1976. He then made his salesian formation alongside civil studies, was perpetually professed in 1982, and on 25 June 1983 was ordained priest at Olomouc.

In the years that followed until the frontiers were opened once again, he was entrusted with posts of responsibility. In 1991 he was appointed Rector and Director of Novices at Hodonovice, and continued in both roles when the novitiate was transferred to Dolní Pocerovice, Prague. When in 1997 he became Vice-provincial, he continued for a period as Novice Director.

4. *Fr Alfredo ROCA, Superior of the Vice-province of Ethiopia-Eritrea.*

Fr Alfred ROCA is the first Superior of the "Mary Pact of

Mercy" Vice-province of Ethiopia and Eritrea, erected with a decree of 29 June 1998 (cf. AGC 364, n.5.3).

He was born at Palles in the province of Barcelona, Spain, on 3 October 1933, and made his first profession at Barcelona-Horta on 16 August 1950, after the novitiate made at Sant Vicenç dels Horts.

After the study of philosophy and practical training he followed the course in theology at Sheffield English, England, and was ordained priest at Barcelona on 29 June 1959. He gained a Licentiate in Philosophy and a Diploma in English.

He worked in the educative and pastoral field, and in 1965 was entrusted with the direction of the studentate of theology at Sentmenat until 1974, when he was transferred as Rector to the house of formation of Martí Codolar, Barcelona. Two years later, in 1976, he was appointed Provincial of the Barcelona Province.

After his six years as Provincial, he spent three years as Rector at Terrassa, and then left for Ethiopia to offer his services especially in the field of formation. From 1987 he was for ten years Rector of the house of for-

mation at Adigrat, and in 1997 moved on (still as Rector) to the Novitiate of Addis Ababa. In 1996 he was appointed Delegate of the two Provincials of the Middle East and Milan Provinces for all the salesian work in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

5. *Fr Andrew WONG, Superior of the Vice-province of Indonesia and Timor.*

Fr Andrew WONG has been appointed to lead the new Vice-province "Bl. Callistus Caravario" of Indonesia and Timor, recently erected (cf. AGC 364, n.5.40).

He was born on 30 November 1952 at Trinity (Rizal) in the Philippines, and made his first profession on 1 May 1972 at Canlubang, where he had made the novitiate and remained for the postnovitiate. He did his practical training at the aspirantate of San Fernando, and studied theology at Parañaque, Metro Manila. He was ordained priest at Manila on 7 December 1972.

He was soon given responsibility in the field of formation. After some years in the studentate of theology at Parañaque he was appointed Director of

Novices at Canlubang, an office he continued to hold, together with that of Rector, when the novitiate was transferred to Bacolod-Granada in the Southern Philippines (1991). In 1992 he became a member of the provincial council of the Southern Philippines.

In 1994 the Superiors sent him to Indonesia where he spent a year as Rector of the formation community at Jakarta, and then in 1995 was appointed Rector and Director of Novices at Fatumaka. From there he was appointed to head the new Vice-province.

#### 5.4 New Salesian Bishop

*Mgr. Zef GASHI, Archbishop of Bar (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia)*

On 11 July 1998 the Osservatore Romano reported that Pope John Paul II had appointed our confrere Fr Zef GASHI to be Archbishop of BAR, in Yugoslavia, an archdiocese immediately subject to the Holy See.

Zef (Joseph) Gashi was born at Pester-Janjevo, in the province of Pristina, on 4 December 1938, and came to know

the Salesians through frequenting the work at Rijeka. Attracted by the salesian way of life he made his novitiate there and also his first profession on 24 August 1961. He studied theology at Ljubljana and then at Zagreb, and was ordained priest on 19 June 1969.

After ordination he became parish priest in his native province of Pristina where he remained for several years, and in 1978 was appointed Rector of the Nis-Sacro Cuore community (on which the parish of Pristina then depended) and in 1981 of the house of Titograd (now Pod-

gorica), to which Pristina was later transferred. There he remained for nine years until 1990.

In 1992, when salesian work began at Scutari in Albania, Fr Zef Gashi was appointed to the new work, where he became responsible for the National Catechetical Centre, entrusted to the Salesians by the Bishops of Albania. He worked in the liturgical field, and collaborated in the translation of liturgical texts into Albanian for Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo. Recently he had also become parish priest.

### 5.5 Our dead confreres (1998 - 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.» (C 94)

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P ACUÑA PEÑA Manuel	Santiago de Chile	11-07-98	87	CIL
P ALBRECHT Ernesto Miguel	Rosario (Santa Fe)	31-07-98	84	ARO
P BALBI Luis	La Plata	15-09-98	94	ALP
P BERTOLINO Mario	Venaria (TO)	05-10-98	66	ICP
P BOBENSTETTER Josef	Rosenheim, Baviera	08-08-98	89	GEM
S BORUSZEWSKI Sebastian	Slupca	29-07-98	22	PLN
P BRUGNA Ciro	Bahía Blanca	04-09-98	85	ABB
P BRUNI Gian Emilio	Soverato (CZ)	13-07-98	50	ILE
P BUSTILLO Basilio	Barcelona-Martí Codolar	14-07-98	91	SBA
P CALVO Pedro	Quito	06-09-98	80	ECU
P CAMINHA Manuel	Vila do Conde	09-09-98	84	POR
P CAMP ZUZULICH Eric	Talca "La Suiza"	28-07-98	69	CIL
P CASTRONOVO Giovanni	Pedara (CT)	16-07-98	86	ISI
P CIGNATTA Natale	Torino	26-07-98	92	ICP
P COCKSHOOT Joseph	Bolton	16-09-98	89	GBR
L COLUSSI Giovanni	Torino-Valdocco	08-09-98	77	ICP
P de DEUS Augusto	Porto	30-08-98	58	POR
P D'ERAMO Edmondo	Roma	08-09-98	86	IRO
L FABRIS Pietro	Negrar (Verona)	02-08-98	89	IVO
P FLYNN Francis	Cape Town	13-09-98	80	AFM
P FRASCONI Armando	Civitanova Marche Alta	24-08-98	83	IAD
P FRIGERIO Ettore	Hua Hin	02-08-98	88	THA
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
P GARRONE Luciano	Torino-Valsalice	09-08-98	76	ICP
L GENTILIN Silvino	Negrar (Verona)	01-09-98	85	IVO
P GLISCIŃSKI Jan	Aleksandrów Kujawski	27-07-98	49	PLN
P HARDY Camille	Beaupréau	10-08-98	92	FPA
L HUNG Henry Leng-Yeung	Macao	01-09-98	53	CIN
P INNOCENTI Costante	Varazze	11-09-98	83	ILT
P JUTKIEWICZ Marian	Rumia	25-07-98	62	PLN
P KERKETTA Louis	Guwahati	31-08-98	86	ING
P KŇAZOVIČ Valerián	Bratislava	03-09-98	82	SLK
P KOSTER Adrianus Albertus	Nijmegen (Olanda)	14-08-98	90	BES
P LANK Jaroslav	Frydek	05-08-98	69	CEP
L LOURENÇO Eugénio	Lisboa	13-07-98	88	POR
L LUDWIG Hubertus	Helenenberg	27-07-98	79	GEK
P LUSÁN Pietro	La Plata	24-07-98	86	ALP

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P LUSO MAINERO Giovanni	Quito	17-07-98	80	ECU
P MAGGIO Stefano	Palermo	19-08-98	85	UPS
<i>Fu il primo Assistente Centrale dell'Istituto delle Volontarie di Don Bosco</i>				
E MARENGO Oreste	Tura	30-07-98	91	-
<i>Eletto Vescovo nel 1951: per 13 anni fu Vescovo di Dibrugarh (India), per 5 anni Vescovo di Tezpur, per 6 anni Amministratore Apostolico di Tura</i>				
S MENNA Carlos Alberto	Resistencia	30-09-98	28	ARO
P MION Giacomo	Torino	02-10-98	86	ICP
P MUIÑO RODRIGUEZ Julio do	Sevilla	19-06-98	81	SSE
L NEWPORT Reginald	Port Pirie	10-07-98	80	AUL
P OTTONE Lino	Nazareth (Israele)	11-08-98	83	MOR
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
P PARADIES Nicola	S. Giovanni Rotondo	11-09-98	80	IME
P PAREDES Raúl	Guayaquil	11-09-98	76	ECU
P PÉREZ Aldo	Córdoba	20-06-98	69	ACO
P PÉREZ Guillermo	Barcelona-Martí Codolar	10-07-98	92	SBA
P PITTON Pericle	Aviano (Pordenone)	17-09-98	76	IVE
P PLASENZOTTI Germano	Rosario (Santa Fe)	23-08-98	80	ARO
P POJER Mario	Bolzano	18-07-98	74	IVO
L RAUDUVÉ Bronislao	León	08-09-98	84	SLE
P RISCO José María	Jerez de la Frontera	25-08-98	73	SSE
P ROJAS CHIRIFE Vicente	Asunción	10-08-98	84	PAR
L ROTHER Dieter	Helenenberg	02-09-98	62	GEK
L SABATINI Giuseppe	Roma	06-10-98	88	IRO
P SOLARINO Francesco	Roma	10-07-98	73	ISI
P TISSOT Maurice	Toulon	16-05-98	87	FLY
P TONINI-CARDINALI Walter	Roma	25-09-98	78	IRO
P TOPINKA Josef	Ivancice	28-09-98	66	CEP
P VAN HOUTTE Arsène	Neufvilles (Belgio)	19-07-98	77	BES
L VAN VELSEN Guus	Amersfoort	24-09-98	62	OLA
P VOLPATO Giacomo	Torino	27-08-98	68	ICP
P ZAGHETTO Antonio	Vercelli	08-08-98	74	ICP
L ZANETTINI Mario	Torino	04-08-98	84	ICP
P ZAPPULLA Salvatore	Civitanova Marche Alta	23-08-98	83	IAD

