



# acts

**of the general council**

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year LXXX

april-june 1999

**N. 367**

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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## SENT TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.<sup>1</sup>

**1. Our poverty:** Freedom and detachment. - Investing in the Community. - Sign of the salesian mission. - Work and temperance. - Wise administration. **2. Today's challenges:** The divided world. - Money. - Complexity of administration. - individual management. **3. Icons of salesian poverty:** The disciple, the follower of Jesus. - Good news to the poor. - The first Christians. - Don Bosco's poverty. **4. Some suggestions for the present day:** Intelligent responsibility. - Apostolic application of goods. - Solidarity. - Educating to the use of goods. - Loving the poor in Christ. **Conclusion.**

Rome, 25 March 1999  
*Feast of the Annunciation*

My dear Confreres,

I send my Easter greetings to all of you: may the Lord fill you with joy and the power of his Resurrection.

In the month of February we began the Team Visits which will characterize this last year of the millennium. At Nairobi were gathered the Superiors and Councillors of the English-speaking Circumscriptions of Africa to verify the implementation of the GC24 and make an on-the-spot assessment of the process of evangelization being followed by our communities.

This and the following thirteen team-visits are taking place after the Rector Major with the General Council have been able to review the systematic effort made by the provinces in their provincial chapters to give life to the pastoral model already

<sup>1</sup> cf. Lk 4,18

well known and accepted as the best response to the ecclesial situation and the state of our strengths and possibilities.

In every verification we are brought back to the conviction expressed by the GC24: "The profession of the evangelical counsels, as well as being an expression of the following of Christ, has also a pedagogical content of human growth and is a paradigm of the new humanity".<sup>2</sup>

I thought it fitting, therefore, after our reflections on chastity, to continue our considerations on the counsels by speaking to you about our poverty. I am prompted to do this also by the fact that in our program for the present six-year period, we undertook to "foster the witness of consecration and communion of the communities" and to "create the awareness of the educative power of religious consecration and bear witness to it in daily life".<sup>3</sup>

While I was thinking over what points to offer you, I wondered what the main objectives of our reflection should be and what requirements should be emphasized in view of the present moment in which we are all living and the variety of contexts in which the provinces are working. I came to the conclusion that the purpose of this letter of mine could be: to call attention to this aspect of our consecrated life around which many ecclesial and secular sensitivities revolve at the present day and on which our witness and vocational fruitfulness depends; to recall the main traits of poverty in line with our charism; to prompt a discernment in the face of the innovations which are appearing in our customs and praxis; and finally to offer some suggestions for responding to the new challenges.

I take it that you will be making a creative reading of the text in communities, and allow yourselves to be prompted by it to a deeper study of your way of life, and a generous assuming of the demands of the Gospel.

<sup>2</sup> GC24 152

<sup>3</sup> AGC 358 (Supplement), p.16, nn 32, 34



## 1. Our poverty

Poverty has to do with things and money, and equally it is also linked with the heart and spirit. In it our relationship with God and with our brethren is forged through the bond we establish with material and spiritual goods: our use, preferences, and the proper ordering of what belongs to us or we consider ours.

It is not surprising that in a project of life, long lived and studied like the one offered by our Constitutions, there should be found together with stimulating gospel inspirations precise indications about the manner of practising poverty in the way we have learned from Don Bosco.

Each of these indications and all of them together are indispensable if we are to arrive at new expressions of our poverty in the context of the present day.

In fact they not only link poverty with a spiritual tradition which has developed in the course of time, but also unite it harmoniously with the charisma.

Fundamental to our commitment of poverty is the following of Christ, and the conforming of ourselves to him as the Good Shepherd. The settings for the specific daily expressions of this are the mission and the community. To these as points of reference the gospel inspirations return, suggested interior attitudes are linked, and practical guidelines find their motive.

### *Freedom and detachment*

The Constitutions speak to us of detachment of heart<sup>4</sup> lived in normal daily life,<sup>5</sup> freedom from concern and worry:<sup>6</sup> In our meeting with Jesus and in his person we have discovered good things infinitely superior to those which are temporal, though

<sup>4</sup> C 73

<sup>5</sup> C 75

<sup>6</sup> C 72

the latter are not without value. This is the first meaning or significance of our poverty. It is something of advantage for us, like the selling of lesser goods to acquire a longed-for treasure,<sup>7</sup> in the way expressed by St. Paul: I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in comparison with the sublime knowledge of Christ, my Lord.<sup>8</sup>

This should not be taken as a spiritual reflection which only secondarily leads to practical criteria for assessment and manner of acting. On the contrary it is a primary decision, able to give direction to the whole of personal experience: intuitions, inspirations, desires, appetite for the good things to which the human heart is called, and the conviction that they can be found in Christ: "I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection".<sup>9</sup>

Detachment, because temporal goods are beneath our desires and we have discovered others far superior, is applicable to affections, health, individual freedom, power, personal cultural preparation, sufficiency of our intelligence, material means, and also to our will and decisions. In this sense poverty is founded on and becomes merged with obedience as a necessary means to attain the will of God, and with chastity as necessary for a love proportionate to our emptiness.

Don Bosco used to say: "You cannot practise poverty unless you love it".<sup>10</sup> Many external attitudes not in harmony with the profession of poverty are signs of a lack of internal freedom, of the absence of a yardstick for assessing the quality of goods, of fixed ideas, untenable even from a human standpoint. We can understand why the "poor" person in Scripture represents not only the one who restricts himself in his use of material goods, but also the person who has entered into the

<sup>7</sup> cf. Mt 13, 44-45

<sup>8</sup> cf. Phil 3,8

<sup>9</sup> Phil 3, 8-10

<sup>10</sup> BM 5, 442

mystery of human existence, in his need for the infinity of God. This is a perspective which must not be neglected in the time of formation. The quality of the heart must be judged from the "treasures" to which it is attached.<sup>11</sup>

### *Investing in the Community*

"We share together our material goods: the fruits of our work, the gifts we receive and whatever comes to us from pensions, subsidies and insurance policies. We do the same with our talents, our energies and our experience. In the community the good of each individual becomes the good of all".<sup>12</sup>

Detachment is a condition for fruitful investment. Rather than renounce our goods, we entrust them to the multiplying power of communion. Communion in the full sense concerns in the first place the goods to be shared. The article of the Constitutions uses broad terms, but it provides only an example of what the individual can place at the disposition of others.

The limitless implications of communion concern also the subjects: in fact they include all mankind. Poverty becomes visible in the personal love of each member for all the confreres of the religious community, to the point where the two realities become inseparable and interdependent. St Francis de Sales puts it with direct simplicity: "To be poor means living in community".<sup>13</sup> Giving and receiving, showing generosity and gratitude, sharing with everyone gifts and material resources both intellectual and spiritual, constitute its daily practice.

Communion goes beyond the immediate religious community: it extends to the "needs of the entire Congregation, of the Church and of the world".<sup>14</sup>

This kind of attitude becomes the criterion for the applica-

<sup>11</sup> cf. Mt 6, 21

<sup>12</sup> C 76

<sup>13</sup> Oeuvres de St. François de Sales, Ed. Annecy, vol.IX, p.229

<sup>14</sup> C 76

tion of goods placed by Providence at our disposal. We cannot pretend to have satisfied our obligation of poverty when in disposing of our resources we have first looked after our own personal needs. Poverty impels us "to be one with the poor and to love them in Christ".<sup>15</sup> In them we see the image of Christ who, through his Incarnation, has entered our human condition marked by suffering, privation and want. In them, therefore, the grace of the presence and a meeting with the Lord awaits us.

Solidarity with the poor generates attitudes of sharing: physical presence especially where poverty means squalor, lack of essentials, want of educative possibilities, absence of prospects. And with our presence there must also be a sharing in the living conditions, and a sharing too in the efforts to improve conditions.

A comprehensive glance at the Congregation gives us heart when we find that in every continent the Salesians are making courageous and determined efforts in those contexts most marked by extreme need and destitution, and are trying to enter into communion with the poor.

### *A sign of the salesian mission*

Our presence among the poor and the sharing of our goods with them are already a witness to evangelical poverty. But our poverty tends to be expressed in concrete service. We instigate projects to evangelize and help people, especially the young, to overcome situations of need, whether they be financial, affective or spiritual.

In the charismatic figure of Don Bosco we discover that the profession of poverty, in addition to being necessary for living authentically in evangelical communities, is an excellent way for realizing our mission to the full.

The "detachment of heart"<sup>16</sup> is directed to the "generous ser-

<sup>15</sup> C 79

<sup>16</sup> C 73



vice of others";<sup>17</sup> the renunciation of all earthly goods<sup>18</sup> ensures a "spirit of enterprise in the mission of the Church and in her struggle for justice and peace, especially by educating those in need".<sup>19</sup>

It is clearly a matter of two closely linked elements: all the resources we have at our disposal, material and spiritual, personal and communal, are generously aimed at fulfilling the mandate to reach the greatest possible number of young people and make them aware of their being children of God in Christ.

We commit ourselves, therefore, on many different fronts, and always with an educative intention, to giving life to projects for human advancement for which we make use of adequate structures, accept and look for suitable means, support and finance. Don Bosco's enterprise in this direction has been passed on to his sons. Today we still seek help by directing towards charitable purposes those who are in a position to give it; we promote groups of benefactors to come to the aid of those in need; we stretch out our hands for the poor. All this gains us approval, frequently unexpected collaboration, and (unfortunately) a certain amount of criticism or cliché-ridden reaction which is not always kindly.

The pastoral charity of Don Bosco urges us to appeal and express our thanks, in the awareness that "what we have is not ours, but belongs to the poor".<sup>20</sup> His transparent witness of personal poverty was always united to his determination, carried even to the point of recklessness, to serve the young and mainly the poorest of them with the most up-to-date and efficacious means.

Our poverty, chosen for the sake of the Kingdom and necessary for our mission, has – we hope – a social impact on the task of education. By forming young people and being involved with them we intend to work for a society which gives more

<sup>17</sup> C 73

<sup>18</sup> cf. C 73

<sup>19</sup> C 73

<sup>20</sup> C 79; cf. BM 5, 450

consideration to the common good, respects the value of every individual, builds on criteria of justice and equity, and has concern for those who are weak or disadvantaged.

This intention determines the choice of places, contents and forms of education and guides the use of capital and means in line with the various social and cultural contexts.

### *Work and temperance*

What we have tried to clarify above leads us to live our daily poverty through intelligent and sedulous work, made possible and sustained by temperance. "In our daily labours we are at one with the poor who live by the sweat of their brow, and we bear witness to the human and Christian value of work".<sup>21</sup>

The correlation between poverty and work is to be sought in the spirituality of apostolic activity understood as tireless work for the Kingdom. Don Bosco lived it joyfully in faith. Every Salesian is invited therefore to develop and make good use of his talents, waste no time at all, and work for his living.

And so, as we work for our daily bread we share the lot of those who must depend on their work for the support of themselves and their families, and thus express the social value of our poverty. Moreover the appreciation of work as an expression of human capabilities and as a special means of human fulfilment, not exclusively aimed at profit, becomes an educative message and witness.

The importance of work in our spiritual make-up can be easily deduced from a series of facts, real and symbolic: the peasant origin and first experiences of Don Bosco, the protagonists and style of life at the beginnings, the working class to whom our attention is primarily addressed.

Work is the main component of the formation of youngsters in the professional and technical schools; it is the characteristic,

<sup>21</sup> C 78

though not exclusively so, that marks the figure of the salesian Brother; it is our way of involvement in society and culture. It gives the Salesian his fundamental trait: the Salesian is a worker. Don Cagliero had a strong way of putting it: "One who does not know how to work is certainly no Salesian!"<sup>22</sup>

Two facts can serve to sum this up: the place of work in the badge of the Congregation and Don Bosco's recommendations quoted by Mgr. Cagliero who emphasized that in the month of December 1887, Don Bosco "recommended twice over for the Salesians: work, work!"<sup>23</sup>

But one or two clarifications will not be superfluous. For Don Bosco work is not just any activity, tiring though it may be, but dedication to the mission full-time and with all one's ability. It includes not only manual work, but intellectual and apostolic activity as well. Workers also are those who write, who hear confessions, who preach and study, who keep the house in order: it is a matter always of working for souls.

Our work is characterized by obedience, by pastoral charity, by a right intention and by a sense of community. It is not a matter of mere activity, but of purpose, choice and the wise ordering of our work; and we must add that in the word 'work' there is a reference to manual and practical skills. The Salesian learns to work with his hands and so is at ease performing "humble" work of a domestic or material kind.

The pastoral charity which directs the work can be seen in spontaneous and generous gestures. But more commonly it means involvement for long periods in a patient daily toil for the growth of individuals and the animation of the community. More than a simple attitude of kindness or gesture of sympathy, it is a praxis: a constant manner of acting competently in a particular environment, similar to political, social or med-

<sup>22</sup> MB XIX, 157. Words quoted by Pius XI, 3 June 1929. In 1933 he said again: "Anyone who does not work is out of place among the Salesians; work is their badge, the identity card of this providential army". MB XIX, 235)

<sup>23</sup> MB XVIII, 477

ical practice. All these imply a form of activity which is coherent and constant, well thought out, directly intended and constantly improved. This is the kind of work which ends up by moulding a person's spiritual character.

Work therefore means acquiring and developing a specific professional competence, required by pastoral charity, through which we learn and perfect ourselves in the arts of motivating, instructing, animating and sanctifying. We become capable of understanding a context, of formulating and realizing a project responding to the needs, and taking into account the imponderable elements which are always present in pastoral work.

Work includes the effort of educative creativity: that mental and practical attitude which leads to the finding of original solutions to new problems and situations. Don Bosco thought up a project for street-children while the parishes were still carrying on with their "regular" catechism lessons. Immediately afterwards, when he saw that the boys were not ready for employment nor protected in it, he thought up a small-scale and home-made solution which later grew: work contracts, workshops and professional schools. And he had a similar approach to other needs, like the home and instruction. Don Bosco was imaginative in the matter of work.

But work must be combined with temperance. It is not the same thing as agitation and frenzy but includes a professional approach, dedication, and good order without loss of time or energy regarding the objectives of the mission. Such a requirement cannot fail to be linked with a life-style characterized by its simplicity, dedication, and I would even say its austerity. The two aspects are complementary and they suggest to us that we bring them together in a manner consonant with the grace of unity.

Temperance is linked with the penitential dimension which is essential to Christian maturity. Without it there can be neither a beginning or any further progress in the way of conversion, which consists in assuming some elements and leaving



many others aside, in selecting and cutting, in destroying old or useless practices and allowing oneself to be rebuilt.

Every Institute has an ascetical tradition consistent with its own style of spirituality. In our own, the formula which sums it up is "coetera tolle"; leave aside the rest, order the rest to the primary objective, i.e. to the "da mihi animas", to the possibility of interior life and expressing love for the young, taking them away from situations which are an obstacle to life. And it is precisely the "coetera tolle" that finds daily expression in salesian temperance.

I say "salesian" temperance because in our history and literature there are some very characteristic references to it.

Temperance is the cardinal virtue which moderates impulses, word and actions in accordance with reason and the demands of the Christian life. Around it rotate continence, humility, sobriety, simplicity and austerity. In the preventive system the same realities are combined in the concept of reason. Its manifestations in daily life are: mental balance, i.e. moderation in everything, proper self-discipline, ability for collaboration, a calm interior and exterior, a serene and authoritative rapport with all, but especially with the young.

From a spiritual and apostolic standpoint temperance is the "athletic state", ready for any request in favour of the young; it means keeping oneself free of ties that would be too restricting, from the influence of personal tastes and demands which create dependence: "Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one".<sup>24</sup>

Temperance is applicable to work: it is the order which gives actions a motivation and priority in respect of their objectives; both personal and "apostolic" ambitions are given both order and measure; others are asked for their just contribution and not for something excessive or which would serve only for our own convenience; matters should be arranged so that work

<sup>24</sup> 1 Cor 9, 25

does not mean the elimination of prayer or fraternal relationships. Temperance is needed in activities, in outlay, in seeking funds, in the desire to finish one thing before beginning another; in the control of our own work so that we do not become caught up as in the wheels of a machine.

Temperance is also applicable to fraternal life: without it a good community relationship is impossible.<sup>25</sup> Brotherly love implies self-control, an effort at attention, control of spontaneous feelings and reactions, the overcoming of disagreements, the understandings of the sufferings of others: it is all an exercise in getting out of oneself and changing one's personal approach. For us there is also the obligation to show it in perceptible manner: a fraternal love that is able to draw out a response for the good of the other person.

Finally, temperance is applicable to one's personal life-style: relationships commensurate with the mission: the possession and use of consumable goods (cars, equipment, tools); time for relaxation and holidays; interior watchfulness and purification.

These things can seem all too ordinary as the ascetical dimension and practice of evangelical poverty, rather as being a too lighthearted approach to the serious nature of the call to be radical. Don Bosco expressed the apparent contradiction in the dream of the pergola of roses of which the GC24 wanted to remind us<sup>26</sup> immediately after the indications for our present commitments to animation and spirituality. The Salesians walk on rose-petals, Everyone thinks they are "rejoicing", and they are in fact "happy". Although pierced by the thorns they do not lose their joy. This is another place where temperance comes in: simplicity, making the best of a situation, no fuss and bother. It is in line with the gospel advice: when you fast, do not look dismal, but anoint your head and wash your face.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> C 90

<sup>26</sup> cf. GC24, 187-188

<sup>27</sup> Mt 6, 16-17

This style of life, made up of work and temperance, concerns also the community itself, as is well emphasized by art.77 of the Constitutions: "Every community is sensitive to the conditions of its neighbourhood and bears witness to its poverty by a simple and sparing way of life in unpretentious dwellings (...) the criterion for our buildings is that they be simple and functional".<sup>28</sup>

The sensitive point about structures follows two related criteria: that of service to young people in most need and that of simplicity. Constant attention to the need to keep both these criteria in mind, with a balanced discernment at the necessary levels, allows the community to avoid hang-ups regarding projects and at the same time to maintain credibility in bearing witness to the gospel values which are at the basis of the consecrated life and of evangelization itself.

But let us remember that the credibility of the community is linked with the witness of each individual confrere. The personal assumption of poverty, solemnly professed by vow, can be made explicit only by a tenor of life which includes surroundings and practical attitudes to such things as food, instruments for work, furnishings, holidays, means of transport. Submission to the discernment of a community, even through dependence on a superior, is part of our evangelical option, it prevents a practice of poverty tailored to individual criteria and is a protection against falling back on securities and guarantees offered by the institution.

The program for the individual is set out in these words. "Every member lives out his poverty by temperance in the use of food and drink, by simplicity in dress and by moderate use of holidays and amusements. He furnishes his room in a simple manner, taking care not to make it a refuge which keeps him separated from his confreres and from young people. He is watchful so as not to become a slave to any habit opposed to the spirit of poverty".<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> C 77

<sup>29</sup> R 55

### *Wise administration*

Because of the characteristics we have set out above our poverty includes the sound administration of goods: precision, with careful foresight, skill in putting to good use, openness, and with the shared responsibility of the community. Salesian praxis tends to guarantee a shrewd management and at the same time a witness evident to our contemporaries.

The unity of government, application to the apostolate and solidarity among the confreres, houses, provinces and Congregation are the principles which govern our economy and the consequent administration of goods.

The function of economy is instrumental and is subordinate to the purpose of our consecration. It is controlled, however, by specific laws and regulations which cannot be neglected without harm to the objectives of the apostolate. They have in consequence become part of the norms of the Church and of the Institutes of Consecrated Life.

Without going into the technical details, which would need a treatment by itself, I only emphasize that a transparent administration through a careful recording of expenses, a fraternal and trusting reference to the one responsible for administration, and requests for authorizations foreseen by the Constitutions and Regulations, all form part of the spirit of poverty.

## **2. Today's challenges**

If we compare the picture we have just outlined with the tendencies and customs in which we are immersed, we notice a clear division and we feel the urgent need to check up on our life-style and our witness to poverty.

**The world is marked and divided by the possession of goods.** The wealth of a restricted part of the globe is counter-balanced by a majority of peoples and individuals who are



living in penury and want. Development is taking place at different speeds. The distance between rich and poor is getting ever greater and there is no improvement in sight on the basis of factors which govern the economy. Indeed some countries, after a short-lived period of relative wellbeing, seem to fall back into situations of insuperable and desperate need, made still worse by enormous debts to the rich countries.

The well-to-do societies tend to create ever new needs and can produce even in us an unbalanced consumer mentality based on comfort and a free and easy life. Such a mentality can lead to a dangerous conformity which gradually deprives the vow of poverty of its spiritual value and of its social perceptibility and prophetic impact.

Even in the poorer contexts we Salesians are not short of a house, the means of subsistence and the means for the effective realization of our mission. As well as the obligation to thank Providence, this imposes on us a courageous discernment to find suitable ways of witnessing, sharing and giving service. In fact an excessive availability of means and structures, as well as contrasting with gospel values, can place us at a much more comfortable level of life than is warranted by the social and economic situation of the context in which we find ourselves and the tenor of life of those we are working for.

Another element which influences our life is the relevance of economic values in our individual and collective mentality, and at the same time the importance of **money** in the financial and social system. Work loses its value as a feature of identity, as a source of support and as a sign of personal dignity, a point frequently made by John Paul II in his social writings. Money becomes an ever more decisive factor for enterprise, realization and conservation. In its turn it becomes converted into the principal source of income and riches. References are heard to a "financialization" not only of the economy but also of thought and language.

The greater abundance and circulation of money in rich countries has brought about a ready and growing solidarity between individuals, groups, political institutions and humanitarian organizations. It is frequently expressed in a generalized form in connection with dramatic situations such as hunger, epidemics and refugees. Through the universal empathy with the figure of Don Bosco and the lively nature of many salesian works in the midst of the young and people in general, Providence brings us the necessary means for our mission in the different continents. It is quite touching to discover how many benefactors there are who follow with love and tangible offerings the salesian works in the world, the new frontiers in work for the young and the great missionary impulse of the last ten years. Many of the offerings come from simple folk, not always well to do, who regularly and not infrequently with sacrifice make a generous contribution to encourage and sustain us.

A point to be noted is the **complexity** involved in the management and financial support of our works. The structures in which we work and which we have frequently built by our own efforts, with the help of generous persons and humanitarian institutions, have high administration and maintenance expenses, and heavy obligations in respect of regional and state administrations. Many of our educational activities still have a commercial side to them and as such are subject to taxation by local legislation. The ever more consistent presence of lay people at various levels means that we must pay them a just salary, generally regulated by contract with very precise and binding norms.

All these features not only make considerably more complicated the task of those directly responsible and frequently require the regular service of qualified consulting bodies, but require on our part the provision of large sums of money, without which we would be prevented from fulfilling the mission itself.

To all the foregoing we may add the modern incentive towards the autonomous management of affairs which leads to individualistic forms of organizing life.

In a context of abundance and individualism, an appeal is made ever more frequently to the respect due to the individual, and the degree of responsibility he must be recognized as having. This sort of appeal is not necessarily negative or without foundation. But if it were to result in an indiscriminate provision of personal comfort, of equipment and money without vigilant control, it would undermine the charismatic influence of our consecration and would weaken the impact of our mission among the young.

Rightly then we may ask ourselves: how can we reconcile all this with the demands of the vow of poverty, such as not disposing of our own funds, depending on the judgement of others for our multiple personal needs and for what we require for our work and mission? And, on the other hand, how can we avoid the risk of publicly professing evangelical poverty in line with the salesian charism and then in practice, with full awareness we have acquired, interpret in an individual manner a vow with a communal objective significance?

### **3. Icons of salesian poverty**

Many are the paths by which the Bible, right from the Old Testament, links the experience of God and human happiness to a realistic attitude respectful of the truth towards self and possessions. It is an attitude personified in the "poor" of Yahweh.

Our Constitutions have chosen three images to explore the inexhaustible depths of evangelical poverty and guide us to new expressions of it.

*The disciple: the follower of Jesus*

To the young man who asked him about eternal life, Jesus replied: "Go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me".<sup>30</sup>

The story, used as an inspiring source for the text of the Constitutions, develops a series of ideas which are of particular interest at the present time: the paradoxical nature of religious poverty, the need for the gift of the Spirit in order to embrace it, the happiness of one who does so, the possibility of living it, shown through the experience of those who entrust themselves to Jesus.

The insistent succession of the verbs brings out the idea of the urgency with which a decision must be made, and what is at stake in it: the fullness of life ("if you wish to be perfect"); the liberating or enslaving relationship with material goods ("sell your possessions"); the place occupied by love in one's life ("give the money to the poor"); the authentic good things to be pursued ("you will have treasure"); the possibility of sharing life with Jesus ("come, follow me").

"Go" ... and "come" at the beginning and end of the advice, express the movement from being centred on one's own concerns, from living in an enclosed and remote manner, to the intimacy with Christ implied by following him.

Art.72 of the Constitutions contrasts the scenario of the young man who did not accept the invitation with the image of the Apostles who declare: "We have left everything and followed you".<sup>31</sup> They place themselves at the service of the Gospel. We identify ourselves with them and in their gesture we find example and inspiration.

The following of Christ, to which we are invited, is not only acceptance of Jesus' teaching and active participation in his af-

<sup>30</sup> Mt 19, 16-22

<sup>31</sup> Mt 19, 27

fairs but a grafting into his mystery, in his total donation to the Father and his brethren, in his death and resurrection.

The radical poverty of Jesus consists in his becoming a man with the limitations and reality like each of us, but open to the divinity and filled by it. He is not attached to his divine prerogative, but takes on the human condition of weakness and death and finds its meaning in confiding himself into the hands of the Father. As a man he does not impose his higher identity; for many people he is simply the son of Mary, of the carpenter, living as a wandering rabbi with no fixed abode, often in precarious situations and deprived of the human certainty that comes from riches, status and power.

Through poverty those who are consecrated have this first and principal experience: they contemplate with a special light the "poverty" of Christ, they are attracted by it, they share it and become conformed to it: to the poverty of the Servant of Yahweh, who entrusts himself to the Father in everything and finds in Him his happiness and fulfilment.

In Jesus they live the emptying out of themselves so as to be filled by God, and feel happy in receiving and giving. In this way they are introduced into the mystery of the Trinity, as is emphasized in *Vita Consecrata*: "Poverty proclaims that God is man's only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, 'though he was rich ... became poor' (2 Cor 8:9), it becomes an expression of that total gift of self which the three Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in his redemptive death".<sup>32</sup>

The emptying out of whatever misleadingly creates the conviction that one is self-sufficient and can reach fulfilment on one's own, the satisfaction of depending on God and one's brethren for happiness and self-realization involves being humble in the manner of Mary's song, i.e. to accept the truth of

<sup>32</sup> VC 21 c

our being, of the fact that we are creatures: made by Someone else and for Someone else; aware of our incompleteness, of our moral poverty, our limitations and weaknesses.

It is understandable therefore how prayer, looking towards God and yearning for him, become characteristic of one who is poor: in it is the emptiness of man who invokes the riches of God; the intuitive designs of God become fused with our plans for happiness; we are directly challenged to recognize that we have been loved and to be at ease in loving others.

We understand too how it is that the "poor" man, who thus becomes wise, is willing to give everything he has in exchange for the wisdom which is the consciousness of his own being and of the way to bring it to fulfilment.

### *Good news to the poor*

The first icon identifies evangelical poverty with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God which is the consecration of Jesus of Nazareth.

A second image recognizes in poverty the mysterious secret of the mission of Jesus and hence the key to the fruitfulness of the Church.<sup>33</sup> In both cases poverty is the revealing sign. Men are unaware of it and so cannot accept it, but he declares it publicly when he tells the messengers to say to John the Baptist, who was looking for confirmation of his messianic identity, "the poor have good news brought to them".<sup>34</sup> The same thing happens at the present day: where the hope of the poor is reawakened, where they recover their dignity, it becomes clear that the Kingdom is at work.

And so the poor are explicitly chosen as the main significant and fruitful subjects to whom the mission is primarily addressed under the inspiration of the Spirit: "He has anointed

<sup>33</sup> cf. VC 25 a

<sup>34</sup> Lk 7, 22

me to bring good news to the poor".<sup>35</sup> They are not the only ones. The message is offered also to those who have possessions, as an invitation to poverty, starting from the experience of need, of sharing, of love and liberation.

Poverty is included in the proclamation: "Blessed are the poor".<sup>36</sup> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal"<sup>37</sup> "What does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"<sup>38</sup> With these expressions the Gospel leads man to some fundamental questions about his existence, and at the same time offers him the way to answer them through the life and teachings of Christ.

The very explicit conclusion of Jesus is summed up in the aphoristic expression: "You cannot serve God and wealth".<sup>39</sup> He decries as opposed to man's own good the excessive concern for riches which conditions and enslaves him.

It is not that the economic condition of need has priority in a Manichaeian and indiscriminate manner over that which is well-off. It puts the value of the latter in proper perspective and reveals its snares with respect to conversion of heart, building the Kingdom, fulfilling man's destiny and the quality of human relationships. His recommendation is: "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into eternal habitations".<sup>40</sup> And so do not despise money. He praises the action of the widow who makes her tiny offering,<sup>41</sup> that of Zacchaeus who promises to give half his goods to the poor and to restore four times any amount he may have gained by fraud,<sup>42</sup> and the shrewd man-

<sup>35</sup> Lk 4, 18

<sup>36</sup> Mt 5, 3

<sup>37</sup> Mt 6, 19

<sup>38</sup> Mk 8, 36

<sup>39</sup> Lk 16, 13

<sup>40</sup> Lk 16, 9

<sup>41</sup> Mk 12, 42

<sup>42</sup> cf. Lk 19, 8

ager who fiddled the accounts so as to ensure for himself friendship and a welcome after his dismissal.<sup>43</sup>

The poverty of consecrated life continues and gives effect to the teaching of Jesus as regards goods. It is expressed in terms of a different relationship with them in a context of riches which are an end in themselves, of greed and endless craving for possessions, and hence of a different kind of rapport between individuals and peoples. In fact the overpowering longing for money and the intoxication of the desire to possess are at the root of many of the great evils afflicting modern society, the arrogant exploitation of others, concealed injustice, indigence and destitution.

Interior and exterior detachment, keeping to essentials, renouncing of possessions, do not therefore represent an impoverishment and still less a negation of values which are authentically human, but rather their transfiguration; they propose a "spiritual therapy" for humanity, because they reject idolatry with its consequences and in some way make the living God visible.<sup>44</sup>

Poverty, as well as being the human setting and content of the proclamation, is an indispensable characteristic of the evangelizing missionary. He puts his trust in the word, in the convincing power of charity, in the promise of life. For a journey he has no need of "staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic".<sup>45</sup> On his side he has the power of Jesus to cast out devils, the joy of proclaiming salvation and of curing men's wounds. He is willing to live by what they offer him.

Poverty linked directly to consecration and the proclamation of Christ has for the consecrated missionary an ascetical value: it enables him to purify his heart, relationships and words, freeing him from the tendency to domination and self-affirmation and the seeking for prestige which is so strongly

<sup>43</sup> cf. Lk 16, 1-13

<sup>44</sup> cf. VC 87

<sup>45</sup> Lk 9, 1-6



rooted in both individuals and the community. "Consecrated persons will be missionaries above all by continually deepening their awareness of having been called and chosen by God, (...) freeing themselves from the obstacles which could hinder the totality of their response. In this way they will become true signs of Christ in the world".<sup>46</sup>

### *The first Christians*

"After the example of the first Christians, we share together our material goods", says art.76 of the Constitutions.

The poverty of Christ is expressed in the gift of himself even to the extreme gesture of his death. The community which is born of his Resurrection, strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, feels itself called to realize fraternal union among all men through the sharing of spiritual and material goods.

"Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common".<sup>47</sup> The *koinonia* therefore includes many aspects of life, and indeed leaves out none of them: union of hearts, use of material goods, participation in the Eucharist and prayer, daily living, convergence in a unified project of our presence in society.

The will for and realization of communion, an indispensable element of evangelical poverty, is shown in different forms with the passing of time and continues to find new and eloquent expressions: "Consecrated persons, who become 'of one heart and soul' (Acts 4, 32) through the love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5, 5), experience an interior call to share everything in common: material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable service".<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> VC 25 b

<sup>47</sup> Acts 4, 32

<sup>48</sup> VC 42 b

The result is the multiplication of resources: a patrimony also of temporal goods which increases so that it can be distributed "to all as any had need"<sup>49</sup> and "there was not a needy person among them",<sup>50</sup> because it was given to each one as he had need.<sup>51</sup> This is a constant phenomenon throughout the centuries: poverty directed towards communion produces abundance. The individual possession of riches only reproduces and extends destitution.

This poverty, which places its hope in communion, has its first site for sowing and reaping in the religious community where there is giving without measure, in opposition to the principle of "each for himself" and an endeavour to build a joyful fellowship of witness. It cannot be reduced to the use of things, nor is its main intention that of preserving a common economic patrimony, but it provides the possibility of a spiritual experience which also has temporal value.

The desire for sharing among the first Christians overcame the boundaries of the restricted community and extended to sister Churches and those who were in need and destitute. Paul organized a collection for the benefit of the needy Jerusalem community and the Apostles chose deacons as a response to the requirements of the poor and widows. Looking at our own situations, *Vita Consecrata* remarks: "The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option; but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor".<sup>52</sup>

The experience of religious life through the centuries shows

<sup>49</sup> Acts 2, 44

<sup>50</sup> Acts 4, 33

<sup>51</sup> cf. Acts 4, 35

<sup>52</sup> VC 82 b

that one of the aspects which brought about the decay of common life was the interpretation of the relationship between collective and individual poverty. The paradox was eventually reached of rich religious in poor institutes and vice-versa of religious with no belongings in institutes with vast possessions in contexts of general poverty. One must go beyond a legalistic interpretation and both individually and as a community renew the option to follow Jesus in courageous love, generous sharing, and abandonment to God's mysterious ways.

The taking up of positions like this leads to the making of courageous gestures, even those which may go against the general trend, which enable religious to be credible advocates of the human value of poverty, to denounce by their life-style the injustices perpetrated against so many of God's children and to "commit themselves to the promotion of justice in the society where they work".<sup>53</sup>

### *Don Bosco's poverty*

Among the evangelical counsels the one which presents the greatest diversity with respect to its practice in the various projects of consecrated life even to the extent of deeply characterizing them, is poverty. There is the poverty of the anchorites, that of the great monastic institutions, of the mendicant orders, of the contemplatives, the institutes of active life and the consecrated seculars.

A careful reading of *Vita Consecrata* must shape our reflection and our practice with a view to a conversion involving both individuals and communities. For this purpose I think it indispensable to invite you to look for a moment at Don Bosco, in order to complete our frame of reference. Of him the Commentary on our Constitutions says in compelling

<sup>53</sup> VC 82 b

words: he lived poverty "with one eye on Christ and the other on poor youngsters".<sup>54</sup>

Don Rinaldi gives us an important key to the understanding of what Don Bosco thought about poverty. Speaking to the confreres of Valdocco in December 1930 on the occasion of the exercise for a happy death, he referred to an episode he had witnessed at first hand. Our Father reacted with particular severity to some requests which had been made in the community of San Benigno (new overcoats for all the clerics and curtains for the windows in private rooms). In reply to a confrere who, after the conference, said that he did not think that poverty was incompatible with decorum, he insisted: "The decorum of a religious lies in his poverty". "He had spoken in the same way of poverty", emphasized Don Rinaldi, "just when he was equipping his print-shops with machinery as up to date as any in Turin, and was also building an imposing boarding-school alongside the Church of St John the Evangelist".<sup>55</sup> An apparent contradiction of this kind suggested to Don Rinaldi a distinction between the poverty of each individual Salesian and the communities, and the requirements of an educative work with which Don Bosco wanted to be in the vanguard of progress, according to the expression he used with the future Pius XI.<sup>56</sup>

In fact he spent much of his time looking for means to support his works, making himself a beggar for the benefit of poor youngsters. People from every level of society in Italy, France and Spain placed at his disposal even large sums of money, struck by the holiness and simplicity of our Father. Vast sums of money passed through his hands without a cent remaining. In his style of life and dress, his meals and journeys, the furnishing of his study, his times for rest and sleep, he was temperate, thanks to his early experiences of joyful poverty in his

<sup>54</sup> Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco, p.584

<sup>55</sup> BM 14, 435

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

own family, the example of his mother, and his determination to spend every moment of his time and every item of his possessions for the young.

He clearly drew his inspiration from the ideal of the poor Christ, and he frequently drew this to the attention of the Salesians. "Jesus Christ was born, lived, dressed, ate and died a poor man. And this doctrine of holy poverty was what he continually preached. To the multitudes he proclaimed the need to detach the heart from the things of the world and imposed this on those he called to be his apostles; and from those who asked to be accepted as his disciples to be his associates, he demanded that they give up all they possessed, even their families".<sup>57</sup>

We know of his unshakable trust in Providence through the innumerable stories about him that have come down to us from the first generation of Salesians, and his frequent recommendations. "Divine Providence has helped us in the past in all our needs, and even in an extraordinary way. And we are quite certain that we shall continue to receive such help in the future through the intercession of Mary most holy, Help of Christians, who has always been a Mother to us. But this does not take away our obligation of being careful to reduce expenses when possible in our purchases, in making journeys, in building, and in general in everything that is not really necessary. Indeed in this connection we have a particular duty both before Divine Providence and our benefactors themselves".<sup>58</sup>

Don Bosco therefore linked the generosity of Providence with the spirit of poverty, as though what attracted the abundance of God's gifts was our apostolic endeavour, our daily forgetting of self, and our dedication to the good of the young.

On the other hand, as one naturally inclined to the study of the history of the Church and of religious orders, he connected the flourishing of vocations with the growth or falling off of

<sup>57</sup> MB IX, 699

<sup>58</sup> MB XVIII, 191

poverty in their life and mission. "A third thing worries me a good deal: it is perseverance in observing the vow of poverty. Remember, my dear sons, that from this observance depends in large part the well-being of our Pious Society and the benefit of our own soul".<sup>59</sup>

Today Don Bosco's message and concern are a challenge to us to return to the healing sources of our history and consecration. In both prosperous and needy settings, the charismatic power inserted in the Church through Don Bosco by the Spirit for the salvation of the young, can only be effective through our humble and clear witness in following Jesus. Don Bosco prompts us to make clear, and to reform if necessary, our way of living poverty, both individually and as communities. As the young see the generous poverty of our gift, they cannot fail to be captivated by the blessings God bestows on us.

#### **4. Some suggestions for the present day**

The motives we have outlined above which provide inspiration for our communal and personal way of life have to be applied to the concrete situations in which we are living.

It is imperative to be able to make wise judgements in line with our charism, concentrating on what is essential and entrusting ourselves to the Holy Spirit to find eloquent expressions of our poverty. That implies travail, uncertainty and sometimes strong but fruitful differences. Nowadays extreme poverty is forced on the attention of the whole world in all its tragic reality. Want is an existential condition suffered by millions of men and women in every corner of the earth, as a consequence of injustice. Poverty embraced for the kingdom of heaven does not enjoy the same publicity; it is chosen by only a few, seems almost hidden, and is often exposed to misunder-

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

standing and critical interpretations. There are those who do not believe in our profession of poverty, but attribute to us only motives of self-interest and profit and, all things considered, a life that is safeguarded in every sense.

At the present day, how can we make our public option for poverty visible in an intelligible way and its harmony with the Gospel?

### *Intelligent responsibility*

In the first place I remind you of the attitude of **vigilance**, in the face of the necessary comparison between the professed ideal and the daily manifestations of poverty. It is easy to slip into compromises, not individually serious, but which combine to undermine the effective expression of consecration.

In recent years we have often recommended the "scrutinium paupertatis" included in the Regulations: "The community, whether local or provincial, should examine at intervals it considers opportune its own state of poverty, both as regards its collective witness and the services it renders, and should study the means to ensure a constant renewal".<sup>60</sup>

We may ask ourselves: at community level, are we really willing to submit our tenor of life to evaluation, our habits and our options? Do we help ourselves to face with sincerity our infidelities, our adaptations? I encourage every single confrere, as well as communities and those who exercise the service of authority to live the "scrutinium" not so much as an examination of conscience as an experience of the Spirit, as an entrustment to his purifying fire and power of regeneration.

The scrutinium cannot evade an assessment of some tendencies which may be dictated to some extent by circumstances but which, if neglected, can become destructive, such as the individual management of money and resources which becomes a

<sup>60</sup> R 65

kind of parallel economy, tends to avoid any control and gives rise to clear inequalities to the detriment of fraternal spirit and the quality of religious life itself.

There is in fact in the very make-up of our consecration a dynamism which we must have the courage to let loose, so that through our collaboration the Spirit can bring about at the present day the salvation of the young. It is the choice of a "prophetic austerity" which challenges possession as an end in itself and rejects the temptation to consider oneself important and secure, because of what one has and has acquired. Showing weakness or leniency in the face of more evident abuses (personal accounts, unauthorized costly journeys, an easy life-style, seeking the most modern comforts, exclusively personal means of transport, etc.) leads to the gradual emptying of the significance and witness of both our consecration and our mission.

In some provinces the local communities are helped, through appropriate aids, not to lose the overall view of the demands stemming from poverty made in line with the Constitutions and the indications of the Church: austerity in life-style, sharing of goods, work, commitment for justice, preferential concern for the poor.

The scrutiny, in addition to promoting among us a responsible and fraternal exchange, will prove useful for a growth in the understanding and practice of poverty. In this regard too there is need for an "ongoing formation" which leads to a deepening awareness of its gospel meaning, overcomes routine observance which has become a habit, and opens us to new experiences.

### *Apostolic application of goods*

We have already emphasized that Providence, in widely differing ways, puts financial resources at our disposal. From this derive some points which call for our attention.

The first regards their scrupulous **application** to educa-



tion and to the evangelization of the young and of ordinary people, to the advancement of the very poor, and to the formation of educators, leaders and catechists. In my journeys I have been impressed to see that in many places the Salesians have indeed thought first of all of the young in putting up new buildings. The salesian residence is often modest and limited to the essentials while the apostolic work has been fitted out with welcoming premises and suitable equipment.

It is perhaps necessary at the present day to emphasize that we need to work especially for the development of individuals and groups. Let the structures be simple, worthy, sufficient for the present purpose and that of the immediate future, not costly from the standpoint of management and maintenance, and decided on after careful consideration. Let us rather devote further expenditure to the formation of personnel, to promoting groups, to the education of young people of the poorest classes, to initiatives of evangelization and human advancement. And similar remarks apply to the use of our time, which is the equivalent of money.

Nowadays, to "apostolic" application can be added what can be described as "charitable", i.e. which tends to relieve such primary and pressing needs as hunger, health and basic services, and the reception of the homeless or refugees. The command: "Give the money to the poor"<sup>61</sup> is addressed also to us, especially with regard to goods that are not necessary, including structures and money. Many of the charitable donations we receive are motivated and offered for the alleviation of such needs. It would be unjust to use them for management expenses or in superfluous building.

A second point calling for our attention concerns the **criteria of the safeguarding** of the goods we have available. Everywhere to some extent we are bound by multiple requirements of civil and social legislation, heavy financial burdens

<sup>61</sup> Mt 19, 21

linked with structures and their maintenance, and possibilities of investment and capitalization vary a great deal. On the other hand we have in hand the redimensioning of our works and the organization of our resources. I will not dwell now on details concerning specific points on which guidelines will soon be given by the competent Department.

I want rather to point out, in the spirit of our poverty, the principle of keeping our resources readily available for the apostolate; and hence of not investing in buildings or possessions or making money an end in itself. Even amongst us a mentality and a practice can creep in which is directed to the accumulation of funds to ensure a profit linked only indirectly or tenuously with the mission.

The combination of trust in Providence with wise foresight is difficult and not always obvious at first sight. Nevertheless this point must not be overlooked so as not to run the risk of incompetent management, and to avoid losing through highly speculative planning goods and property that with more creativity and courage could have been used at once for the benefit of the people. We must remember Don Bosco's assertion: "Our goods and money belong to the poor".<sup>62</sup>

### *Solidarity.*

We have already spoken of **solidarity**, as a decisive element in the normative framework of salesian poverty. It is not something optional but a constitutional duty, which touches on our common identity as consecrated persons and sons of Don Bosco.

I will not conceal from you that in this area, together with exemplary situations of the sharing of goods in the Congregation there are others of evident inequality: in the same province there are works with notable financial means at their disposal and abundant reserves, while others are suffering a scarcity of re-

<sup>62</sup> BM 5, 450

sources and find themselves limited in their possibilities for the mission. These situations should be faced calmly but with determination, and set right without further delay by those competent: house council, provincial council, provincial chapter. In particular the provincial administration must provide precise guidelines for the financial conduct of the local communities and of the province according to what is stated in art.197 of the Regulations: "The provincial with the consent of his council will decide on and inform the houses of the contributions required from them for the needs of the province, and will likewise withdraw surplus funds that may be available in certain houses. He will draw up a periodic plan of financial solidarity among all the houses of the province, in order to help those in greater need..."<sup>63</sup>

Solidarity between the communities is a norm for the province and is organized at provincial level, at which there is a wider and more objective view of the mission of the local communities.

I realize that in some cases this will require a real conversion, a complete change of both mentality and practice. But it must be done, with a spirit of availability and detachment, in the certainty that a kind of management based on solidarity builds fellowship, provides unhoped for possibilities for the mission, guarantees greater fidelity and clarity in the personal witness of the confreres, and allows for resources to be directed to the urgent needs of the Church and the people.

### *Educating to the use of goods*

Education takes place through testimony, teachings and appropriate experiences. There is a myth that needs to be exploded, almost an idolatry from which young people are not exempt. They too want to possess so as to cut a good figure: money, clothing, motor-cycle, computer, holidays. They are often completely ignorant of the needs of their neighbour. This can happen even

<sup>63</sup> R 197

in our own environments, though in more recent times there has been an evident effort to sensitize youngsters to solidarity and it has met with a gratifying response from them.

There is a way of life that can be suggested, which is attentive to all the needs of the person but without going to extremes of consumerism and waste. An example could be the organization of families which propose to live on what is necessary and to limit superfluous expenditure.

There is a respect and care for common goods which is necessary and needs emphasis: environment, nature, vegetation and living space.

There is above all a Christian vision of an ordering and application of goods and their individual and social management. The dominant tendency in today's society does not project this kind of vision. Additional specific experiences are needed to make them understood and assimilated. Under this heading come the various forms of volunteer work, collaboration in humanitarian causes, information about such grave problems as hunger and famine, the exploitation of the weak and endemic unemployment, topics which only occasionally find expression in the mass media. To invitations to works of charity and the organization of voluntary service must be added a correct social view of situations which reveals how these phenomena come to be, and suggest possible lines of solution, even of a structural kind.

The GC23 emphasized the urgent need of forming young people to the social dimension of charity in the context of education to the faith.<sup>64</sup> In fact they could not fail to be involved, according to what John Paul II said in his message for Lent: "There are situations of persistent misery which cannot but impinge upon the conscience of Christians, reminding them of their duty to address these situations both as individuals and as a community".<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> cf. GC23 209-214

<sup>65</sup> John Paul II, Message for Lent 1999

*Loving the poor in Christ.*

Loving the poor means feeling oneself poor among the poor. Our cultural preparation and our profession of priests and educators places us naturally in a condition of security, of prestige, of sufficiency, of rapport with a certain social class. For some this can become something to be sought after and enjoyed. From this standpoint through charitable initiatives, we open our hand and our gaze towards those who are in want.

Often, however, we remain psychologically at a distance, without sharing in the sufferings of the poor nor receiving anything of their rich humanity. A direct exposure to poverty cannot be other than a wholesome experience for the community. For further points of meditation on the implications of our preferential option for the poor, I refer you to the letter "He had compassion on them".<sup>66</sup>

A welcoming reception, help and sharing, cannot be expressed in all our works in one and the same manner, but what is important is that in none of them should be lacking the awareness of the kinds of poverty which are around us or further away, the knowledge of its roots in those afflicted by it, and in our own attitude; it is important that such poverty be assured of finding a place in the heart and initiatives of the community. A Church capable of compassion is one of the pressing requirements of the present day, when these problems of which we are speaking are disturbing public opinion.

Of this we are reminded by the Constitutions: "The spirit of poverty leads us to be one with the poor and to love them in Christ. For this reason we make every effort to stay close to them, to alleviate their needs, making our own their lawful aspirations for a more human society".<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> AGC 359

<sup>67</sup> C 79

## Conclusion.

"He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty".<sup>68</sup> Mary's canticle is the first of a human being that Luke places in the Gospel. It introduces and interprets the story of Jesus in the key of the history of salvation as its paradigm and definitive moment.

Mary recounts not only her personal experience of election and exultation, but also provides a vision of human history, and acknowledges the forces that move her: God is the protagonist with his love manifested in power placed at the service of mercy. The poor in the biblical tradition are its first recipients, chosen as the setting for the revelation of such power and compassion and as the moving force in history. The riches and power associated with human pride move irrevocably towards the consummation and, left to themselves, also towards decay and destruction.

History begins again always from the poor and opens to the future in the measure of their hope.

At the eve of the third millennium the themes of poverty and riches, of power and human dignity have become the prevalent ones. The conversion from self-sufficient secularism to the living God, must at this juncture be placed in close rapport with the possession, application, ordering and use of goods, both material and cultural. The *Magnificat* seems to resound as a program for our times.

May Mary help us to believe, to hope and to love according to the vision of her Canticle.

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.

<sup>68</sup> Lk 1, 53

## 2. GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

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### 2.1 SALESIAN CELEBRATION OF THE JUBILEE

#### *Communication of the Rector Major*

One of the questions I have been frequently asked recently is this: We are approaching the year 2000, the great jubilee of the Church. Have the Salesians programmed anything special to celebrate this passage from one millennium to the next?

This communication will provide a reply to such questions.

From the time we first began to prepare celebrations, in view of the movement which would be taking place in all the particular Churches and in the universal Church itself, we have adopted a criterion: each salesian community, with their young people, parents and collaborators, will join in with whatever is organized by the local Churches. For example, 2 February will everywhere be the day of Consecrated Life, and the Salesians will join in. Probably there will be celebrations or functions of reconciliation: let the Salesians take part in their preparation and join in with the local People of God in whatever is planned. Various dioceses will be organizing pilgrimages to Rome or to the Holy Land. We are not planning a worldwide gathering of either confreres or youngsters. All are invited to join in with whatever is planned by the local Church: e.g. the youth meeting in Rome.

We have however programmed **some functions** which do not call for massive movements of people on a worldwide scale. One of the first will be the youth gathering to be held at Colle Don Bosco in August of this year at European level. The meeting at world level will take place to coincide with that of Rome in the year 2000. It will be limited as regards the number

of participants. It is intended only for animators, and for the more mature among them at that: 800 altogether. They will have to study more deeply salesian youth spirituality at the dawn of the third millennium, so as to be able subsequently to perfect the process we are proposing. In the world youth meeting in Rome it will be possible to hold a meeting of the Salesian Youth Movement.

A second event will be the **gathering of the branches of the Salesian Family**. But here too the numbers will be restricted: only the men and women Superiors General and their Councils. They will discuss how to animate the Salesian Family in the new phase on which it is entering. Since 1972 the branches or groups have increased in number, and more than half a dozen other groups have applied for membership and are awaiting approval. Each group has created around itself a lay movement. Texts for the organization and spirituality of the different branches have been written. The Common Identity Card has been published. What is of interest now is to consider how the common mission can be accomplished. All this will be discussed by the Superiors General and their Councils at the meeting which will take place in January of the year 2000.

A third event is **the missionary expedition**. We want to make this an extraordinary episode, which will correspond to a proportion of one missionary per province: between 90 and 100 altogether. The intention is to strengthen some missions which are still weak or isolated, or are close to becoming autonomous; and to open new foundations in Asia, which seems to be the frontier of the Third Millennium. The Superiors need to speak about this in their provinces, and to facilitate matters for those confreres who under God's inspiration may wish to ask the Rector Major to be included in this group. The Councillor for the Missions has sent a letter to all the houses of formation, and replies are coming in. But it is my hope that mature confreres too and even elderly members will ask to have such an experience.



Again: in the last session of the Council we decided to have with all the Salesians, provinces and houses, **a celebration** analogous to the entrustment to Mary of the year 1984, and the renewal of profession of 1988. It could be a process of conversion combined with a suitably prepared celebration. We decided not to ask for particular works which would impose new tasks on the provinces: these are left to the provinces themselves to decide. We also decided not to organize other congresses which call for further movement. On the other hand an act such as I have mentioned will help us to live together the extraordinary circumstance of passing from one millennium to another. It is helpful to recall that as the nineteenth century passed into the twentieth, Don Rua entrusted the Congregation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

To all of this, which constitutes the main part, can be added **the investments** we are making in Rome to modernise the house for our student priests who come from Italy or elsewhere to frequent the Roman Universities, the restructuring of the buildings of our own University, the adaptation of the Salesianum at our Generalate to give it a greater capacity and bring it into line with European norms, and the completion and embellishment of the Church of Don Bosco at Colle.

And we may add also some minor and less extraordinary things, such as the publication of a new edition of **"Don Bosco in the World"**. The Salesian University has also its special days in the overall context of the initiatives of the Roman Universities, and similarly other sectors and institutions can have particular initiatives in the spirit we have spoken of.

We shall not be short of work. We must hope and pray that all this will lead to a real renewal, and that the new millennium will bring us an increase in faith in Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

## 2.2 SOME PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE PRACTICE OF POVERTY

Fr Giovanni Mazzali  
*Economer General*

This contribution is linked directly with the letter of the Rector Major on poverty, of which it takes up certain aspects and develops them from a practical standpoint.

### 1. Some indications concerning administration.

At the present day there is no doubt that administration is a complex matter and one that is demanding from a technical point of view. Canon Law (can.1284) describes the principal attitude of a wise administrator "the diligence of a good householder". This however is not to be understood in a reductive or slapdash sense, but rather as referring to the deeper motivations for an accurate administration, as indeed is emphasized in the rest of the canon. The complexity of financial operations, with reference to both economy itself and the laws which regulate its various aspects from a civil or fiscal standpoint, needs to be understood in all its implications.

On the other hand, to avoid being overwhelmed by tasks and functions of an exclusively administrative nature, in this economic and juridical sector we should avail ourselves of the advice and collaboration of lay professionals who are a guarantee for us of civil rectitude and of the wise management of our resources.

Nonetheless this does not mean that we can delegate to third parties the total administration of the goods placed by Provi-

dence at our disposal. It is rather an invitation to be more careful in distinguishing between technical aspects of management and the more specific decisions that have to be made concerning the economic set-up in general and the destination of resources, which cannot be delegated indiscriminately to others but for which we must feel ourselves to be completely responsible.

Family spirit cannot justify incompetence, superficiality or impropriety in administration and management. Attitudes of this kind can cause serious harm to both individuals and institutions, and have indeed done so in some cases. I encourage the tendency already becoming consolidated in many provinces to send for suitable training those confreres who will be working in administrative posts, but especially the praiseworthy effort to organize the provincial centre in an efficient manner, so that it can give greater support to local economists, even through an intelligent system of supervision at both accountancy and management levels.

I refer to some points in greater detail.

#### 1.1 *Bank deposits and the management of shares or bonds.*

The tendency to coordinate and unify at provincial level the relationship with banks should be encouraged and followed up, albeit gradually and with due regard to special requirements in certain contexts. Some provinces already have an efficacious coordination in operation in this sense, under the guidance and control of the provincial economists, safeguarding at the same time both the constitutional autonomy of the different communities and the more effective organization of solidarity, as well as a more transparent management and a greater ease of supervision.

As regards the management of possible shares or bonds, some guidelines are already to be found in the letter of the Rector Major. I add one or two others at a practical level.

- The management of possible reserves on the part of communities should be made in an open manner and in agreement with the provincial office. It is suggested that reserves of a certain

- consistency should be managed by those responsible for the local communities and that they be submitted to particular and frequent supervision by the Provincial and Provincial Economist.
- Any merely speculative management of possible capital is to be avoided (cf. C 187); it is risky on the one hand, and sometimes doubtful as regards the complex purposes and numerous channels through which investments are made. Our objective cannot and must not be to obtain the greatest possible return, but rather to carry out a prudent and meticulous management which, by the use of today's more ethically accessible instruments, enables us to meet all the needs of our mission to the young. We need the assistance of specialists in the financial sector which today is so complex and changeable, but with the full awareness that we alone are responsible for a management that must be in harmony with the requirements of our evangelical poverty and of our mission.
  - The apostolic purpose of the money we handle is evident from the fact that it is promptly spent and used with a mentality of solidarity, and hence only for a short time can it be left in bonds, shares, common investment funds, or other instruments in use at the present day. Equally, however, we must be scrupulous in our observance of those items of state or regional legislation which require us to constitute the funds which we must manage ourselves according to law.
  - The Province is the most suitable entity for setting up "funds" or "reserves" for meeting certain capital expenses, e.g. for confreres in formation, for those who are sick and aged, and for coming to the aid of communities in which financial emergencies may occur.

### 1.2. *The keeping of accounts*

It is certainly fitting that an efficient and punctilious keeping of accounts be considered an indispensable condition for a clear and prudent financial management which will enable receipts and expenditure to be accurately evaluated, to-

gether with the details and purpose of financial transactions. On the basis of a good system of accountancy it is possible to draw up credible budgets for the help and guidance of communities and provinces in making options in the financial area. For this reason it is recommended that an efficient coordination be established between the provincial office and the communities, which may reach (especially in the more complex provinces) even a centralized accounting system, without detriment however to the financial autonomy of the individual communities. In this way we can try to avoid a not infrequent weakness in administration at local level and lay the foundation for a solid mentality which cannot fail to produce good results for the province as a whole. I may add that interesting experiences have been realized in the Congregation in this sense, respectful of our administrative traditions but also with innovations as regards a broad and systematic convergence. With sound professional advice, with courage in planning, and with strong and wise determination it is possible to open up new paths even in this sector.

## **2. Personal witness to poverty.**

In his letter the Rector Major makes reference under various aspects to living and bearing witness to poverty. In this more practical context I limit myself to some specific considerations concerning the management and use of money.

- 2.1 It is important to stress that by the vow of poverty we have renounced the personal management of money and goods, entrusted by the Constitutions and Regulations to the classical figures of our salesian tradition. This implies sharing, and hence the handing over to the Rector or Economer of any money which in various ways is placed at our disposal. There is no tradition of a private "peculium" in our Congregation and on this theme, with all its implications, I

refer you to the article of my predecessor (cf. AGC 354, Fr Omero Paron, the 'peculium').

2.2 With regard to *credit cards*, it is well that the use of these be harmonized with the spirit and the letter of the Rule. By definition credit cards are personal and have reference to a banking account. In themselves they are an excellent instrument for purposes of control, in so far as each expense is doubly recorded. They can become an abuse when in practice they endorse a system of financial self-management at variance with poverty. In line with the legislation of the different countries, each province must lay down norms for the use of credit cards which safeguard both individual and community aspects in the practice of evangelical poverty.

2.3 Another problem that occurs with a certain frequency concerns *personal bank accounts*. Some confreres, especially in the various cases of those who receive a stipend, are required to have a personal account, sometimes expressly demanded by the mode of payment, and by the Entity paying. This happens also in some countries with respect to old-age pensions. What is of concern is not the method of payment but rather the distorted mentality and practice which could follow: independence from the community for one's 'personal' expenses and at the same time dependence on the community for all other costs and needs.

Personal banking or post-office accounts can be opened for lawful reasons by agreement with the Provincial, with the obligation of giving a clear and regular report on their use to the Rector of the holder's community. As far as possible such accounts should be transitory in nature, with deposits being subsequently transferred to the community account. Finally it is a duty to ensure that such accounts are operable by two signatures, the first being that of the holder and the second that of the local economist or provincial economist. Undoubtedly there are many reasons which in the past have led

confreres to open a personal account with a bank or the post-office: estrangement from the community, clashes with superiors, a sense of frustration or lack of security, a sincere desire to protect sums of money from careless mismanagement. For this very reason I make no further judgement on the matter, but leave it to the good Lord who reads all hearts and knows all intentions. But I am sure that all confreres will feel the longing to give clear witness to the values of poverty, of detachment and of temperance, especially in the eyes of the young to whom they are sent.

### 3. Provincial solidarity

In his letter the Rector Major refers several times to solidarity, as being a characteristic element of our witness to poverty. I myself dealt with the same theme in an earlier intervention (cf. AGC 361, *Poor but with solidarity*) with some practical suggestions. I now add some more guiding elements.

We must aim at a structured organization of solidarity in the province, starting from art.76 of the Constitutions: "As brothers we share what we have with the other communities of the province, and we show solidarity with the needs of the entire Congregation, of the Church and of the world". I emphasize therefore that solidarity is one of the principal regulators of our use of goods and money, and in this sense must guide the organization of financial praxis in all our provinces.

This responsibility is entrusted directly to the Provincial and his Council: "The provincial with the consent of his council will decide on and inform the houses of the contributions required from them for the needs of the province, and will likewise withdraw surplus funds that may be available in certain houses" (Reg.197).

On these two aspects, the contribution to be made and the surplus to be transferred to the province, many different prac-

tices exist in the Congregation and this is only to be expected, given the great variety of situations and contexts in which we are working. Nevertheless it is indispensable that every province face the problem with determination and clearly define the practice to be followed, so as to avoid abuses and errors which, in the long run, have negative consequences for the whole provincial community. Even to only a limited extent all the communities must contribute to the needs of the province and of those who work for the good of all. Moreover, since what must be considered as surplus funds is capable of more than one interpretation, the Provincial Economist with the help of competent advice, must take up the problem and propose reasonable solutions which respect the particular situations of the various works. His plan must be verified by the Provincial Council and then submitted in due course for approval by the Provincial Chapter as a norm for the province (cf. Reg.58,3).

I would like to conclude these remarks, which are certainly not exhaustive, by referring to some positive signals I have been able to verify in the Congregation in recent years. At provincial level, even though sometimes with difficulty, there is a movement towards an intelligent and straightforward centralization as a fundamental guarantee of transparency and solidarity. At world level one feels a strong sense of Congregation, and concrete help is provided in cases of calamity or urgent need. The *Solidarity Fund* of the Rector Major is well supported by many contributions and can provide timely intervention in any context when there is need.

Naturally problems are not lacking, and some provinces are particularly concerned about their overall financial situation and their ability to face new and often complex situations.

The ideal of evangelical poverty proposed once again to all by the letter of the Rector Major is a stimulus and guide for the renewal of our praxis and for making our witness more credible in the eyes of the young and of people in general.



## 4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

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### 4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

From 1 December 1998 to 22 January 1999 the Rector Major presided over the winter plenary session of the General Council, with occasional visits of animation to other significant events, some of which were recorded in the preceding number of the AGC (cf. AGC 366, p.65). He spent Christmas at the Generalate with the members of the General Council and the confreres of the Generalate.

At the end of the year he presented the *Strenna for 1999* at the Generalate of the FMA according to custom, and began the new year with the traditional Mass at the “**Auxilium**” on 1 January, and at the **FMA Generalate** on 6 January, feast of the Epiphany.

An important item in January are the **Days of Spirituality of the Salesian Family**, celebrated this year at Barcelona in Spain. The theme was: *The experience of God the Father in Salesian Spirituality*, and some elements are recorded in n. 5.2 of the present Acts. The Rector Major gave a commentary on the *Strenna*,

presided at the Sunday Eucharist on the 17<sup>th</sup> and in his concluding address later the same day *emphasized the innovation this year of holding the Days of Spirituality outside Rome. Barcelona was a place well suited for the purpose because of its linkages with Don Bosco, Don Rinaldi and the Cooperator Dorotea de Chopitea: the Founder, a holy successor, and the Cooperators.*

On 16 January Fr Vecchi visited the salesian work at **Sarrià**, and saw the extensions to the provincial house and the Salesian University. After supper at the house of Barcelona-Rocafort he met with the community and was then present with the participants in the Days of Spirituality at a theatrical production provided by the pupils and past-pupils of Barcelona-Sarrià.

With the work of the General Council concluded, the Rector Major was at Valencia, Spain, from 30 January to 3 February for the centenary celebrations of the salesian work there.

On his arrival on the 30<sup>th</sup>, he first had a meeting with the con-

freres of the house of Calle Sagunto, then met the young people of the parish and then went on to the post-novices community for Vespers, the Good Night and supper. The following day, 31 January, he met a group of representatives of the Salesian Family and then went on to preside at the parochial Mass for the parish.

After the Mass he received greetings from civic and other authorities, gave a brief interview to a local TV station and then moved to the square in front of the College, where he blessed and inaugurated the new monument to Don Bosco.

In the afternoon, in the San Juan Bosco College he was present at a theatrical presentation organized by the Salesian Youth Centre entitled *Schlinder*, based on the famous film depicting the drama of the Jews in the last world war. For supper he went to the nearby "Maria Auxiliadora" College of the FMA.

On 1 February Fr Vecchi had a meeting with journalists from four publications and the Salesian Bulletin. In the afternoon he conversed with the senior pupils of the Collegio Sagunto and then with the lay teachers. He then went on to the coordinating office of the Youth Cen-

tres, the organizing centre for the federation of the Centres of the Valencia area and the Confederation of all the Centres of Spain.

In the afternoon, after a visit to the cemetery at Benimachet, a suburb of Valencia, where are buried together with other Salesians six of the salesian martyrs who were victims of the 1936 persecution, the Rector Major went to the Salesian College of **Burriana**. There he assisted at a theatrical presentation in his honour, blessed the premises for the parish catechism classes, and visited the Youth Centre to reply to a series of questions posed by the young people present and broadcast live.

2 February. Fr Vecchi was at **Zaragoza**, where he visited the Archbishop and then went to the Salesian College to meet the confreres, teachers and pupils. In the afternoon he went on to **La Almunia di Doña Godina**, where there are two salesian communities: the salesian college and professional school for some 600 pupils, of whom 130 are boarders, a festive oratory, the headquarters of ADMA and the university residence. After visiting the various premises he returned to the parish church to preside at the Eucharistic Celebration.

On 3 February the Rector Major returned to Rome.

From 6 to 13 February Fr Vecchi was in Kenya to take part with some other members of the General Council in the *Team Visit* to the English-speaking provinces of Africa and to see some of the works of the area.

7 February. He presided at the eucharistic celebration at **Nairobi Upper Hill**, in the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians. Before the Mass he was given a festival reception; led by the band of the *Savio Youth Centre* of Kamuli in Uganda, he was escorted to the altar and invested in the regalia of a chief according to the usage and traditions of the Masai people. In the afternoon the sanctuary became a theatre for a spectacle of songs and dances presented by the young people in line with local tradition.

In the evening the large hall above the Sanctuary was the venue for a meeting of Salesians, FMA and Cooperators with Fr Vecchi, who gave them news about the Congregation.

8 February. He went by air to **Moshi** to greet the novices and postnovices, who received him with great festivity; he went on to meet Salesians and Cooperators, giving his impressions after

visiting salesian works all over the world. In the evening he returned to Nairobi to the house of the Dimesse Sisters Karen, the site for the "Team Visit".

The Visit occupied the time from Monday 8 to Friday 12 February, with its rhythm of prayer, group meetings and assemblies.

11 February. In the morning the Rector Major received a visit from the Bishop of Lilongwe, with whom he had a lengthy conversation. In the afternoon he returned to the provincial house at Upper Hill to be present in the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians at the ordination of nine of our confreres as deacons by the Apostolic Nuncio, Mgr. Tonucci.

After the ordination Fr Vecchi went on to our international community of theological students, where he had supper and gave the Good Night.

12 February. In the morning the Rector Major presided at the eucharistic concelebration and in the afternoon concluded the work of the Team Visit. In the evening after Vespers he distributed to all present a necklace with a pendant of Africa traversed by a cross.

Sunday, 13 February. After saying farewell to the participants in the Team Visit, Fr Vecchi visited the trade school of *Boys Town*

and the work *Bosco Boys*, followed by lunch in the neighbouring provincial house of the FMA.

Going back to *Upper Hill*, he went in the evening to the *Kenya National Theatre*, where he saw a presentation entitled *The Witness*, aimed at raising funds for scholarships for young people wanting to study and capable of doing so, but lacking the necessary means. The spectacle was organized by the theology students of Utume, the FMA novices, the youngsters of Upper Hill and those of the Cathedral of Nairobi, and the young children who flock around the FMA novitiate.

After supper the Rector Major left for Rome, but only to stay there for less than a week.

19 February. Fr Vecchi left Rome heading for Guwahati, Assam, India, where he was to preach a retreat to the provincials and provincial councillors of the eight Indian provinces and for the annual celebration of the Rector Major's Feastday, programmed this year for India. Technical difficulties concerning flights between New Delhi and Guwahati delayed him for a day in the capital but gave him the possibility of visiting the houses of *Alaknanda* and *Okhla*.

21 February, Sunday. He final-

ly reached Guwahati and the provincial house. In the afternoon he visited the Bishop of the Diocese, Abp. Thomas Menamparampil SDB, and then went on to Shillong, where the retreat was to take place in the *Pastoral Centre*. On the way he called at the aspirantate where the boys greeted him with their band and dancing.

During the afternoons of the retreat the Rector Major was able to visit the various works of the Salesian Family in the neighbourhood and was received everywhere with great joy.

22 February. He visited the novitiate at *Sunnyside* where, in addition to the novices, he also met the Mother General and some Sisters and novices of the Congregation founded by Abp. Hubert D'Rosario: the *Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco*.

23 February. He visited the *Fr Hopewell Helias School*, near the parish of the Divine Saviour and then went on to greet the FMA at *Auxilium Convent*, where he met the Provincial, Sisters, novices and some postulants.

24 February was the turn of the house of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians in Peachlands Laitumkhrah, where he was greeted by the Mother

General with some novices and aspirants. The same evening he went to the *Sacred Heart College* of Shillong, the house of the students of theology, where he met the students and teachers.

Thursday, 25 February. Fr Vecchi was invited to lunch by the Archbishop of Shillong, Mgr. Tarcisius Resto Phanrang SDB., and then went on to the *St Anthony College* to meet the teachers of that university institution.

26 February. Fr. Vecchi went to the *Sacred Heart Convent* of the FMA in the Mawlai quarter to meet 317 *Salesian Youth Leaders*, who gave him a festive reception. Fr Vecchi urged them to give full value to the gift of life.

Saturday, 27 February. The Rector Major blessed the Museum of Native Culture at the theologate and then moved on to the playground of the St Dominic Savio Parish where the **Rector Major's Day** functions were to take place.

After greeting the Bishops present and welcoming the participants, the Provincial Fr Dominic Jala presented Fr Vecchi to those present with a brief account of his earlier life. Then followed various manifestations, of which the most outstanding were dances by various ethnic groups

from North East India: Khasi, Adivasi, Tripuri, Mizo, Rongmei, Assamese, performed by groups from various SDB or Sisters houses. The hymn to Don Bosco concluded the performance.

In the afternoon he was taken to the *Youth Centre*, where he blessed the gymnasium and unveiled a commemorative stone. He then went on to the *Don Bosco Technical School* to meet the confreres, celebrate the Eucharist, and join in a fraternal supper followed by a brief academy.

Sunday, 28 February. The Rector Major was once again at *Sacred Heart College* for a meeting with Cooperators, Past-pupils and members of the *Bosco Apostolic Group*. This was followed by Mass in the playground of the St Dominic Savio Parish, animated by the young people with singing and dancing, and with some 7,000 people present.

The same afternoon Fr Vecchi finally left Shillong and went back to Guwahati and specifically to the *Holy Child Institute*.

Monday, 1 March. Early in the morning the Rector Major said Mass in the Generalate of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, which is also the community of the young professed Sisters. Immediately af-

terwards he went to the Don Bosco School, next to the provincial house, where he met the pupils and their teachers, and then visited the provincial house itself and saw the various sectors of animation.

The final visit in Guwahati was to the school at *Maligaon*, where he met the young students. After lunch he left once again to return to New Delhi where he was able to visit the *SPCI Centre*, the headquarters of the animation services of the Indian Provincial Conference. Then at the Institute of *Okhla* he blessed the new machinery for the mechanics section, and concluded the day with supper with the confreres and FMA of New Delhi in the house of *Alaknanda*. Fr Vecchi then returned to Rome.

Monday, 8 March. The Rector Major was at the **UPS** for the celebration of the feast of the University community and the commemoration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of it being raised to University status. Present at the festivities was also the Hon. Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, President of the Italian Republic.

13 March. The Rector Major went to the headquarters of the **DBV** in Rome, Via Aureliana 53,

to meet the Superior General and her Council, and bless the new extensions to the premises.

Thursday, 18 March. Fr Vecchi left Rome once again, this time for Munich in Germany, to visit some salesian foundations in Southern Germany, and in particular the studentate of philosophy and pedagogy at Benedikbeuern and the work at Waldwinkel.

At Munich the Rector Major visited the *Salesianum*. This is a significant salesian work, including a hostel for students and artisans and the oratory. The young boarders are divided into groups of 25, with a person responsible for each group who attends to their pedagogical and religious assistance. Fr Vecchi then visited the *Don Bosco Verlag* publishing house and gave an interview to the *Don Bosco Magazin* the Salesian Bulletin in German.

In the evening he moved on to **Benedikbeuern** where he immediately said Mass and gave the Good Night.

Friday, 19 March. The Rector Major gave a press conference to journalists from the two most widely-read publications of the area: *Suddentsche Zeitung* and *Muntcherner Mercue*, and replied to questions. He then went on to

visit various sectors of the salesian work: the Centre for Youth Formation (*Aktionszentrum*), the Institute for Youth Pastoral Work; the Catholic Foundation of the Higher Institute for Social Assistance - Benediktbeuern section; the psycho-pedagogical consulting service; the Higher Institute of Philosophy and Theology - Faculty of Theology; and in the afternoon, the Centre for the Environment and Regional Culture.

At the end of the visit to each sector Fr Vecchi had a meeting with the teachers and then with the salesian students concerned.

After the meetings the Rector Major went to the chapel for Vespers, gave the Good Night, and then everyone moved into the refectory for supper which concluded with songs and a very interesting spontaneous entertainment.

Saturday, 20 March. Fr Vecchi went to **Waldwinkel**. He celebrated Mass in honour of Don Bosco, spoke to some seventy confreres of the province who had come to meet him, and visited the work for handicapped children of various kinds. In this centre they learn manual trades or office work compatible with their disabilities.

Returning to Munich he paid a visit to the Archbishop, Card.

Friedrich Wetter, and then went back to the Salesianum for supper, followed by music and singing.

Sunday, 21 March. After celebrating Mass in the chapel of the provincial house Fr Vecchi returned to Rome. As a conclusion to the visit, it is significant to recall the words he wrote in the Visitors' Book: "The Province of Mary Help of Christians of Munich shows pastoral vitality, brotherly cohesion and fidelity to our charism. It has to cope with a youth situation not without its difficulties as regards education and evangelization. But it does so with initiative and authentic salesian spirit. I am grateful to everyone for the days I have spent with this community, and I ask God to bless the persons, initiatives and all those to whom these initiatives are directed".

On his return to Rome the Rector Major immediately began work in the so-called Intermediate Session of the General Council which took place from 22 to 31 March with, as the principal item on its agenda, a communal reflection on three salesian Regions: Australia - Asia, and the two Regions of America: Southern Cone and Interamerica, so as to get a deeper knowledge of the realities



of these regions and identify guidelines and proposals to ensure fidelity to the charism and the development of the mission in different contexts. Other themes will evidently have accompanied this reflection on the Regions.

## **4.2 Chronicle of the General Council**

The plenary winter session of the General Council (the sixth of the present six-year period) began on 1 December 1998 and ended on 22 January 1999, with 28 full sittings in addition to other meetings of groups and sectors.

As always the Council worked hard to deal with matters coming from the provinces: appointment of provincial councillors, approval of the appointment of Rectors, the opening and canonical erection of houses and/or other activities (in the period concerned 5 new houses were opened, 6 were canonically erected and 4 canonically closed), practices concerning individual confreres and others of an economic and administrative nature.

The greater part of the work was dedicated to themes regard-

ing the government and animation of the provinces and the study of some problems of the Council itself of a general nature or of the Congregation as a whole. The main arguments dealt with were the following:

### *1. Appointment of Provincials*

Many Provincials were appointed, following the usual procedure: an accurate analysis of the consultation process, discernment by the Council, straw vote on the main candidates, definitive vote with the consent of the designated candidate. In alphabetical order they were: Bosio Carlos Alberto (Rosario, Argentina); Guijo Gonzalez José Manuel (Central America); Gustilo Francis (North Philippines); Herrero Sanz Miguel Angel (Bolivia); Inisan Francis (France - newly unified province); La Piana Calogero (Sicily, Italy); Mendes Joaquim Augusto (Portugal); Riva Eugenio (Milan, Italy); Smyth Michael (Ireland and Malta); Swertvagher Camille (Central Africa); Von Spee Meinolf Graf (North Germany) (some biographical notes can be found at n.5.5)

### *2. Reports on extraordinary visitations*

These too were numerous in this session. The Council's study of each report, prepared by the



Visitor, implies deep reflection on the facts and the salesian reality of the province, the common life and effectiveness of the mission, and the provincial plans and prospects for the future. Reports were made and examined on the following provinces or circumscriptions: Argentina-Rosario, Brazil-Porto Alegre, Ecuador, Germany-Munich, India-Bombay, India-Dimapur, Italy-West Venice, Korea, Spain-Valencia, Uruguay, Zambia-Malawi-Zimbabwe.

### 3. *Approval of Provincial Chapters*

In the session June-July 1998 38 Provincial Chapters of 1998 had been approved. In this session a further 36 were approved (including a supplement to one already examined in July). Each one involved an examination of the documents and deliberations, and eventual changes to the Directory, after comparison with our fundamental texts (Constitutions, Regulations, Ratio) and the indications and guidelines of the General Chapter.

### 4. *Reports of individual Councillors for information*

As in every plenary session the Councillors at the head of the various Departments (formation, youth pastoral work, salesian

family and social communication, missions, and finances) together with the Rector Major and Vicar General, gave a brief account of their own activities, personally and at departmental level, in the service of the animation of the provinces and of the Congregation at world level.

These reports provide information for all the Councillors and serve not only to keep them updated about the work of each Department but also to help in the general coordination and to raise particular points which need deeper examination by the Council as a whole.

### 5. *Themes for study and practical decisions*

In the course of the session the Council took up some particular themes concerning the government and animation of the Congregation in general, with particular attention to the programming of the six-year periods and the life and activity of the Council itself. Some practical decisions were made referring to the themes dealt with. The principal points of reflection were the following.

#### 5.1 *Some practical decisions*

Within the ambit of the Congregational structures, the Rec-

tor Major with his Council has made the following practical decisions for a better action of government and animation:

- (a) The reunification of the two Provinces of Lyons and Paris in a *single French Province* with "St Francis de Sales" as its titular and headquarters in Paris. The erection of this province comes at the end of a process of discernment and reshaping which has involved the two previous provinces and an ample consultation among the confreres.
- (b) Positive guidelines for the division of the Province of Madras, India, and the constitution of a new circumscription in *Southern Tamil Nadu*. This development is the fruit of the study of the positive growth of the Congregation in this area and of the results of a consultation among the confreres. The definitive decision will be made in a subsequent session.
- (c) The approval of a *Provincial Delegation for Albania*, dependent on the Southern Province (Naples) of Italy, to promote the coordination and animation of salesian work in that country.

## 5.2 *Plan for the renewal and re-launching in the world of the Salesian Bulletin.*

Continuing with the examination of this project in its various editions and languages, the General Council has given its consent to a batch of concrete proposals presented by the Department for Social Communication. The proposals give practical effect to the guidelines indicated in previous sessions, (cf. especially AGC 365, n.4.2, p.90).

## 5.3 *Image promotion, public relations, press office.*

Taking up again one of the points in the six-year programming, which had already been considered in general terms when the plan for renewal of the *Salesian News Agency* (ANS) was put forward, the Council (at the instance of the Councillor for Social Communication) has produced a better definition, with concrete practical indications of the press office and public relations in the service of our headquarters (and in particular of the Rector Major with his Council) with the specific task of "promoting the institutional image" and of "qualified representation" (spokesman) of the Congregation.

#### 5.4 *Structure of Central Government.*

Continuing the study of the theme of the structures of government at central level, according to the indications received from the GC24 (n.191), the General Council has taken stock of the reflections made so far (cf. AGC 361, n.4.2 and AGC 365, n.42.2) by means of a sounding for purposes of orientation, so as to specify better the lines of discernment still to be followed, with also a consultation of the provinces with a view to the next General Chapter.

#### 5.5 *Suggestions for the year 2000: the "SDB moment".*

As the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 draws nearer the Council studied whether – in addition to our primary commitment to our involvement in the local Churches and some particular moments at Congregational level already programmed – it would be opportune to have some significant community event. Various proposals were examined, and it was decided that that a communal event, understood as a strongly interior moment, would certainly be useful if it involved everyone both personally and spiritually and if it were inserted in the

process already taking place in the Congregation and every province in application of the GC24, especially from the aspect of spirituality (cf. in this number of the AGC, the communication of the Rector Major at 2.1).

#### 5.6 *Projects to be completed at Colle Don Bosco.*

The General Council examined some projects for the necessary and opportune structural adaptation of the Don Bosco Temple at the Becchi, so that the Church dedicated to our Father may be ever more welcoming for the young people and pilgrims who come to his birthplace. The work involves some structural adaptations, especially in the upper church, and some embellishments for which we can use the legacy of a benefactor.

#### 5.7 *Membership of the Salesian Family of the group: "Resurrection Witnesses on the way to the year 2000".*

On the basis of documentation presented by the Councillor for the Salesian Family, the Council expressed its positive response to the request for membership of the Salesian Family expressed by the Lay Association *Resurrection Witnesses on the way to the year*

2000. (cf. n.5.3 of this issue of the Acts).

6. *Joint Meeting of the FMA and SDB General Councils.*

In the afternoon of 12 January at the Salesian Generalate there took place the periodic meeting of the two General Councils of the SDB and FMA. The theme, agreed on in advance, was of equal concern to both: *vocational suggestion*.

Welcoming the Sisters at the beginning of the meeting, the Rector Major emphasized the positive value of these meetings which enable us to grow in fraternity and mutual collaboration, and then pointed to the relevance and importance of the vocational theme, so deeply felt in the Church and in religious institutes of both men and women, for which the GC24 hoped for a more intense collaboration in the Salesian Family.

The work then proceeded in two parts:

- a presentation of the present practice and of pastoral work for vocations in the two Institutes: presented by Sister

Georgina McPake, FMA Councillor General for Youth Pastoral Work, Sister Giuseppina Teruggi, FMA Secretary General, and Fr Antonio Domenech, SDB Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work;

- a dialogue on the following points: 1. Young people and vocations: ways to respond to the challenges; 2. Collaboration between FMA and SDB in the area of pastoral work for vocations; 3. Concrete proposals.

The dialogue was rich and produced proposals which the two Councils intend to keep in mind for a greater collaboration in this important commitment to the salesian mission.

Significant moments during the session were also the day of spiritual retreat on 13 January 1999, animated by Fr Manlio Sodi, of our University, and a half-day (the morning of 7 January) of study and reflection on the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, accompanied by Mgr. Rino Fisichella, Auxiliary Bishop of Rome, and Prof. Gaspare Mura, a teacher at the Lateran University.

### 5.1 Martyrs of our Family

On 13 June, during his next visit to Poland, John Paul II will beatify at Warsaw 108 Martyrs of the Polish Church who died in the years 1939-1945. Among them is a Salesian, Fr Jozef Kowalski, provincial secretary, killed in the Auschwitz concentration camp on 4 July 1942, after refusing to trample a rosary underfoot. There are many and valuable first-hand witnesses to his death who can provide us with details of his martyrdom.

Included in the same group of martyrs are *five young men of the salesian oratory of Poznan*: Czesław Józwiak (22 years), Edward Kazmierski (22 years), Franciszek Kesi (21 years), Edward Klinik (23 years), Jarogniew Wojciechowski (20 years). All of them were zealous animators of the oratory. After being imprisoned and moved from one concentration camp to another they were condemned to death on 1 August and beheaded on 24 August 1942 in the prison-yard of Dresda. Of them too we have precious testimonies which show them to be robust spiritual personalities, true models for our young people of today.

### 5.2 Days of Spirituality of the Salesian Family (21<sup>st</sup> year)

The 21<sup>st</sup> edition of this significant spiritual event took place from 15-17 January 1999 at the salesian house of *Don Bosco - Marti Codolar* in Barcelona (Spain). It was organized by the Councillor for the Youth Apostolate and the collaborators of his Department and brought together representatives of ten groups of the Family with some 130 participants in all, the majority of them from Europe. They had available the text of the main papers in Italian or Spanish. A subsequent publication will be enriched also with the results of the working groups.

The main theme was centred on the Strenna 1999: *Let us turn to God with the love of sons and daughters, so that with our young people we can build a world of fraternal partnership*. It involved a study of *spirituality as inspired by the salesian charism*, from the standpoint of the reflection in which the whole Church is engaged in this last of the three years of preparation leading to the Jubilee of the Year 2000, i.e. that centred on *God the Father*.

The meeting opened in the afternoon of Friday, 15 January,

with the Rector Major's presentation of the Strenna, using 21 summaries projected on slides. The commentary presented God the Father in the progressive revelation which finds in Christ its decisive event, to indicate the pilgrimage of mankind to the Father, in which the salesian way towards the Father takes on a precise significance, and the gift of educative paternity which involves ourselves, our young people and the human family in a network of solidarity for the Kingdom.

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> began with the Eucharist at which the Rector Major presided and at which Fr Antonio Martinelli gave a lively homily, shared with the participants. The work of the assembly began with two papers on themes connected with the Strenna: Fr Aldo Giraudo SDB, of the UPS - Turin section, spoke on *The countenance of God in salesian spirituality and pedagogy*, and provided a historical, charismatic and spiritual background. He was followed by Fr Luis Gallo SDB, of the UPS - Rome, who gave the biblical and theological support to the theme of the Father with a paper entitled *The countenance of God revealed by Jesus*. In each case a dialogue followed with the speaker in the assembly.

In the afternoon there was a series of interventions by representatives of different groups of the Salesian Family, who presented the specific charismatic reading by each group of the gift of God the Father. The following spoke in turn: Fr Antonio Domenech, SDB Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work; Sr Maria de los Angeles Contreras, FMA, Councillor for the Salesian Family; Mr. Emilio Pascual, National Coordinator of Cooperators of Spain; Ms. Dora Pandolfi, World Council for Formation of the DBV; Sr Eulalia Marin R., of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts; Sr Pusppha Kottuppallil, of the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Help of Christians; Ms. Concetta Apolito Zecchino, Confederal Councillor of the FMA Past-pupils; Fr Rafael Mata, SDB, of the ADMA of Spain; Mr. Antonio G. Pires, Confederal President of the Don Bosco Past-pupils.

Later in the afternoon the theme was analyzed further by Fr Jesus Manuel Garcia, of the UPS-Rome, in a paper entitled *Educating at the present day to the experience of and relationship with God*, which gave practical pedagogical and psychological illustrations of the main theme. All the papers given in the assembly were

subsequently studied in group workshops. In the case of that of Fr Garcia the dialogue with the speaker had to be carried over to the morning of Sunday 17, after the Eucharist at which the Rector Major presided. It was followed by a concrete experience presented by Sr Josefina Culla FMA on a formative process with the young people of the "Casal" of Marti Codolar.

Finally, the Rector Major concluded the meeting with a synthesis of the principal points that had been made. He reasserted the value of the charismatic and spiritual legacy of Don Bosco and of the Family that from him took its rise. He invited all the Salesian Family in its various branches and expressions to become embodied during this year in the form of a spiritual paternity or maternity. He also expressed his satisfaction at the success of the meeting which for the first time took place outside Rome, and in the welcoming context of Barcelona.

As always, in addition to the emphasis on spirituality, the days were characterized by moments of prayer and fellowship.

### **5.3 Recognition as Member of the Salesian Family of the Group "Resurrection Witnesses on the way to the year 2000" (TR 2000).**

To Mr Agostino Aversa  
Coordinator General TR 2000  
Sorrento

Dear Mr Agostino Aversa,

It gives me great satisfaction to send you as Coordinator General this letter which informs you of the recognition of the TR 2000 as a member of Don Bosco's Salesian Family.

I share with you the joy of becoming part of the vast movement which had its beginning in Don Bosco.

It falls to me as Rector Major to welcome you.

With my confreres of the General Council we reflected, in our sitting of 21 January 1999, on your identity as it appears from the documentation you sent to us; on the multiple commitments you already have in various activities; on the particular emphasis you place on the paschal dimension of salesian spirituality, and we were able to give a positive response to the request you made to me for membership of the Salesian Family.

### **Membership of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco**

I recall some of the aspects which follow as a consequence of membership.

Almost as a commentary on arts.11 and 30 of your Statute: "The TR 2000 Movement has in the Salesian Congregation a 'sure and stable bond of union' and rapport with it takes place in a setting of fraternal and mutual trust and confidence", I call to mind a text which has become familiar among us and which I quote in full:

*Art.9 of the Common Identity Card of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco – the Rector Major centre of unity.*

"Membership originates from communion and becomes consolidated in a communion which becomes ever deeper. It is not just a vague kind of sentiment with weak and fleeting bonds, but an impulse of the Spirit which tends towards unity and seeks concrete and sometimes even established expressions for a practical rapport and collaboration.

Membership of the Salesian Family is of concern to many groups, each of which has its specific autonomy. There is need therefore of a vital centre which will ensure that references to the

Founder, to the common spirit and to the mission itself are always up to date.

In the thought of Don Bosco the centre which guarantees unity is the Rector Major. In him all recognize a triple unifying ministry: he is the successor of Don Bosco; he is the Father of all members; he is the Centre of unity of the Family.

The Rector Major is the successor of Don Bosco; an unbroken bond links him to the Founder's person and so renders him the fit and proper person to represent him in a living manner at the present day.

He is the centre of unity of the whole family. He provides, in fact, the example and teaching which ensure fidelity to the spirit and elicits participation in the salesian charism. His function is one of animation and advancement which forges unity in the variety of the specific vocations, fidelity to the spirit and the coordination of initiatives. His is not a task of government, but rather one of vital service of animation.

The Rector Major is the father of all who collaborate in Don Bosco's mission. He extends the compass of his fatherliness which is for him, as it was for Don Bosco, an essential characteristic. Fa-



therliness demands kindness, a sense of responsibility with regard to the growth of each one, guidance in fidelity to the charism, and commitment to the growth of the salesian vocation in all its expressions. 'Your Rector will take care of you and of your eternal salvation', wrote Don Bosco".

In line with the salesian spirit and the spirituality which has in Don Bosco its master and guide, you will find in the person of the Rector Major one who will be able to accompany you, encourage you and support you.

#### **Don Bosco needs committed lay people**

You are an association of lay persons. This seems an affirmation so evident that there is no need to repeat it. But from a spiritual and organizational standpoint it is well to be clear about what precisely it implies.

I will begin with this second aspect: you are lay people, you must organize yourselves as lay people, you must live as lay people.

In our salesian experience we have a single case in which the laity have an ordained priest as a point of reference (even from an organizational aspect): the priest is the Rector Major and the laity are the Salesian Cooperators.

But the Rector Major then leaves to the World Council of the Cooperators, to the Coordinator General and to the provincial and local coordinators, the practical management of the organization of the Association, so as to leave a salesian priest, as delegate, with concern only for formation to the salesian spirit and spirituality; for the formation in the typical spirituality of activity, and for the salesian formation of the members of the Association.

With greater reason is all this applicable to an association of lay persons like your own.

Do not ask yourselves therefore what the Salesians can do for you, but rather what you yourselves can offer to the development of Don Bosco's spirit in the world.

This is the aim of all the Salesian Family, and each group – under the impulse of the Holy Spirit – will make its own original contribution linked with the different talents with which each one has been endowed. In this sense, all the formative initiatives which the Salesian Family will organize should see you as active and dedicated participants.

I am thinking also at this moment of your participation in initiatives of the Salesian Family in

pastoral work for youth, so as not to dissipate our strength and multiply commitments.

I know that you are members of professions. I am told that you are also organized as an association of volunteers, and that you are working to extend your organization beyond the boundaries of Italy. You do not lack a missionary spirit.

I rejoice at the goals you have already reached, and I would like to encourage you to continue along the same path, organizing yourselves in a manner that will bring about a development which will see you, as lay people, protagonists in all you are doing.

I know Fr Sabino Palumbieri very well, and so I can well imagine the attention he is giving to a serious formation of the members, and in particular of those responsible for the association at local and national level. You must work alongside him and, to some extent do his work for him.

That is how an association of lay persons grows!

Let me now refer to the spiritual dimension.

I have read the many spiritual elements in your Statute, and I will not now repeat or analyze them. But I would like to remind

you of what is said in nn.54 and 55 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*.

"In recent years, one of the fruits of the teaching on the Church as communion has been the growing awareness that her members can and must unite their efforts, with a view to cooperation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the Church's mission.

This helps to give a clearer and more complete picture of the Church herself, while rendering more effective the response to the great challenges of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts. (...)

The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate. In whatever activity or ministry they are involved, consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate 'the most precious gift: the spirit'. For their part, the laity should offer Religious families the invaluable contribution of their 'being in the

world' and their specific service."

These are demanding words for everyone: for us and for you alike. Let us then set about giving effect to them.

On your own side, observe carefully the practical activities of the lay groups of the Salesian Family with whom you will establish rapport and build communion.

**The specific spiritual contribution of the TR 2000 Association to the Salesian Family**

Art.14 of the Statute states explicitly:

"Adherents to the Movement embrace the dimension of Don Bosco's charism by promoting and embodying:

- the spirituality of paschal joy;
- priority of attention to the young;
- the commitment of each one to live in his own situation pastoral charity and zeal for God's Kingdom;
- active fellowship for the building of the family".

This will be the most significant contribution to offer to all the Groups of the Salesian Family.

The Via Lucis and the image of the "disciples of Emmaus" will constitute the content of your spirituality and method of working. And so we look forward to re-

ceiving from the TR 2000 Association a practical plan of spirituality of action in the style of Don Bosco, illuminated by the light of Easter.

From the experiences of Don Bosco gathered in the Biographical Memoirs there are many direct references he made to the Easter Mystery, and the theme has also been taken up in some of the earlier celebrations of the "Days of Spirituality of the Salesian Family".

A more complete presentation of facts, incidents and memories of the various experiences could be a welcome gift offered by the Association to the whole of Don Bosco's Family.

It would help towards a better understanding of the 'salesian' inspiration of our spirituality, where I use the word 'salesian' with reference to St Francis de Sales.

It could be helpful in the present cultural context for overcoming fears and discouragement, restricted outlooks and fruitless lack of initiative. It would also complete the reflection made by the Salesian Family in significant steps in the deeper study of the spirituality of Easter.

**Foster the salesian aspect of the Association**

In practice this means  
– a living and personal knowl-

edge of Don Bosco, of his apostolic work and of his spiritual vision;

- a practical knowledge of his preventive system: reason, religion and loving kindness. The terms of the salesian trinominal have been frequently analyzed by General Chapters. The Pope, in the letter written to Fr Egidio Viganò in 1988 on the centenary of the death of Don Bosco, offered the Church a rich meditation on the preventive system;
- a knowledge of the constituent elements of the salesian spirit, which is at the foundation of the sincere and sure communion with all the Groups that make up the Family of Don Bosco;
- an educative and cultural vision of the problems which concern, positively and negatively, the condition of young people in the contemporary world and the practical contexts in which they live and work;
- a constant seeking of communion between all the Groups, for a mutual exchange of talents, criteria and experiences.

Dear Mr Agostino,

I ask you to convey to all the members of the Association my

affectionate greetings, together with the content of this letter.

I also take the opportunity presented by the coming feasts to assure you of my prayers that you and all the associates may live in depth the mystery of the Resurrection, together with Mary, Mother of the Risen One and of the Church of Easter, on whose festivity I have the pleasure of informing you of your membership of the Salesian Family.

Rome, 25 March 1999

Solemnity of the Annunciation to Mary

**Fr Juan E. Vecchi**  
*Rector Major*

#### **5.4 Decree of canonical erection of the Province "St Francis de Sales" of France.**

Prot.n. 058/99

The undersigned,

Fr Juan E. VECCHI,

Rector Major of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco,

- after considering the situation of the salesian works in the territory of France, at present divided into the two Provinces of St Francis de Sales with head-

- quarters in Lyons and of St Denis with headquarters in Paris;
- having heard the opinions of the Provincials concerned, with their respective Councils, and examined the results of a consultation carried out among the confreres of both provinces;
- with reference to art.156 of the Constitutions;
- with the consent of the General Council given in its meeting of 16 December 1998, in conformity with Const.132 §1,1 and Const.156;

#### CANONICALLY ERECTS

by means of this present Decree, the **SALESIAN PROVINCE of France, with the title of "St Francis de Sales", with headquarters at PARIS, House of St Francis de Sales, resulting from the unification of the two Provinces of Lyons and Paris**, and made up of all the Communities at present forming part of the above-named Provinces, with the confreres assigned to them.

The houses of the new Province of St Francis de Sales are the following:

- ARGENTEUIL, "St. John Mary Vianney"
- BAILLEUL, "St. Paul"
- BINSON, "Blessed Urban II"

- CAEN – Couvrechef, "Bl. Philip Rinaldi"
- CAEN – Lemonnier, "Jesus the Worker"
- CAEN – St. François de Sales, "St. Francis de Sales"
- CHAMBÉRY, "Sacred Heart of Jesus"
- COAT AN DOC'H – Don Bosco, "St. John Bosco"
- COAT AN DOC'H – Don Rua, "Bl. Michael Rua"
- FONTES, "SS. Vincent and Isidore"
- GIEL, "B.M.V. of the Sacred Heart of Jesus"
- GRADIGNAN, "St. Francis Xavier"
- GRENTHEVILLE, "Sacred Heart of Jesus"
- KÉNITRA (Marocco), "Christ the King"
- LA CRAU, La Navarre, "St. Joseph"
- LANDSER, "St. John Bosco"
- LES HOUCHES, "St. John Bosco"
- LYON – Bon Secours, "Our Lady of Help"
- LYON – Fourvière, "St. John Bosco"
- LYON – Minimes, "Madonna of the Minims"
- MARSEILLE, "St. Leo"
- MONTÉSSON, "Assumption of Our Lady"
- MONTPELLIER – Parish, "St. John Bosco"
- MONTPELLIER – Residence, "St. John Bosco"

MULHOUSE, "St. John Bosco"  
 NICE – Don Bosco, "St. Peter"  
 NICE – N. D. Auxiliatrice, "Mary Help of Christians"  
 NOISY-LE-SEC, "St. Stephen"  
 OUISTREHAM, "St. John Bosco"  
 PARIS – Aligre, "St. John Bosco"  
 PARIS – Monte Cristo, "St. Anne"  
 PARIS – Pyrénées, "St. Francis de Sales"  
 PARIS – Residence Don Bosco, "St. John Bosco"  
 POUILLÉ, "St. John Bosco"  
 RABAT (Marocco), "Mary Help of Christians"  
 RESSINS, "St. Stephen"  
 SAINT-DIZIER, "Mary Immaculate"  
 ST. GENIS LAVAL, "St. Isidore"  
 STRASBOURG, "St. John Bosco"  
 TOULON – Bon Accueil, "Holy Family"  
 TOULON – Résidence, "St. John Bosco"  
 YVERDON (Svizzera), "St. Peter"

The following decisions have been made:

1. Members of the Province are all those confreres, who at the date of the canonical erection live and work in the houses and salesian works listed above.
2. Members also are confreres in formation coming from the pre-existing Provinces of Lyons and Paris, and other confreres incardinated in the

same provinces who at the date of the canonical erection find themselves outside the Province for reasons of study, health, work or other reasons.

For any other questions the norms of the Constitutions and Regulations apply.

The present Decree will come into force on 15 August 1999.

Rome, 31 January 1999.

Fr. Juan E. VECCHI  
 Rector Major

Fr. Francesco MARACCANI  
 Secretary General

## 5.5 New Provincials

*The following are notes on the new Provincials appointed by the Rector Major with his Council during the winter session December 1998 - January 1999.*

1. *BOSIO Carlos Alberto, Province of Rosario, Argentina.*

Predecessor: Fr Juan Cantini.

b. 26 May 1955, Vignaud (Córdoba), Argentina. Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Manucho, 31 January 1974. Perp. profession: 1979.

Theology and ordination: Colonia Vignaud, 24 May 1985. Qualification: Professor of Chemistry. 1991: Provincial Councillor. 1993-1995: Rector of novitiate. 1996: Rector of students of theology. 1996: Novice Master, interprovincial novitiate of Ramos Mejia.

2. *GUIJO GONZALES José Manuel, Province of Central America.*

Predecessor: Fr Heriberto Herrera  
b. 4 August 1933, Pinedas, Salamanca (Spain). Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: San José del Valle, 16 August 1950. Philosophy in El Salvador. Theology and ordination: Guatemala, 15 August 1960. Licentiate in Letters. 1965-70: Rector of post-novitiate, Guatemala. 1970-73: Rector at Guatemala - Don Bosco. 1973-76: Provincial Councillor. 1976-82: Vice-provincial. 1983-89: Rector at Managua. 1993-97: On staff of Regional Centre of ongoing formation, Quito (Ecuador). 1998: Rector at San José, Costa Rica.

3. *GUSTILO Francis, Province of North Philippines*

Predecessor: Fr Luciano Capelli  
b. 3 December 1953, San Juan (Rizal), Philippines. Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Canlubang, 1 May 1972. Post-novitiate: Canlubang.

Theology and ordination: Paranaque, Metro Manila, 7 December 1979. Bachelor's degree in Theology and Mathematics. 1985: Paranaque, Studentate, teacher and formator. 1987: Provincial Councillor. 1990-1993: Rector of Salesian Publishing House, Makati. 1993: Vice-provincial.

4. *HERRERO SANZ Miguel Angel, Province of Bolivia*

Predecessor: Fr José R. Iriarte  
b. 7 December 1945, Rapariegos, Spain. Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Arbós, 16 August 1962. Left for Bolivia. Theology at Santiago, Chile. Ordination: Salamanca, Spain, 2 April 1972. 1991-95: Rector of Pre-novitiate Cochabamba-Fatima. 1993: Provincial Councillor and Provincial Secretary. 1995: Rector at Don Bosco, Cochabamba-Quintonilla.

5. *INISAN Joseph, Province of France*

He is the first Provincial of the united French Province from 15 August 1999.

b. 10 March 1940, Morlaix, France. Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Dormans, 4 September 1960. Theology at Lyons. Ordination: Coat-an-doc'h, 20 December 1969. Licentiates in Theology and in

Letters. 1973-82: Rector at Paris-Retrait. 1982-91: Rector at Don Bosco, Coat-an-doc'h. 1992-94: Rector at Lyons-Fourvière. 1994: Paris, in charge of social communication and in recent years Director of French Salesian Bulletin.

6. *LA PIANA Calogero,*  
*Province of Sicily*

Predecessor: Fr Giuseppe Troina  
b. 27 January 1952, Rieti (CL).  
Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Lanuvio, 12 September 1974. Philosophy and theology at Messina. Ordination: Rieti, 8 August 1981. Doctorate in theology. Teacher and formator at Messina Theological. 1989-98: Rector, Messina.

7. *MENDES Joaquim Augusto,*  
*Province of Portugal*

Predecessor: Fr Simão Cruz  
b. 14 March 1948, Castelões de Cepeda. Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Manique, 6 January 1975. Theology and ordination: Lisbon, 24 July 1983. Licentiate in Spiritual Theology. 1990-93: Rector of Prenovitiate, Porto. 1993: Rector of Don Bosco, Porto. 1996: Provincial Councillor.

8. *RIVA Eugenio, Province of Milan*

Predecessor: Fr Francesco Cereda  
b. 29 December 1950, Treviglio

(BG). Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Missaglia, 16 August 1968. After philosophy (Nave) and theology, ordination: Treviglio, 27 May 1975. Licentiate in theology, Doctorate in philosophy, Teaching Certificate. President, teacher and formator at Nave for several years. 1994: Rector at Treviglio. 1997: Provincial Councillor. Delegate to GC24.

9. *SMYTH Michael,*  
*Province of Ireland*

Predecessor: Fr John Horan  
b. 1 August 1941, Enniskillen (Fermanagh). Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Burwash, 8 September 1958. Theology at Bollengo, Italy. Ordination: 29 June 1968. 1978: Provincial Councillor. 1980-83: Rector at Ballinakill. 1983: Rector at Maynooth studentate. 1984-90: Vice-provincial. 1986-91: Rector at Celbridge. 1991-97: Rector at Limerick, and later parish priest. 1997: Don Bosco House, Dublin.

10. *SWERTVAGHER Camille,*  
*Province of Central Africa*

Predecessor: Fr Mario Valente  
b. 27 March 1952, Veurne, Belgium. Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Oud-Heverlee, 8 September 1973. Post-novitiate: Oud-Heverlee. Practical training: Central Africa.



Theology and ordination: Oud-Heverlee, 4 April 1981. 1982: Rector at Gatenga, Rwanda. 1994: Provincial Delegate for Rwanda and Burundi, and Rector at Kansebula. 1996: Vice-provincial.

11. *VON SPEE Meinolf Graf,*  
*Province of North Germany*

Predecessor: Fr Georg Demming (Provincial for 9 years)

b. 25 July 1959, Allagen, Germany. Novitiate and 1<sup>st</sup> profession: Jünkerath, 15 August 1983. Theology at UPS-Rome 1986-91. Ordination: Benediktbeuern, 24 June 1990. 1991-92: Jünkerath. 1992-97 Essen. 1999: Vice-provincial.

## 5.6 New Salesian Bishop

*PEDRON Bruno, Coadjutor*  
*Bishop of Jardim, Brazil*

The Osservatore Romano of 25 March 1999 carried news of the appointment by Pope John Paul II of Fr Bruno Pedron SDB as Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Jardim, Brazil. At the time of the

appointment he was parish priest at Rondonópolis in Mato Grosso.

He was born on 3 June 1944 at Torreglia in Italy, and made his novitiate at Albarè di Costermano where he also made his first profession on 16 August 1963. Then he left for the missionary province of Mato Grosso where he did further studies and made his perpetual profession in 1969. Theological studies followed in Italy at Verona-Saval, and he was ordained priest on 6 April 1974 at his birthplace, Torreglia. He completed his studies with the Licentiate in Philosophy and Teacher's Certificate.

Returning to the province of Mato Grosso, he was a teacher in the minor seminary of Cuiabá; Rector of the native mission at Meruri, among the Bororos (1979-82); Rector at Campo Grande – São Vicente (1987-93); and Director of the Faculty of Law and Economy in the "Complexo Salesiano" of Lins. He was the founder of salesian work at Rondonópolis, where he was also parish priest.

## 5.7 SDB STATISTICS AT 31 DECEMBER 1998

Isp.	Tot. 1997	Professi temporanei				Professi perpetui				Tot. Professi	Novizi	Tot. 1998
		L	S	D	P	L	S	D	P			
AET *	0	8	30	0	0	11	3	0	25	77	11	88
AFC	240	13	58	0	0	35	7	0	119	232	19	251
AFE	150	3	40	0	0	19	5	0	83	150	8	158
AFM	69	4	2	0	0	7	1	0	50	64	0	64
AFO *	0	4	11	0	0	17	4	0	72	108	5	113
ATE *	0	2	14	0	0	12	7	0	53	88	6	94
ANT	181	4	44	0	0	13	7	0	108	176	14	190
ABA	157	2	2	0	0	13	6	0	123	146	3	149
ABB	140	4	10	0	0	15	5	0	102	136	2	138
ACO	151	3	20	0	0	13	8	0	100	144	5	149
ALP	109	9	10	0	0	11	4	0	71	105	2	107
ARO	142	6	19	0	0	13	6	0	86	130	7	137
AUL	126	1	12	0	0	18	3	0	87	121	11	132
AUS	121	1	5	0	0	11	3	1	89	110	0	110
BEN	221	0	7	0	0	24	4	0	177	212	1	213
BES	100	4	4	0	0	10	2	0	73	93	0	93
BOL	163	8	44	0	0	13	6	0	82	153	0	153
BBH	154	4	14	0	0	23	1	0	107	149	4	153
BCG	146	5	13	0	0	23	8	0	93	142	9	151
BMA	124	2	22	0	0	17	2	0	79	122	6	128
BPA	116	0	10	0	0	9	8	0	78	105	7	112
BRE	99	1	24	0	0	14	1	0	54	94	10	104
BSP	228	2	36	0	0	33	6	0	145	222	1	223
CAM	243	12	24	0	0	28	7	0	153	224	9	233
CAN	38	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	30	37	0	37
CEP	199	4	19	0	0	11	5	1	155	195	3	198
CIL	247	4	28	0	0	18	19	0	164	233	9	242
CIN	136	1	5	0	0	34	1	1	91	133	3	136
COB	165	4	14	0	0	26	4	0	110	158	6	164
COM	164	3	27	0	1	19	7	0	102	159	8	167
CRO	83	1	8	0	0	4	1	0	69	83	0	83
ECU	235	6	30	0	0	22	10	0	156	224	0	224
EST	138	0	61	0	1	2	6	0	70	140	15	155
FIN	201	6	28	0	0	18	8	0	134	194	5	199
FIS	225	2	21	0	0	9	4	0	58	94	4	98
FLY	147	0	3	0	0	29	3	0	105	140	0	140
FPA	205	0	3	0	0	25	0	0	143	171	0	171
GBR	130	1	6	0	0	13	0	0	104	124	3	127
GEK	178	7	14	0	0	33	4	0	117	175	2	177
GEM	275	7	5	0	0	59	7	0	191	269	2	271
GIA	149	2	16	0	0	20	9	0	95	142	3	145
HAI	66	4	25	0	0	1	5	0	28	63	3	66
INB	257	4	49	0	0	20	27	0	152	252	11	263
INC	251	5	69	0	0	21	11	0	140	246	8	254
IND	215	5	58	0	0	6	15	0	122	206	12	218
ING	344	8	88	0	0	25	27	0	176	324	22	346
INH	154	4	57	0	0	4	10	0	74	149	16	165
INK	275	8	83	0	0	7	17	0	150	265	18	283
INM	458	9	120	0	0	27	52	0	235	443	32	475
INN	114	0	37	0	0	13	6	0	52	108	8	116
IRL	111	1	5	0	0	7	4	0	92	109	1	110
IAD	165	0	20	0	0	20	3	0	87	130	8	138

Isp.	Tot. 1997	Professi temporanei				Professi perpetui				Tot. Professi	Novizi	Tot. 1998
		L	S	D	P	L	S	D	P			
ICP	793	6	42	0	0	203	7	1	502	761	7	768
ILE	444	3	30	0	0	61	10	0	313	417	5	422
ILT	214	2	14	0	0	31	6	1	141	195	2	197
IME	309	1	24	0	0	40	6	0	233	304	3	307
IRO	296	0	6	0	0	65	5	2	214	292	0	292
ISA	69	0	1	0	0	5	2	0	58	66	1	67
ISI	303	1	7	0	0	28	6	1	252	295	4	299
IVE	286	1	32	0	0	49	8	1	188	279	8	287
IVO	219	3	4	0	0	44	1	0	157	209	3	212
ITM *	0	8	66	0	0	7	3	1	31	116	19	135
KOR	93	5	24	0	0	16	7	0	40	92	9	101
MDG	70	2	21	0	0	8	4	0	35	70	2	72
MEG	233	5	56	0	0	11	11	0	133	216	14	230
MEM	205	3	45	0	0	14	9	0	104	175	9	184
MOR	167	1	10	0	1	19	3	0	86	120	1	121
OLA	78	0	3	0	0	19	0	1	48	71	0	71
PAR	108	5	20	0	0	6	5	0	66	102	5	107
PER	194	9	49	0	0	12	6	0	108	184	9	193
PLE	370	3	89	0	0	15	16	0	212	335	11	346
PLN	328	5	65	0	0	11	18	0	211	310	15	325
PLO	241	1	28	0	0	3	9	0	192	233	4	237
PLS	256	2	36	0	0	11	20	0	174	243	6	249
POR	198	3	21	0	0	44	11	1	113	193	2	195
SLK	250	10	72	0	1	11	17	0	127	238	18	256
SLO	140	1	10	0	0	12	6	0	106	135	0	135
SBA	232	0	3	0	0	39	4	1	160	207	2	209
SBI	248	2	10	0	1	50	19	0	136	218	1	219
SCO	153	1	19	0	0	5	3	2	96	126	0	126
SLE	245	2	5	0	0	68	5	0	144	224	3	227
SMA	391	2	18	0	0	93	18	0	218	349	2	351
SSE	184	1	20	0	0	25	12	0	114	172	5	177
SVA	203	3	14	0	0	30	8	0	123	178	5	183
SUE	212	1	11	0	0	43	3	0	158	216	2	218
SUO	123	2	15	0	0	24	3	0	75	119	0	119
THA	95	2	9	0	0	14	2	0	59	86	3	89
UNG	72	4	9	0	0	4	2	0	45	64	0	64
URU	133	1	20	0	0	7	4	0	96	128	0	128
VEN	256	6	43	0	1	18	10	1	167	246	13	259
VIE	165	15	48	0	0	17	28	0	49	157	12	169
ZMB	65	1	15	0	0	5	3	0	38	62	0	62
UPS	134	0	1	0	0	11	0	0	118	130	0	130
RMG	83	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	69	84	0	84
Tot.	17363	321	2409	0	6	2113	701	16	11120	16686	547	17233
Ep.	97									98		
Tot.	17460	321	2409	0	6	2113	701	16	11120	16784	547	17331

Note: During 1998 the new Circumscriptions AET, AFO, ATE, ITM (marked with \*) were erected, and hence are shown as having no personnel at the beginning of 1998. The erection of these new Circumscriptions affects the variations noted in the provinces to which they formerly belonged. There are also some other variations caused by changes between provinces.

5.8 Our dead confreres (1999 - 1<sup>st</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" (Cost. 94).

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P ANTONINI Alfonso	Roma	03-03-99	77	IRO
L ARANDA MOHEDANO Tomás	Sevilla	29-01-99	88	SSE
P BAGIŃSKI Tadeusz	Belém	03-04-99	80	BMA
L BARDZIŃSKI Franciszek	Kopiec	09-03-99	85	PLO
L BEER Leonardo	Lugano (Svizzera)	10-03-99	93	ILE
P BONOMO Innocenzo	Catania	13-01-99	83	ISI
P BOUQUET Claudius	Toulon	23-01-99	84	FLY
L CALEGARI Giovanni	Civitanova Marche	13-01-99	91	IAD
P CHANGEAT Henry	Hong Kong	31-01-99	86	CIN
P CLEMENTI Innocente	Stony Point, NY	19-02-99	78	SUE
P CORREA Gonzalo	Philadelphia (USA)	20-03-99	86	CIL
P de la FUENTE Teodosio	León	13-02-99	83	SLE
P DELL'ANGELA Stefano	Tokyo	31-01-99	78	GIA
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
P DVORÁK Antonio	Moravské Budejovice	20-02-99	91	CEP
<i>Fu Ispettore per 20 anni</i>				
P FAGIOLO Giovanni	Roma	02-02-99	85	IRO
P FARINA Pietro	Barcellona (ME)	07-01-99	83	ISI
P FENYÖ Vendel	Roma	25-01-99	72	RMG
P FIRQUET Joseph	Verviers	29-01-99	83	BES
P GABOR Altfried	Kassel	25-03-99	77	GEK
P GALLENCIA Mario José	Ferré	08-01-99	72	ARO
L GARCIA TORICES Demetrio	Bilbao	29-11-98	72	SBI
P GARCIA USÚN Casimiro	Logroño	22-01-99	68	SBI
P GERACI Salvatore	Roma	10-02-99	80	IRO
L GIUNINO Vicente	Bahía Blanca	27-01-99	78	ABB
P HAMOR József	Edmonton	13-02-99	84	CAN
P IBAÑEZ GARCIA Cipriano	Moca (R.D.)	26-01-99	72	ANT
P IÑESTA PEREZ Rafael	Alicante	03-01-99	60	SVA
L JÜNGLING Manfred	Buxheim	02-04-99	70	GEM
P KLEPPE Johannes	Walkraiburg, Baviera	18-02-99	90	GEM
P KRAMER Joze	Trstenik	10-09-98	63	SLO
L KRZYSZTOF Jan	Wrocław	05-02-99	67	PLO
P LUCCHELLI Vincenzo	Punta Arenas	22-02-99	87	CIL
P MACCHIONI Riccardo	Napoli	25-04-98	55	IRO
P MATUTIS Stanislovas	Barranquilla	03-02-98	85	COM
L MICHELENA RODRIGUEZ Artigas	Montevideo	18-02-99	85	URU

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P MORENO CASTRILLO Mariano	Campello (Alicante)	02-07-98	75	SVL
P MURICKAL Joseph	Senapati, Manipur	23-02-99	44	IND
P NAKAGAKI Yohane Bosco	Kamakura (Kamagawa)	02-01-99	69	GIA
P NEMETH András	Santo Domingo	04-03-99	83	ANT
P PANAMTHANATH Joseph	Bombay	08-03-99	50	ING
P PAROLINI Gino	Arese (MI)	09-03-99	82	ILE
P PEREGO Giovanni	Shindenbaru (Fukuoka)	05-12-98	86	GIA
P RASSIGA Mario	Hong Kong	02-01-99	94	CIN
P REMY Louis	Montpellier	26-01-99	84	FLY
P REPICH Tadeusz	Lublin	23-07-98	89	PLS
P RODRIGUES Cristiano	S. Vicente (Capo Verde)	17-01-99	68	POR
P ROTA Pietro	Torino	30-03-99	73	ICP
P SAILER Friedrich	Vöcklabruck	21-12-98	73	AUS
P SAIZ ASTURIAS Leandro	Barcelona	07-01-99	84	SMA
L SAVINO Antonio	Roma	31-03-99	92	IRO
P SCHNEIDER Alfons	Würzburg, Baviera	25-02-99	84	GEM
L SILVA Nicolau	Goiânia	15-11-98	73	BBH
P SZÉLIGA Andrés Vicente	Anta Gracia (Córdoba)	23-12-98	79	ACO
P TALLER Tullio	Bolzano	05-02-99	84	IVO
L THEVARUPARAMPIL Zachary	Madras	20-11-98	71	INM
P TOTI Andrea	Lugano (Svizzera)	26-02-99	81	ILE
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
P TRNČÁK Vojciech	Santiago de Chile	26-01-99	83	CIL
L VIALE Edoardo	Varazze (SV)	21-03-99	70	ILT
P VIDIC Janez	Sentrupert	16-09-98	62	SLO
P ZOMPICCHIATTI Oreste	Udine	17-01-99	85	IVE
L ZUCCA Giuseppe	Pinerolo (TO)	04-04-99	91	ICP

