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of the general council

year LXXXII

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of the General Council
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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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N. 37

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“WHEN YOU PRAY SAY: OUR FATHER...” (Mt 6,9)
The Salesian a man and teacher of prayer for the young

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Rome, 1 January 2001

Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God

For the season of Lent 1999 a group of dioceses in Spain sent to the faithful a letter on Christian prayer at the present day with the title: “Your face, O Lord, I shall seek”.¹ Other Bishops have done the same thing.²

The Bishops were pointing out the disorientation of Christians with respect to the sense of prayer (why pray? is there still any sense in praying regularly?) and the sources and original forms of Christian prayer. There was also the fact of the progressive loss of the habit of prayer, because of the changes that were taking place in family life, in which days on end could pass without any sign of prayer in common. In the Christian community too, apart from Sunday Mass, other practices were going out of use with which Christian communities

¹ Cf. Dioceses of San Sebastián, Bilbao, Vitoria, Pamplona: *La oración cristiana hoy: Tu rostro buscaré, Señor*. February 1999

² Cf. for example: *La prière nous ouvre à Dieu et au monde*, in *Le Livre de la foi*, edited by the Belgian Bishops, Brussels, 1987, *Our hearts were burning within us*, U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 1999; *Prayer, Contemplation and Holiness: the Church, Community of Christian Discipleship in its Service to Life*, Final document of Sixth Plenary Assembly of Manila 1995

through the years had been accustomed to express their fundamental relationship with the Lord.

At the same time was emphasized the multiplying of places and opportunities for a self-service kind of prayer, offered by various religious groups for anyone who wanted to make use of them, and the growing search for such places.

We have experienced the same kind of thing ourselves: we offer prayer evenings in our churches, we have very popular vigil services, our houses of prayer are growing in number – but not only things like these. Only a fortnight ago I was listening to an evangelical Radio which listed twenty places of worship in the city of Rome, with their respective timetables, for those who wanted to frequent them. In the backgrounds could be heard the words of psalms with electronic musical accompaniment and the involvement of the participants.

The Jubilee, with its moving prayer gatherings in St Peter's Square and the numerous celebrations, has also given emphasis to this expression of Christian religious feeling.

We are living in a globalized world, unique from a religious standpoint: it is both humanistic and secularized, almost unbalanced in asserting the right of the individual to make personal choices in every field and hence somewhat allergic to anything imposed on him from without – “savagely religious” about his privacy, you could call it. There are those who live as “agnostics” (in the sense of non-believers). There are those who practise religion after the manner of a snack-bar or a McDonald's, in line with their own selection and combination of times, places and formulas. There are even those who go in for esoteric religious practices. Sometimes the only one you will ever see praying in a railway compartment is a Moslem. In the airports rooms have been set aside for the practice of various religions.

From all this one thing at least is evident: whoever gets into any religious experience or emotional situation, discovers and accepts the fact that prayer is one of its main manifestations.

Requests made to the Lord, felt to be present, expressions of praise and thanksgiving, the desire for his company and protection, arise spontaneously and almost inevitably.

It is in no way strange therefore that young Christians, living in this atmosphere and in contact with us, feel an attraction towards Jesus Christ and the Gospel and have accepted the challenge of their deepest meaning, or have already expressed their deliberate choice for a living presence of faith, should wonder about the prayer of the Salesians. They wonder to what extent they feel it in their heart, and especially whether the Salesians are capable of launching them on a process of prayer which will traverse their whole life, giving rise to convictions and prompting experiences, so that prayer becomes a habit, something relished, support and light.

1. "YOU ARE MY LIGHT..."³

With young people you can experience extraordinary instances of solemn celebrations, well prepared from the aspects of content, symbolism and choreography. But with respect to ourselves the Constitutions, after putting forward all the community expressions, tell us: "We can form praying communities only if **individually we become men of prayer**. Each one needs to express his own personal and heartfelt way of being a son of God, expressing his gratitude, telling him about his yearnings and his concerns in the apostolate".⁴

It is one thing, in fact, to recite prayers or take part in collective celebrations, things which are certainly both useful and praiseworthy, but quite another to become praying individuals. We have heard this from the young people themselves and from commentators with reference to large scale events like the

³ Ps 27, 1; cf. Ps 61

⁴ C 93

Youth Forum and the Jubilee: without any doubt it all constituted a valid experience, but will it endure and develop further in life? What is at stake is religious education, follow-up, the interiorization following the extraordinary event, heartfelt communication with the Father after the manner of sons.

It is clear, in fact, that if our evangelization provides only explanations without creating a relationship of communion with the Father, it is empty and not much more than an ideology. The great work of Jesus was that of making the Father known, in the biblical sense, and of teaching the disciples to have recourse to him by listening to the voice of the Spirit, and the words and teaching he suggests to the heart.⁵

For this reason the Gospel is rich in teachings about prayer. The evangelist Luke, in chapter 11 of his Gospel, gathers some of these together: the unifying word "Father", perseverance and effectiveness of prayer. And it is in the Gospel that we find the explanation of our communication with the Father, and the presence of the Spirit who prays with Christ in us and for us.

It is not my intention at this point to speak to you of salesian community prayer. Enough has already been written⁶ and there is sufficient animation in this regard, and efforts at improvement are clearly visible in the communities. There is no doubt that this well expresses the life of both individuals and communities, and is also a school in itself, as well as being a guarantee of richness, continuity, perseverance and ecclesial experience. The Salesian prays with the community and in the community.

What I want to do now is dwell particularly on the **personal process** which, with the help of the community, leads each of us to become a man of prayer, wanting and able to guide young people in that direction, and leading to levels of regularity and fervour those who show themselves capable.

⁵ Cf. Jn 14, 26; Jn 16, 13; Jn 17, 3

⁶ Cf. *The project of life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*, Guide to the reading of the Salesian Constitutions, Rome 1986, p. 668-694

A look into our own heart.

The prayer of the Salesian, his communication and filial dialogue with the Lord, is certainly coherent with and reflects his life. But there are some "*clichés*" in that connection which are unlisted; just as there are real conditionings to be overcome before we can be men of prayer in the salesian manner.

Among these *clichés* is one that wants to see action at the centre of salesian life, not always understood as conscious saving activity but sometimes as action which is simply human, with all that this implies: movement, skill, the multiplying of environments, relationships and activities, etc.

In this case prayer becomes "relegated to certain times during the day", confined to some common moments. But the advice of Jesus the Good Shepherd was to pray "*without ceasing*": a conversation with the Father who comes to us in the Spirit and goes out from us in many ways: through thought and feelings, guidance of activity, relationship with our neighbour, sharing in the celebrations and life of the Christian community. And all this carried out with our eyes turned towards Him and with the desire to fulfil "God's good pleasure",⁷ to use the expression of St Francis de Sales.

Another cliché is the interpretation of Don Bosco's words: "The active life towards which our Society specially tends, means that its members are not able to perform many practices of piety in common".⁸ This is true, but we need to go back to his own time to grasp the implications of this statement, by comparing it with the prescriptions of other Institutes: to the daily morning and evening prayers were added triduum, novenas, and detailed practices of piety linked with the liturgical seasons. This is the context in which Don Bosco's words have to be read and interpreted. Common occasions must not

⁷ Cf. Gen 28,16 PAPASOGLI G., *Come piace a Dio*, CNE 1981, p. 472 e s.

⁸ Cf. *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales 1858-1875*, Critical text, edited by F. MOTTO, LAS Rome 1982, p. 182-183

be confused with personal ones, even those occurring in poorly organized activity.

Among our typical *conditioning elements* must be included a certain natural exposure to the multiplicity of commitments that for some, ready to accept anything that crops up, can become a state of agitation. This not only leads to lack of sharing in community moments but also to the skipping of time that should be given to study, reading, the serious preparation for work of ministry or an educative task, which is becoming all the more complex from such aspects as the evangelical interpretation of life and the methodology of youth guidance.

We must recognize the fact that both the pastoral context, to which I referred earlier, and our personal reflection lead us today to specific conclusions concerning the conditions to be created for prayer.

It is possible to speak of prayer only by adopting the experience of Jesus, Son of the Father, re-expressed in his own life under the guidance of the Spirit. To speak of prayer is to investigate the most sacred and unifying element of our life.⁹

"Prayer is the synthesis of our relationship with God. We can say that we *are* what we *pray*, and *how* we pray. The level of our faith is the level of our prayer; the strength of our hope is the strength of our prayer; the ardour of our charity is the ardour of our prayer".¹⁰

Praying and living become fused in a single reality in the conscience of one who prays. Until life itself becomes prayer, not even prayer itself will be alive and authentic.

On the other hand, Sacred Scripture and ecclesial tradition are full of the prayer of the poor who turn to God in the spirit of Jesus like children. The way must be simple, and the communication childlike in the Spirit.

Some attitudes can be listed that foster personal prayer.

⁹ Cf. the experience of Moses in Ex 3

¹⁰ Cf. CARRETTO C., *Lettere dal deserto*, La Scuola Editrice, Brescia 1964, p. 47

Sincerity with God and with ourselves.

Sometimes when we speak of God, with reference to ourselves and still more in religious discussions with others, we put on a mask, we adopt a terminology suited to the occasion, and we use words that are exact and well stated.

These masks do not correspond to what we really are. They represent insuperable barriers to a deep sharing with God and to an open dialogue with him.

God wants to communicate with us on the wavelength of sincerity. And this is by no means something that happens at once: it usually requires grace and time. This is why the Jubilee has called us to conversion, to start again from God and re-plan our journey. It has been first of all an invitation to conversion of heart, even though the celebrations transmitted by television may have conveyed a different idea.

There are many ways and types of prayer, depending on whether feeling or meditation, set formula or spontaneity, is the prevailing factor. In the last analysis each one has his own way of praying, just as he has his own way of walking or of self-expression. But there is always in prayer the desire for a communication which aims at being filial, direct and deeply felt. Whatever kind of prayer has been reached, its essence is the desire for a sincere sharing of oneself. This is how Jesus expressed himself: "I thank you, Father";¹¹ "Keep in your name those you have given me";¹² "Let them be one as we are one".¹³

Ability for listening.

For us who are educators, the ability to speak about God and with him depends in the first place on our ability to listen to him. He, who spoke at creation's beginning, has said a great

¹¹ Jn 11, 41

¹² Jn 17, 11

¹³ Jn 17, 21

deal to us in the History of Salvation through words and events, and has recounted everything in Christ. Now he speaks to us through the mediation of the Church and daily happenings, he makes the voice of his Spirit re-echo within us and reveals new things for new times.

The believer is one who before all else *listens to the Word, as Mary did*. "Listening means not only being intellectually conscious of the presence of the other, but willingly making space within oneself for such presence so as to welcome it and enjoy it".¹⁴

It is not always easy to distinguish the voice of God from that of men. For this we must lend a willing ear, as in the episode of Samuel,¹⁵ to the one who speaks, to educate ourselves and those for whom we work, to listen to the Truth: "Speak, for your servant is listening". We must be always on the alert, to lead our young people towards the Truth, urging them to listen to Him who has the "words of eternal life". This is one of the aims of education. The laws and precepts, the Word of the Lord, are presented as the source from which comes in a mysterious way a complete and deep knowledge, intelligible to the simple but superior to anything produced by the keenest human thought.

On the part of man, this readiness to obey and listen to the Word constitutes the indispensable condition for discovering the plan which God entrusts to every individual, in the time and place where he has been called to live, and will also be the fundamental condition for the continual renewal of his commitment to conversion to God: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that

¹⁴ E. BIANCHI, *Le parole della spiritualità. Per un lessico della vita interiore*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1999, p. 75-76

¹⁵ 1 Sam 3, 3-10.19

goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it".¹⁶

The best place for listening to and hence meditating on the Word, is that of Mary at Bethany, "who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching".¹⁷ Everything begins therefore with attention directed to the Word, which is then developed in meditation, prayer and contemplation.¹⁸ Listening to God,¹⁹ with its aspects of silence, centering on Him and not on ourselves, becomes an act of welcome or, rather, of the revelation in us of a presence more intimately present to us than we are to ourselves. "Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved you! For behold you were within me and I outside; and I sought you outside and in my ugliness fell upon those lovely things that you have made. You were with me and I was not with you. I was kept from you by those things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called and cried to me and broke open my deafness: and you sent forth your beams and shone upon me and chased away my blindness: you breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for you: I tasted you and now hunger and thirst for you: you touched me, and I have burned for your peace".²⁰

Not only did Vatican II open a happy period for returning to the Word, but we ourselves are witnessing a new taste for it felt nowadays among young people. It is a new kind of meeting of the young with the Word, and has been encouraged in his Exhortations by John Paul II with respect to the *Lectio divina*.

¹⁶ Is 55, 10-11

¹⁷ Lk 10, 39

¹⁸ On relationship between Word of God and Spiritual Exercises cf. C.M.MARTINI, *La Parola di Dio negli Esercizi Spirituali*, in *L'ascolto della Parola negli Esercizi*, Leumann (TO), Elle Di Ci, 1973, p. 27-31; F. ROSSI DE GASPERIS, *Bibbia ed Esercizi Spirituali*, Borla, Roma, 1982

¹⁹ Cf. Gen 28,16

²⁰ AUGUSTINE (S.), *Confessions*, X, 27,38

Savouring silence.

Silence is the special characteristic of the Word. Silence and the Word are complementary and mutually strengthen each other. Without silence it is difficult to attain self-knowledge or to discern God's plan for our own life. Silence gives depth and is a unifying element.

Salesian moderation in speech implies neither distance nor artificial self-control; it means that our attention is always given to the other person, with understanding and the desire to give and receive. In this way we pass to an internal aspect, to being at peace with ourselves, to taking a calm view of persons and situations, to an internal peace and tranquility which enjoys the other's presence.

This leads also to an attitude of self-control and resistance which silences disordered sentiments towards others, arbitrary ideas about oneself, rebellions, rash judgements, grumbling and gossiping which spring up from the heart. A controlled silence is the guardian of the internal self and makes it possible to listen willingly to the one who is speaking. The God we are trying to find is within us, not outside.²¹

The internal self needs time and space to examine and judge. As regards the first we should not be afraid to reserve in our daily timetable some periods for personal meditation, study and prayer and – why not? – contemplation: that total attitude as though mesmerized by truth or beauty.

The Gospel advises us to “go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret”.²² It is a matter of choosing a place where attention and spirit find fewer obstacles in reaching God. Without any doubt the church or chapel are the most suitable places for “silent prayer”, but not the only ones. “For prayer our Saviour chose solitary places, those which would not attract the senses too much but lift up the

²¹ Cf. BIANCHI E., *Le parole*, 142

²² Mt 6,6

soul to God, like mountains (which rise from the earth, and are usually bleak and bare with little to attract the senses)".²³

Walks and rambles, for example, can acquire a new meaning: they can become a means of discovering the presence of the Lord who – in the poetical words of St John of the Cross – “passed swiftly through these woods, and by his very glance adorned them with every beauty”.²⁴

The individual therefore does not look to see whether the place for prayer has this or that facility, because that would mean he is still attached to the senses: he should be concerned above all about interior recollection; for this purpose he leaves all else aside and finds for the purpose a place least encumbered by attractions of the senses; he detaches his attention from all such things so as to better enjoy his God in the solitude of created things.²⁵

Discovering our weaknesses.

The Spirit works in us and sanctifies us in the measure of our openness. This involves the conversion of resistance on our part to a docile and filial openness to the Father and to the love of our neighbour rooted in the heart. Our interior feelings must be educated, our love purified and our relationships made more respectful. It is a question of unmasking the dynamic elements that lurk within us and prevent us from giving ourselves freely and wholeheartedly.²⁶

We must have the courage to single out and identify our weaknesses and the negative traits that mark our life; we must

²³ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, in ID., *Opere*, Postulazione Generale dei Carmelitani Scalzi, Rome, 1992, p. 327

²⁴ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Spiritual Canticle B*, in ID., *Opere*, p. 493

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶ Cf. C.M. MARTINI, *Uomini e donne dello Spirito. Meditazioni sui doni dello Spirito Santo*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato (AL), 1998, p. 15. In these pages Card. Martini gives a brief introduction to retreat: objectives, theme, method, attitudes, manner of communication.

know our own points of resistance so that we can share them with the Father. We must accept the patient work that is needed if we want God's will to shape our thoughts and our conscience. There is no man of prayer who has not felt the need and advantages of internal and external ascesis.

Anyone with a little experience in the spiritual life knows that this process demands patience and perseverance, that it is not a path he travels alone for the Spirit both precedes and accompanies him. As he goes on his way he will gradually come to know also the fruits of a growing interior peace and degree of freedom, of meekness and charity, which are also the consequences of a process of prayer.²⁷

Approaching the Father with trust and confidence.

This is suggested by St Paul,²⁸ and is the indication of Christ himself.²⁹ The Lord accepts formal worship, but as a means and condition for spontaneous and transparent trust.³⁰ There are times when we can pray without words, but we can never pray without a deep desire to be with the Lord and stay with him. "Your face, Lord, do I seek"³¹ is already a form of prayer. There is a frequent desire nowadays for those moments of enjoyment and emotion which are experienced only rarely or under the pressure of powerful stimulants. They are a grace with which the Lord sustains us, but not one on which we base our relationship with God. We are living in times when religious emotion is the order of the day, when there is a desire to try out something "further", something that lies beyond the world of the senses. This is true also for young people, for whom authenticity and feeling go together also in religious experience.

²⁷ Cf. BIANCHI, *Le parole...*, p. 41

²⁸ Cf. Heb 4, 16; 2 Cor 3, 4; Eph 3, 12

²⁹ Cf. Mt 6, 25-31; Mk 11, 22

³⁰ Cf. Jn 4, 10

³¹ Ps 27, 8

Friendship with God requires that our desire to meet him be enshrined in prayer, and this in turn enshrined in life as a practical guideline. "O God, you are my God, I look for you at daybreak".³² It is not, therefore, a matter of wanting to fulfil obligations of prayer, but of an intense yearning for the Lord's presence and his friendship.

Sometimes we are afraid of getting too close to God, or that he will make known his will too clearly. A thousand questions invade our mind: what will God ask of me? where will he lead me? The stakes are high: my whole life is involved. All I have done may have to change direction; I could be called upon to reconsider all my values. It happened to the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the saints, who in this matter of prayer are outstanding examples. It happens also to us, through unforeseen events which can change the course, rhythm or tenor of our life.

With others, each of us enters into dialogue on equal terms. But with God it is quite different. He says to me: "I am the Lord, your God".³³ Einstein once remarked: "when I come close to this God, I have to take the shoes from my feet and walk on tiptoe because I am on sacred ground". And yet we are not in a distant area and one of fear, but in a filial relationship, that of the Spirit, who is mysterious and inexhaustible: from him always comes something new on the part of the Father, and on our part too, as life proceeds.

Journeying in prayer.

In prayer too there is a process of formation and continued growth. No one, as an adult or in old age, prays as he did when a child, even though some personal traits may persist, matured by life. Prayer not only enriches us; it moulds us through what it stands for, and through the events of our life that we interpret in its light. Some of us may have shared the experience of

³² Ps 63, 2

³³ Ex 20, 2

monks who have led a life of pure prayer. But even with our own confreres, who have reached maturity in age and suffering, dialogue on prayer is interesting and fruitful.

When I take on the commitment to prayer, I entrust myself completely to God and place myself in his hands. It is God whom I welcome; to him I give myself; with him I intend to journey, and from him receive myself back again, always renewed by his gifts and his love.

Contemplation provides the loftiest moment of prayer. But, as *Vita Consecrata* tells us, it is not the privilege of a certain state, but an essential dimension in those who feel their life "transfigured" in Christ.³⁴ It is the vision of faith, enjoyed in its unifying quality, that radiates light and beauty.

Understood in this fashion, prayer becomes the adult action through which is opened up my personal relationship in God's regard, conscious of my unquenchable thirst for him as also of his loving search for me.

Prayer supposes also the safeguarding of sufficient time for the act of prayer to become deeply rooted in me and find its highest expression. If I want to attain to a living and life-giving form of prayer, which is an experience of love with my one and only "partner", I cannot fail to reserve some space in my life and consecrate it to being on close terms with God.

Perseverance in this pure and unalloyed act of faith, at a moment without haste or thought of personal advantage, given over to simply remaining in the presence of God the Father (he is looking on me, loving me and working in me during these deep moments of solitude), when I have the feeling of being bereft of words and wasting my time: there you have the demand and guarantee of an adoration in spirit and in truth. It is interesting to examine the journey of prayer of our Servants of God, where we always find three characteristics: participation in the community practices, eagerly sought personal moments, and union in life.

³⁴ Cf. VC 29. 35

While it is true that prayer can bring interior peace to my life, serenity of spirit and effectiveness in activity, the principal objective will not be merely to seek such advantages but, if I want to meet in prayer the Father of Jesus and our Father too, the experience of freely given love.

In giving to the Lord my human time, without asking for anything in return (by way of extraordinary effects, notable and rapid spiritual progress, etc.) I leave myself exposed to the very sun of divine gratuitousness. This is the grace *par excellence* that follows commitment to prayer: to become educated to free self-giving in a society like ours in which everything is subject to trading. To possess the unquestionable wisdom of being loved by him and to love him in return is the greatest richness of our life and makes all others with their allurements appear secondary by comparison.

This is the blessedness of a life of prayer! Anyone who knows how to spend his time with the Lord, learns to give his life for his fellowmen with self-sacrificing generosity, forgetful of himself. Prayer, like love, has no need of justification.

Since it is the Spirit who prays in us and from whom we learn to turn to the Father, it is more important to be in harmony and union with him than to know exact definitions of prayer. These latter, nevertheless, help us to a greater knowledge and process of purification. We may take some fundamental elements in this connection, drawing on the experience of Christ, of the Church and of those who have contemplated him more closely and followed him.

Letting God speak.

"I take delight in your statutes".³⁵ We must allow God to tell us what he knows will be of benefit to us.

He pronounces the Word. Jesus reveals himself as the Word,

³⁵ Ps 119, 16

the eternal Word of the Father. The Word is something new and still remains so. That is how charisms come into existence: prophetic movements which develop only in listening to God in a world of monotony and routine. And so listening to God is always for consecrated persons a new and sustaining grace. In point of fact we usually seek in our prayer words that we want to hear, with the risk that we shall not hear what God really wants to tell us, his Truth. Jesus himself advises us: "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases".³⁶

The time we dedicate in a planned period of silence or in a retreat to overhaul our life is not a waste of time; rather does it become the recovery of a space open to a visit of God. To cultivate a method for creating an area of silence and make good use of it, is a way of expressing the commitment without which no one can bring to maturity the consummate fruits of the reflection of faith, of prayer and of contemplation.

When we are able to maintain an interior silence in the midst of the inevitable hubbub of modern life, and in our heart the need to speak and communicate, the commitment we have taken on by prayer will have produced in us one of its most excellent results: we shall be individuals who are mature and level-headed without getting sidetracked, masters of our own internal ego. It is not a matter of a silence merely ascetical in nature, but of the expectation of and attention to a word of love. The Salesian expresses all this without any pretence: temperance comes naturally to him, with reason linked with religion, an optimistic but not naïve kindness, and with his gaze and hope fixed on the redemptive power of Christ.

Receiving God's glance in the depth of our own being.

God's glance has a rich significance in the Bible and in the Gospel. It implies his benevolent will, fatherly attention,

³⁶ Mt 6, 7

predilection and vocation. The gaze of the Lord is often linked with a dialogue, which is already a calling to a program of life.

Prayer does not remain external to the one who prays. There is no separation between prayer, the relationship with God and the one praying. Although it is a gift, it becomes such a blend and foundation with the mode of being of each one who prays as to become the purest expression of his individuality. What I am before the Creator, that is my prayer.

The light-giving gaze of God penetrates to where no other glance can reach. He sees me and teaches me to see myself as I am. To pray, therefore, is to feel and welcome this paternal gaze of God, without obstructing it in a vain effort to do everything by myself.

My life is at one and the same time a gift and a task: a gift which develops only in dialogue with the giver. To assert one's own participation in God's love for men, in a concrete destiny and a particular slot of human history: that is prayer.

I think we may sum up like this what is perhaps the most valid aspect of the personal experience of prayer: it is the on-going practice which leads to the embracing of the Father's will with filial joy in the events of daily life. The practice of prayer enables me to read my personal history – insignificant as it may in fact be, and absurd or contradictory as it may seem to me – as a revelation of the love of God within the coordinates of my existence and of the world. Nothing that happens in my life and in my world is extraneous to God's love.

God is love: by letting him love me I become a mysterious instrument of his love in the world. By opening myself to his initiative, I discover a God who is solid with and committed to the progress of humanity, and in particular with the sorrow of those who are suffering.

The third millennium: a time for mystics! It will be the depth of men and women moved by the Spirit that will save the meaning of life and challenge the limitations of our human vision.

The experience of some of God's friends.

Prayer is "expressive" of life in the best sense of the word. And so what is told us by those who lived intensely in both love and sorrow is of great use to us. Let us listen to some of the significant things they say.

- "Prayer is like a conversation between one friend talking to another, or a servant and his Master: now asking for some favour, now confessing to some shortcoming, now talking about his own affairs and asking for advice about them" (*Ignatius of Loyola*).

- "Here there is nothing to fear, but everything to hope for, (...) for me mental prayer is nothing else but a relationship of friendship, a frequent finding of myself alone with one whom we know loves us" (*Teresa of Avila*).

- "Prayer is nothing else but union with God (...). In this intimate union God and the soul are fused together like two bits of wax that no one can ever pull apart (...). We had become unworthy to pray, but God in his goodness allowed us to speak with him (...). My little children, your hearts are small, but prayer stretches them and makes them capable of loving God" (*Curé of Ars*).

- *Saint Augustine* wrote to Proba: "Let us always desire the happy life from the Lord our God and always pray for it. But for this very reason we turn our mind to the task of prayer at appointed hours, since the desire grows lukewarm, may grow chill altogether and may be totally extinguished unless it is repeatedly stirred into flame.

It is certainly not wrong or useless to pray even for a long time when there is the opportunity. I mean when it does not keep us from performing the other good and necessary actions we are obliged to do. To pray for a longer time is not the same as to pray by multiplying words, as some people suppose. Lengthy talk is one thing, a prayerful disposition which lasts a long time is another. Excessive talking should be kept out of

prayer, but that does not mean that one should not spend much time in prayer as long as a fervent attitude continues to accompany it. To talk at length in prayer is to perform a necessary action with excess of words.

Praying consists in knocking with a persistent and holy fervour on God's door. It is a task generally accomplished more through sighs than words, more through weeping than speech".³⁷

According to these experiences, prayer is a friendly relationship which can be expressed by thought, action and gazing, silence, participation in the liturgy, rapid invocation or calm conversation after the example of Jesus: "I thank you, Father".³⁸ It is a relationship of friendship and love. And it introduces us appropriately into the topic of salesian prayer.

2. THE PRAYER OF THE SALESIAN

The prayer of the Salesian has a special reference to Jesus the Good Shepherd, and to Don Bosco, who is his living image among the young.

To understand its style and the way it has developed, it is enlightening to reflect in the Gospel first of all on the prayer of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, which culminates in the giving of his life.

Motives of space dictate that this reading, absorbing though it is, I must leave to you.³⁹ I want to dwell particularly on the typically salesian experience.

³⁷ From the *Letter of St Augustine to Proba*, CSEL 44, 60-63

³⁸ Mt 11,25

³⁹ cf. VECCHI J., *Spiritualità salesiana*, Temi fondamentali, Turin LDC 2000, p. 86-106

The seeds: Mamma Margaret.

The first references to the process of salesian prayer we find in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.⁴⁰ The account reveals a constant principle that accompanied Don Bosco all his life: the decisive role of the religious aspect in the environment in which he grew up and in its mentality. It led to the seeing of everything in many and various ways in relationship to God: from the contemplation of nature to the recital of prayers which had already become the heirloom of the Christian people.

It is especially to the figure of his mother and her educative activity that Don Bosco attributes the merit for having given deep root in him to the sense of God and a vision of faith about reality and history. Margaret formed him to the practice of the presence of God, showed him how to pray mentally and in words, and instilled in him the principles of Christian life, thus sowing abundantly the seeds of solid virtue. All this was a decisive contribution for his future mission as an educator and pastor.

From the faith of his mother the young John acquired the certainty of a God great in his love. He perceived the reality of an unbreakable link between our frail humanity and his merciful Love. He learned, existentially, that trust in God is never in vain, even in the most desperate moments. This was the root of his unshakeable faith that "could move mountains", and of

⁴⁰ Don Bosco wrote the *Memoirs of the Oratory* between 1873 and 1878, a period which for him was both very important and painful. The Salesian Congregation was already an expanding reality, and the *Constitutions* were in process of being approved in Rome. In August 1872 the foundation of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians became definitive. For some time the Saint had been preparing the first missionary expedition which would take place in 1875. In the progressive clarification of the details of his project of the Salesian Society, the idea of the salesian laity developed with the constitution of the Association of the Cooperators and the realization of the *Bulletin*. At the same time Don Bosco was undergoing severe trials because of a progressive lack of understanding with his Archbishop which led to tensions and painful moments... In presenting the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, the Saint said he had written in response to exhortations he had received from various sources, especially from "a person of the highest authority, to whom any delay was out of the question". Cf. G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introduction and notes by A. DA SILVA FERREIRA, Roma 1992, I, p. 9-10.

the robust hope that prompted him to look beyond all human perspectives, and plan with a courageous daring what others would never have dreamed of doing. All this he discloses in the *Memoirs* and relates to us his readers.

Don Bosco's account is concise but very effective: "Her greatest care was given to instructing her sons in their religion, making them value obedience, and keeping them busy with tasks suited to their age. When I was still very small, she herself taught me to pray. As soon as I was old enough to join my brothers she made me kneel with them morning and evening. We would all recite our prayers together, including five mysteries of the rosary".⁴¹

In the educational action of Margaret there is something more than ordinary religious formation. "God was always in the forefront of his thoughts", says Fr Lemoyne, and consequently was always on his lips (...). *God sees you* was the permanent slogan with which she reminded her children that they were under the eyes of the great God, who would one day be their judge. If she let them go and play in the neighbouring meadow, she used to say to them as they left: *Remember that God sees you*. If she sometimes found them looking worried and was afraid they might have on their mind some feeling of resentment, she would suddenly whisper in their ear: *Remember that God sees you, and he sees also your secret thoughts* (...).

She used the spectacular scenes of nature to remind them continually of their Creator. On a fine starry night she would point to the heavens and say: *It is God who created the world and put all those stars up there. If the firmament is so beautiful, what will paradise be like?* At the beginning of summer, looking at a lovely countryside, or a meadow studded with flowers, or at sight of a beautiful dawn or sunset, she would exclaim: *"What beautiful things the Lord has made for us!"*⁴²

⁴¹ BOSCO G., *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Eng. edtn..New Rochelle, 1989, p. 9

⁴² LEMOYNE G.B., *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco racconto ameno ed edificante*, Turin 1886, p. 28-30

Don Bosco man of prayer.⁴³

It would be historically inexact, however, to think that Don Bosco's prayer remained at this level. His educative and pastoral "oratorian" experience with poor boys and his young followers, brought about in him a leap towards an "apostolic prayer", towards contemplation in action and ecstasy before the action of God in the souls of the youngsters. And so began and developed that union between an attitude of prayer and an enterprising life, full of hope and daring, which at first raised doubts about his mental health, from the time when some thought him to be no more than God's building contractor, but he became the paradigm of prayer and life in God of the Salesian.

A method analogous to that of Mamma Margaret, matured through his pastoral experience and self-sacrificing educational service, would be subsequently used by Don Bosco with his own youngsters. In fact at the beginning of his prayer-book, the *Companion of Youth*, in a list of the *Things needed for a young person to become virtuous*, he begins with the *Knowledge of God*: "Lift up your eyes to the sky, my children, and observe what there is in the heavens and on earth. The sun, moon, stars, air, water and fire are all things which at one time did not exist (...). It is God who is all powerful who brought them into existence from nothing by creating them".⁴⁴ Both experiences were of use to him in introducing young people to communion with God.

Educated as he was to see the finger of God in nature and human events, especially with regard to the youngsters entrusted to him, Don Bosco formed them to take a "simple view" of things which revealed God's love. And so he became a keen observer of human and church history, which he was able to narrate very effectively to the boys. And the boys learned from what he said.

⁴³ In addition to the notes of A. GIRAUDO, *Itinerario spirituale*, I follow in this point the contribution of P. BROCARDO, *Don Bosco, "profeta di santità" per la nuova cultura*, in M. MIDALI (Ed.), *Spiritualità dell'azione*, p. 179-206

⁴⁴ BOSCO G., *Il Giovane provveduto per la pratica dei suoi doveri...*, Turin 1847, 9

The Saint tells a story of Michael Magone that took place during a holiday at the Becchi: "One evening when the boys were all in bed, I heard someone weeping and sighing. I crept quietly to the window and there at one side I saw Magone looking at the moon and weeping softly. "What is the matter, Michael?", I asked; "do you not feel well?" He was rather upset and did not know what to say, because he thought he had been alone and unseen by anyone. But when I repeated my question he said in these precise words: 'I am crying when I look at the moon which has been appearing regularly for centuries to give light to the darkness of the night without ever once disobeying the Creator's orders, while I who am so young, I who have the use of reason and should have been most faithful to the laws of my God, have disobeyed him so often and offended him in so many ways'. And with that he broke into tears again. I consoled him with a few words, whereupon he calmed down and went back to bed".⁴⁵

Don Bosco comments with admiration on this ability of Michael "to see in everything the finger of God, and the duty of all creatures to obey him".⁴⁶

Following St Francis de Sales.

All this is in line with the spirituality of St Francis de Sales who, in the second part of the Introduction to the Devout Life (where he lists "some advice for raising the soul to God") after presenting mental prayer, suggests five other brief forms of prayer "which serve as a prolongation of the longer prayer": morning and night prayers, the examination of conscience, spiritual recollection and aspirations made to God. To this last kind of prayer, made up of frequent but ardent ejaculations,

⁴⁵ BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in A. CAVIGLIA, *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di don Bosco nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti*, vol. V, Turin, 1965, p. 228-229

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

Francis invites the devout client: "praise His excellence, invoke his aid, cast yourself in spirit at the foot of His Cross, adore his goodness, offer your whole soul a thousand times a day to him, fix your inward gaze upon him, stretch out your hands to be led by him, as a little child to its father, clasp him to your breast as a fragrant nosegay, raise him up in your soul as a standard".⁴⁷

This type of aspiration is likened by the Saint to the thought of those who love each other: "their hearts overflowing with tenderness, and their lips ever ready to praise that beloved object (...), so those who love God cannot cease thinking of Him, living for Him, longing after Him, speaking of Him, and fain would they grave the Holy Name of Jesus in the hearts of every living creature they behold".⁴⁸

"And to such an outpouring of love all creation bids us", writes again St Francis de Sales, "there is nothing that he has made but is filled with the praise of God, and everything in the world speaks silently but clearly to the lovers of God of their love, inciting them to holy desires, whence gush forth aspirations and loving cries to God. Here are some examples" (...).⁴⁹ The examples quoted are taken from the lives of the Saints and daily life, or from spectacles of nature. "A devout soul, gazing upon a brook wherein the starlit sky of a calm summer's night was reflected, exclaims, O my God, when Thou callest me to dwell in Thy heavenly tabernacles, these stars will be beneath my feet (...). Another saintly soul, looking upon the blooming orchards, cried out, "Why am I alone barren in the Church's garden!" Another, beholding a hen gathering her chickens beneath her wings, exclaimed, "Keep me, O Lord, under the shadow of thy wings".⁵⁰

This was the teaching of Saint Francis de Sales, and it was in the same way that young John was guided by his mother

⁴⁷ SFS *Introd Dev Life* #90

⁴⁸ Ibid. #92

⁴⁹ Ibid. #92

⁵⁰ Ibid. #96

and instructed in the ways of faith and contemplation. In this way he acquired the deep sense of the presence of God that was to be with him all his life. We know – as Saint Francis de Sales puts it once again – that in this simple exercise of contemplation and spiritual recollection expressed in short aspirations, good thoughts and spontaneous ejaculations, “lies the great work of devotion: it can supply all other deficiencies, but there is hardly any means of making up where this is lacking. Without it no one can lead a true contemplative life, and the active life will be but imperfect where it is omitted”.⁵¹

Don Bosco too was sensitive to the wonders of nature, but much more so to those of the soul of the young person who overcomes his evil inclinations, responds to the promptings of grace and opens himself generously to God.

A contemplative in matters of salvation, ecstatic at God’s work in life, full of admiration at the effects of grace in Dominic Savio, he could be deeply moved at the sight of youngsters in prison, at the sight of the natives of Patagonia he invoked the help of Mary Help of Christians, and longed for the evangelization of Asia.

The oratory hallmark.

In this kind of climate at Valdocco the spirit and practice of prayer was closely linked with educative charity. You could see it in the very countenances of those who lived there, many of whom were to form the first salesian generation. “We knew them”, Fr Ceria was to write later, “as men very different in talents and culture, so unlike each other in their habits, but in all of them shone certain common characteristics, which made them what they were. Calm and serene in what they said and did; kind and fatherly in manner and expression, but particularly with a piety that made it clear that they knew what made

⁵¹ Ibid. #97

them tick, the central principle of the salesian life. They prayed a great deal, and they prayed intensely; they laid great insistence on praying and praying well. It seemed that they could not say more than a few words in public or private without mentioning prayer in some way. (...) And yet those men did not seem to enjoy any extraordinary graces in prayer; in fact we saw them fulfilling with candid simplicity nothing more than the practices prescribed by our rules or customs". They loved God, and in him they loved the young. That was the comment on the way they linked times of prayer with life, explicit prayer with the mission.

The kind of prayer that Don Bosco practised and tried to teach his followers is simple and straightforward in form, authentically complete and popular in substance and content, joyful and festive in expression. It is truly a prayer within the capabilities of all, particularly of children and the lowly, and has a rightful place in what he called the "practices of piety".

Fr Caviglia wrote that Don Bosco did not create any new or special form or practice of prayer or devotion, like the Rosary, Retreats, Stations of the Cross and so on. He was open to formulas and also, in a certain sense, to forms of piety of which as an educator he perceived the usefulness; he was a realist, with his eye on the substance, on the rapport with God and its reflection on life: to pray was to be friends with him which led quite easily to being alone with him and at his service in one's neighbour.

Fr Ceria is correct when he says that Don Bosco did not dedicate long periods to meditation, as did some other saints (the Curé of Ars, St. Anthony Mary Claret). But to have one's own way of praying is not the same thing as not praying at all or praying too little.

Don Bosco's prayer differed from that of other saints in both quantity and kind, but the facts make it clear that it was no less true and deep. Witnesses in the process of beatification and canonization revealed in Don Bosco an unexpected and exalted ac-

tivity of prayer. Despite the lack of external signs and striking gestures, prayer came in on all sides. "It can be said", declared Fr Barberis, "that he prayed always; I have seen him hundreds of times going up or down stairs and always praying. He used to pray as he went along the street. On his journeys, if he was not correcting proofs, he was always seen in prayer. On a train journey – he used to say to his followers – never be idle, but recite the breviary, say the rosary of our Lady, or read some good book".

Although in the last years of his life he had been dispensed from reciting the breviary, in reality he almost always said it and with great devotion; when it became physically too much for him he made up for it, as is clear from his formal and heroic promise, "not to do or say anything which did not have as its aim the glory of God".

For Don Bosco prayer was the "most outstanding of all works",⁵² because prayer "obtains everything and triumphs over everything". It is "what water is to the fish, air to the bird, the spring of water to the deer, warmth to the body".⁵³ His institution was founded on prayer.

Don Bosco, who was able to contemplate God in the countenance and situation of the young, did not feel the need to impose on his followers practices of piety other than those of the good Christian, or of the good priest in the case of priests. It is a prayer which never forgets or leaves aside the youth situation which must be transformed according to God's plan, or that of men to be directed towards Christ: "*da mihi animas cetera tolle*". We have already recalled the text of the first draft of the Constitutions: "The active life towards which our society more especially tends, means that its members are unable to make many practices in common".⁵⁴ This expression contains the implicit statement that many other forms of prayer are both pos-

⁵² MB XVII, p. 69

⁵³ MB III, p. 246. 613

⁵⁴ Cf. *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales 1858-1875*, Critical texts, edited by F. MOTTO, LAS Rome 1982, p. 182-183

sible and recommended. Among these Don Bosco attached great importance to ejaculations.

"Each one – we read in the same draft of the Constitutions – in addition to the vocal prayers, will make at least half an hour of mental prayer each day, unless he is prevented by the sacred ministry. In this case he will make up for it by more frequent ejaculations, directing to God with greater fervour those works which prevent him from performing the ordinary acts of piety".⁵⁵ Ejaculations are easy and essential prayers which serve to keep alive the thought of God.

We may say that in Don Bosco there was a perfect rapport of identity between prayer and work. In this sense, but only in this sense, one can say that work is prayer. And this, according to Fr Ceria, was Don Bosco's secret, his most characteristic trait: "The specific difference of salesian piety lies in being able to convert work into prayer".

Pius XI has given solemn confirmation to this: "This, in fact, was one of his finest characteristics, i.e. that in the middle of everything, continually beset by a crowd, worried by all sorts of problems, with people on all sides seeking advice, his spirit was always somewhere else, above it all, where there was undisturbed tranquility, where calm remained always supreme, so that in him work was always effective prayer, and there was verified the great principle of the Christian life: *qui laborat orat*".⁵⁶

And so, just as Don Bosco became identified as the man of "union with God", so the Salesian is characterized as being a man who is a "contemplative in action".⁵⁷ The difficulty lies in the precise meaning to be given to this expression.

In the tension between prayer and activity, in fact, it is difficult to maintain a balance, not so much theoretically but in the

⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid. p. 185

⁵⁶ PIUS XI, at the reading of the Decree on the heroicity of virtues, 20 February 1927.

⁵⁷ Cf. C 12

practice of daily life.⁵⁸ The problem has been there since the beginnings of Christianity, and has been much discussed. It is in this connection that Augustine, commenting on Luke 10,38-42, writes: "The words of Our Lord Jesus Christ are meant to remind us that there is a single goal at which we aim while we labour in the various occupations of this world. We travel as pilgrims who have not yet reached the destination; wayfarers not yet in the fatherland; desirous but without the final enjoyment. Martha and Mary were two sisters, not only on a natural level but also on that of religion; both of them honoured God, both served the Lord present in the flesh in perfect harmony of feeling. Martha welcomed him in the usual manner for receiving pilgrims, and nevertheless received the Lord as a servant..."

For the rest, Martha, let it be said in all sincerity, you who were already blessed for your praiseworthy service sought rest as your reward. You are now immersed in many concerns, you want to refresh mortal bodies, albeit of holy persons... Up there above there will be no room for all this. And so what will you do? What Mary has chosen: there we shall not feed others but be nourished ourselves. And so will be completed and perfected what Mary has chosen here: from that rich table to collect the crumbs of the word of the Lord (who) will seat his servants at table and wait on them".⁵⁹

Martha and Mary are an example of a radical unity in which active life and contemplative life are not opposed; together they represent an existence totally bound up with contemplative listening, especially when called to be involved in worldly matters. The radical unity between contemplation and action is found in the rapport and communion with God.

Let us see now how this tension between contemplation and action in the life of the Salesian can be unraveled, by dwelling

⁵⁸ Cf. VECCHI J. E., *Spiritualità Salesiana. Approfondimento di alcuni temi fondamentali*, Ediz.extracomm., SDB IVE-IVO, Venezia-Mestre, 2000, particularly p. 69-83.

⁵⁹ AUGUSTINE (S.), *Sermon* 103, 1-2.6, in *PL* 38, 613.615.

first of all on the expression "contemplatives in action", before passing on to list some characteristics which define the life of the Salesian as a contemplative person in the service of the young.

"Contemplatives in action".

Contemplation, i.e. becoming intensely taken up in wonder and amazement for a long or short period, embraces and grasps in a single profound moment reality in its very roots and the subject in his many unified elements.⁶⁰ It is properly called an "experience".

Christian contemplation implies a unified view which perceives in the sequence of events the fulfilment of God's Kingdom and hence our participation in its construction. This is not brought about only in silence and solitude, as though apart from the aspirations and desires, joys and sufferings of the Kingdom, but also in the sharing of the things of life that Christ came to bring.

In Christian tradition, in fact, one may speak of two great and preferential ways or methods of contemplation which are nevertheless not exclusive. In the first, the person becomes detached from "human things" to become immersed in God; in the second, it is precisely through those "human things" that he grasps the presence of God and his Kingdom, and he makes himself available to participate in the proclamation of salvation. "See, O God, I have come to do your will".⁶¹ In consequence he takes up his life as a union with God, in his zeal for the salvation of man.

The difference between the two is found in the different emphasis in the relationship between the Kingdom of God and human life. One who lives detached from things sees them by con-

⁶⁰ L. BORRIELLO, *Contemplazione*, in L. BORRIELLO et al., *Dizionario di Mistica*, Città del Vaticano, Editrice Vaticana, 1998, 338-344. At p. 348 there is an essential bibliography on the problem of action and contemplation.

⁶¹ Heb 10, 7

templating them in God. The accent is on the recognition of the mystery of God, who is inaccessible, man's definitive place for rest and happiness. On the other hand he, who lives an active and responsible zeal for salvation, puts the accent on God's Incarnation and his participation in history. He contemplates God who offers his grace for the building of the Kingdom here and now; like Jesus he rejoices at the wisdom worked by the Father in the poor and lowly. In this way God is "understood" in the contemplation of things and in the various activities of the Kingdom.

Both these attitudes are important and neither can be renounced. It is a matter of an emphasis which has an influence on what we do with our time and on the style of life we adopt. It is said of the Salesian that his contemplation stems from and is manifested above all in his zeal for the life of the young; and so after perceiving the mystery of the Incarnation he tries to enter its depths.

"Contemplation in action" does not necessarily mean thinking about God in the midst of activity, but rather of being conscious of the fact that the building of the Kingdom is at stake in that human activity. Contemplation in action is a process which requires conditions similar to those for contemplation in silence and, even though it be a grace, it is acquired through the cross.

Some conditions for becoming "contemplatives in action".

Here I will summarize some traits which make it possible for the Salesian to contemplate God in life.

a. Interior attitude.

All spiritualities, even that of the contemplative in action, are valid only if they lead to the sanctuary of the heart, where Truth precedes us.⁶² In religious formation we insist on interi-

⁶² St Augustine warns us: "*Noli foras ire. In teipsum redi: in interiore homine habitat veritas*"

orization; in common religious thought we distinguish the emotion of a moment from a mature and personalized faith.

To become a contemplative in action, an *interior frame of mind* is needed, born of open faith and vigilance, of humility and patience, of fidelity to God and men, of self-control and openness to the horizons of eternity. The quality of contemplation in action is measured by the human quality of the act done and by the awareness, implicit but alive and deep in the believer, that the Kingdom of God is here and now, or that the Kingdom of God cannot be achieved in such a situation. In the first case one rejoices, in the second case he suffers. Suffering and joy are the fruit of contemplation.

Each one of us – the Constitutions remind us – “needs to express his own personal and heartfelt way of being a son of God, expressing his gratitude, telling him about his yearnings and his concerns in the apostolate”,⁶³ so that “all his life may be imbued with an apostolic spirit, and all his apostolic activity with a religious spirit”.⁶⁴

At this point we may briefly recall the thoughts of Fr Cafasso, who was a sure teacher of prayer for Don Bosco; they indicate the best way to live a unifying and enlightening charity in action. What are of concern to us here are the fundamental attitudes, while their practice depend on the person and his era.

“The first secret”, says Don Bosco of Cafasso, “was his unfailling *serenity*. He always had in mind those words of St. Teresa: “*Let nothing disturb you!*” And so, with an unfailling smile, always courteous and with the gentleness that is proper to saintly souls, he tackled energetically everything he had to do, even though it might be tedious, difficult, and sometimes accompanied by thorny problems. But all this without getting worked up and without the number or serious nature of the things to be done causing him the least disturbance. This wonderful tranquility

⁶³ C 93

⁶⁴ PC 8

meant that he could deal calmly with many different matters without any becoming upset".⁶⁵ This is so different from the kind of worried apostle you can meet at the present day.

The second secret was long *experience joined with a great confidence in God*. "He would frequently repeat the words of David, the royal prophet: *Dies diei eructat verbum* (Ps 18, 2). What I do today serves as a pattern for what I shall have to do tomorrow. This maxim, joined with his prudence, experience and long study of the human heart, had made him familiar with the most complex questions. Doubts, difficulties and the most complicated problems faded away before him. When he was asked a question he needed only a brief outline of it, then he would raise his heart to God for a moment and reply with a readiness and precision which could not have been improved on by lengthy study".⁶⁶ It was ongoing formation in and through life against the background of the Word.

The third secret was the careful and *constant use of time*. "In the more than thirty years that I have known him, I do not remember a single moment when he could have been said to be idle. As soon as he finished one matter, he began another. How often he was known to spend five and even six hours in the confessional, and then go to his room where he began at once to receive those who wanted to speak with him, which could take several hours. How often too he was seen to return, almost exhausted, from preaching or hearing confessions in the prisons, and on being asked to rest a little before giving his usual conference replied: the conference will provide me with a rest".⁶⁷

⁶⁵ BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*, Paravia, Turin 1860, p. 91-95. Cf.: OPERE EDITE, vol. XII, p. 351ff. In the *Appendix*, Don Bosco inserts the *Pensieri del sacerdote Caffasso Giuseppe per passar bene la giornata*: "1. Do everything as Our Lord Jesus Christ would have done it. - 2. Do everything in the way you would want to have done it if you were asked about it at God's judgement seat. - 3. Do everything as if it were the final action of your life. - 4. Do everything as if you had nothing else to do" (*ibid.*, p. 110).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

The fourth secret was his *temperance* which in him was a prudent penance, and which in Don Bosco reveals the consistency of the elements that make up salesian spirituality. *Without great sobriety*, he says, *it is impossible to become holy*. "Along these lines every day, every week, every month and the entire year, except for mealtimes, he was able to use every scrap of time for the benefit of souls.

With these four secrets – concluded Don Bosco – Fr Cafasso was able to do many different things in a short time, and so bring charity to the highest degree of perfection: *Plenitudo legis dilectio* (Rom 13,10)".⁶⁸

b. *Intention.*

It is not true that any activity whatever, no matter how it is done, can be a prayer. For our activity to become an occasion for a meeting and communication with God, it must be performed in accordance with God's will and flow from intimate union with him.

The Salesian needs to set aside a specific time for personal and community prayer, not because he denies that daily life can be the place for meeting God in the young, or because he considers the only true kind of prayer to be that carried out in a church or chapel, but rather because he is aware of himself as a creature, and therefore as a sinner. For this very reason his attention can be sidetracked and he needs intimacy with the Lord to purify the motives for his activity, and so continue his relationship with God who wants to be present in his life.

Through explicit prayer, the Salesian searches in his inner self and purifies his fundamental option, reconfirming God as the Lord of his own existence, who guides his life and gives meaning to all he does. In explicit personal and community prayer, the Salesian recognizes the priority of the choice of God as the supreme love which excludes everything opposed to him.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

If this purification of the intention, which stems from intimate union with God, is lacking, activity – even of the kind we call apostolic – becomes a work of our own hands and therefore a cause of spiritual impoverishment. “The characteristic sobriety that Don Bosco wanted is to be interpreted therefore, not as a relaxed minimalism but in reference to the context. In this case to the rich and intensely supernatural atmosphere of the Oratory at Valdocco, as an irradiation of the sanctity of Don Bosco and as a result of the fervent environment he had created among the boys, in which without any doubt God was the centre of everything”.⁶⁹

Transformation of the life of prayer presupposes, therefore, a deep union with God. Only then can explicit prayer diminish, so to speak, because the activity, transformed into prayer, springs from where the soul loses itself in God.⁷⁰

c. Feeling ourselves God's instruments for the benefit of the young.

Against the risk of the widespread unbridled search for efficiency and successful results, the Salesians feel the need in their work for an attitude of *radical humility*. It is a matter of remaining faithful to a mission they have received. Hence before one of giving, our mission is one of receiving. We are not proprietors of the Kingdom, nor of the task we have been given. The Vineyard has its Master. Work becomes prayer if it is done in a spirit of obedience and readiness towards Him who has sent us: “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake”.⁷¹

The Salesian behaves as a “mystic” in action when, though aware of his own weakness, he labours at finding out what is pleasing to God and allows himself to be guided by the will of Him who wants all men to be saved.

⁶⁹ RICCERI L., ASC 269, 1973, p. 45

⁷⁰ Cf. Ibid. p. 46

⁷¹ 2 Cor 4, 5

The spiritual life of the Salesian consists specifically in allowing this divine love to fill his heart, so that he can spread it among the young. The "silence of all one's being", of which the SGC speaks, "is born from the need of always advancing in greater intimacy with God 'loved above all and without limit': a silence which can place us in the condition of really listening to God, and of identifying ourselves ever more with his plan of redemption".⁷²

The Salesian knows that he has been chosen to be the witness and instrument of this active presence of God in history. From this follows how his actions are preceded by and subject to a more powerful presence. For this he gives thanks and praise. Through his presence the youngster is touched by a new love, both powerful and transforming.⁷³

Being a "sign and bearer of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor"⁷⁴ translates for the Salesian into the triple attitude of compassion, closeness and intercession which leads effectively to salvation for the young.

d. *Discovering the presence of the Spirit in the life of the young.*

The Constitutions speak of docility and readiness in the continual renewal of our attention to the Spirit: "Attentive to the

⁷² Cf. SGC, 552

⁷³ As an example we have the testimony of Don Albera: "Don Bosco loved us in a manner all his own... I felt that I was loved in a manner I had never felt before, not even in the deep love of my unforgettable parents. Don Bosco's love for me was something that surpassed any other affection... His love attracted us, won us over, and transformed our hearts! And it could not be otherwise because everything he said and did showed forth the holiness of his union with God, who is perfect love. He drew us to himself by the fullness of the supernatural love which he stirred up in our hearts... We were his, because in each of us was the certainty that he was truly a man of God in the word's most comprehensive sense... In his sanctity lay the secret of the attraction which conquered us for ever and transformed our hearts. His preventive system was nothing else but charity, i.e. the love of God which reached and embraced all human creatures, especially the young and inexperienced": P. ALBERA, *Circular Letter*, 18 October 1921: *Don Bosco our model*, Turin, Direzione Generale Opere Salesiane, 1965, 373-375

⁷⁴ C 2

presence of the Spirit and doing everything for God's love, (the Salesian) becomes like Don Bosco a contemplative in action".⁷⁵

The Spirit is active in the depths of every human conscience. We must be able to discover and interpret this mysterious presence, recognize its signs, single out its particular applications, and the various manifestations of the Spirit in young lives.

With joyful surprise the Salesian finds God at work in a receptive heart, in an open group, in a commonplace or unexpected happening. For this reason he is ready to meet the youngster wherever he is to be found, conscious of interpreting in this way the meaning of the divine action so as to be its servant and visibly collaborate in it. And more particularly, he is convinced that God speaks secretly to every young person and earnestly prompts him to a Covenant dialogue in this particular and decisive moment of his personal history.

Rather than condemnation, the Salesian prefers discernment as an instrument for the reading of history from a Christian standpoint – a criterion which implies an acceptance of facts without either prejudice or naïveté; indeed, history is the place where you read the "signs", i.e. relevant meanings for the Christian faith (cf. Mt 16,4).⁷⁶

To the diagnosis of the signs of the times corresponds the therapy of updating, so as to "lend an ear to the voices of the earth"⁷⁷ and thus establish a living and vital rapport with the past, present and future.

⁷⁵ C 12

⁷⁶ From the abundant bibliography on discernment, I quote some recent publications: J. M^a. CASTILLO, *El discernimiento cristiano. Para una conciencia crítica*, Salamanca, Sígueme, 1984; M. COSTA, *Sentire, giudicare, scegliere, nello Spirito*, Rome, CVX, 1995; M. RUIZ JURADO, *Il discernimento spirituale. Teologia, storia, pratica*, Cinisello Balsamo, San Paolo, 1997; *L'attitudine al discernimento*, Milan, Ancora, 1998; E. FORTUNATO, *Il discernimento. Itinerari esistenziali per giovani e formatori*, Bologna, EDB, 1999

⁷⁷ JOHN XXIII, *Discorsi, messaggi, colloqui del Santo Padre Giovanni XXIII*, I, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1960, 10

In this way, contemplation has its part in the complete giving of ourselves in the service of the young and of people in general, by accepting its daily consequences after the example of the Good Shepherd: participating in God's fatherliness, working like him in favour of life from the most elementary forms (food, housing, instruction) to the very loftiest (revelation of the Gospel, life of faith).

The Salesian plays out his role as an "instrument of God's love for the young" in practical and historical terms: "The Salesian must have a practical sense and be alert to the signs of the times, convinced that God is calling him through the prevailing needs of time and place".⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

Up to this point we have been considering some points about the prayer of the Salesian. Using Don Bosco's words we may call it the *prayer of the "da mihi animas"*. It should permeate all salesian activity for the benefit of the young. Don Bosco insists that his followers link together in a single reality work (which can border on the hectic) and prayer, (which is to breathe God so that every action may be part of a "psalter of good works").

We must remember that personal maturing and growth as a community are not mutually exclusive; indeed they must give each other reciprocal support and integration. "We can form praying communities", we are told by our Rule of life, "only if individually we become men of prayer".⁷⁹

"The action of the Spirit is for the professed member a lasting source of grace and a support for his daily efforts to

⁷⁸ cf. J. AUBRY, *Al centro della santità salesiana: la carità apostolica. Abbozzo di una spiritualità dell'azione salesiana*, in M. MIDALI (Ed.), *Spiritualità dell'azione. Contributo per un approfondimento*, Rome, LAS, 1977, p. 207-228

⁷⁹ C 93

grow towards the perfect love of God and men. The confreres who are living or have lived to the full the gospel project of the Constitutions are for us a stimulus and help on the path to holiness".⁸⁰

The prayer of our Saints.

The testimony of our brothers and sisters on their way to the honours of the altar shows us that this form of prayer is not something fanciful and unrealistic, but has already been used by members who have lived it in daily life, as is confirmed by the experts who have examined their lives and virtues in the light of theology. It is interesting to look back on their lives as consecrated or lay people, because one thing appears in all of them: they always prize highly some explicit practices or moments, often with personal touches, and the confiding of their work and life itself into the hands of God.

Recently we celebrated the canonization of **Bishop Aloysius Versiglia**.

He once wrote to the Carmel at Florence: "Let us lift up our hearts ever higher, let us be more forgetful of ourselves and speak more of God, so as to serve him better, to give him greater consolation, for the saving of souls. You, Sisters, will be able to speak more easily to us of the delicacy of the love of Jesus, while we perhaps can speak to you of the wretched state of so many souls who are a long way from God and of the need to bring them back to him; we shall feel ourselves raised up in the love of God; you will find yourselves prompted to greater zeal".⁸¹

In connection with the Venerable **Artemides Zatti** we have heard in particular of his tireless charity.⁸² The intensity

⁸⁰ C 25

⁸¹ Letter to the Florence Carmel, Sal. Archives 9,3, Vers.

⁸² *Positio*, p. 212

with which the Servant of God lived the sense of God's presence, led him to see Christ in the sick and the suffering, even to the extent of his manner of speaking: "Sister, please make a bed ready for the good Lord". We find this trait referred to frequently by witnesses during the process.

"The impression I received", said one witness, "was that he was a man *united with God*. Prayer was like the breath of his soul; everything he did showed that he was living the first commandment of God to the full: he loved him with all his heart, mind and soul".⁸³

"It was evident", added another, "that the Servant of God *prayed continually*; on his bicycle he prayed while he pedaled, just as he prayed when looking after the sick [...]; with spontaneous expressions of faith, he used to repeat *phrases which lifted up the spirit, even with religious*".⁸⁴ And again: "As both a youth and an adult Zatti moved in a *supernatural sphere*, without any other concern than the glory of God and the salvation of souls."⁸⁵

Fr Aloysius Variara⁸⁶ is also on the way to beatification.

The Christian and religious life of Fr Variara was characterized by an intense theological vision and constant priestly and missionary activity. The living faith, which was the source of his spiritual strength, was so simple and powerful that it left no room for tiredness or discouragement; and it was precisely through faith that he succeeded in overcoming all the obstacles that arose in his path, always and uniquely absorbed as he was in the love of God and his neighbour.

The love of Fr Variara for God is witnessed to by his manner of prayer, his eucharistic fervour, his devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The kind of apostolate he carried out

⁸³ *Summarium*, p. 43, n. 160

⁸⁴ *Summarium*, p. 179, n. 731

⁸⁵ *Summarium*, p. 182, n. 743

⁸⁶ PINARTE E., Osservatore Romano 4.12.1997

constitutes the best testimony of love for his neighbour and of the heroic fortitude with which he carried it out to the last.

The liturgy of life.

To this brief reference to our Saints and Servants of God, which could indeed have been further developed, I add a description of educative daily prayer taken from the text of the GC23: "For the salesian, educating youth to the faith means 'work and prayer'. He is aware that by committing himself to the salvation of the young he is experiencing something of the fatherhood of God (...). Don Bosco has taught us to recognize God's operative presence in our work of education, and to experience it as light and love (...). We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognizing their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life.

In this way our work of education becomes the preeminent context in which to meet him",⁸⁷ and of the contemplation of his work in the life of man.

The educator is called to recognize God working in the human person and to put himself at his service. This is something similar to what Mary had to do for the divine consciousness of Jesus to be manifested historically in his humanity. Mary had to accompany him and sustain him with food, affection, advice, the teaching of language and traditions, human relationships, how to use religious words and gestures, without knowing anything of what would later be revealed by this son of hers.

A mysterious dialogue takes place between every young person and what reaches him from outside, what arises within himself, and what he discovers through experience, grace or sense. He gradually acquires a full awareness of himself and

⁸⁷ GC23, 94-95

formulates a plan of life in which he wagers his strengths and tries out his possibilities.

The educator is called upon to offer everything he thinks opportune, with a hopeful attitude as regards future unknowns. He takes a sincere interest in this as yet insecure human being who is maturing. In him, in fact, God will be received and will manifest himself ever more clearly as the child grows.

The educator therefore – whether he be parent, teacher, friend or animator – must keep alive the awareness that he is part of a festive encounter of God with the young. He is the friend of the bridegroom, not the protagonist but a help and active spectator, as Mary was at the marriage-feast of Cana.

Precisely in the faith which discerns the action of God, in the hope that looks forward to his manifestation in the life of the young, and in the charity with which he puts himself at the disposal of the young person and of the bridegroom, are sentiments developed and the moments of education lived as prayer in joy, expectation, pain, effort and apparent failure. Thanks-giving, rejoicing and sorrow are interspersed with intercession, desire and prayer.

The liturgical celebration has a *Kyrie*, a *Gloria*, a *Credo*, an offertory, an aspect of symbolism, a community, times of penance and exultation. In the same way the liturgy of life has moments of gratification and others of disappointment, of initiative and of waiting, of solitude and of company. Space is there too (playground, school, neighbourhood!), and there are people to love and receive our heartfelt collaboration (the educating community).

The whole of it, lived in the light of God's operative presence, becomes prayer and contemplation. It happens as in communication between persons who know each other well: feelings can be expressed by words, by gestures, by a gift or a glance, by silence, by a visit or by a telephone or fax message.

It is a matter, as St Augustine would say, of "taking in hand the Psalter of good works and using it to sing the Lord's praises".

But it must be kept in mind that there is a relationship between a continuous attitude of prayer and the exercise of prayer, between prayer in word and prayer in life, between prayer expressed explicitly in words and prayer diffused through the whole day, between the celebration of the liturgy and the liturgy of life. And it is perhaps in this relationship that difficulties lie, but in which is to be found at the same time the rich value for the Salesian, and hence a fundamental point in his spiritual and apostolic formation.

The two elements or aspects are important for one another, both for the stability and fullness of consecrated life. If one is left aside, the other goes with it.

Anyone who educates or advises others needs time for learning and especially for concentration. "Many think that prayer comes spontaneously and do not want to hear about how to do it, but they are mistaken".⁸⁸

There is a need for a calm and progressive introduction to the different forms of prayer: vocal, mental, reading, silence, contemplation, use of formulas, creativity. They need to be practised at different times and in different situations, until they become so much a part of life that they automatically flow in and out of us in many ways and forms.

Practice produces a habit: regularity is a decisive factor; there is a time for all the important things in life, a moment specifically reserved for them; if something cannot be done at the customary time, we immediately fix another for it. So it is for eating, sleeping, ablutions.

The community practices are indispensable for us: places, times, forms, the community itself. I say "for us", because the community style covers all the aspects of our life. For other religious it may be different. But personal application is needed as well. The manner and results of this application vary. Each one has his own way of praying, just as he has his own way of

⁸⁸ GUARDINI R., *Lettere su autoformazione*, p. 91

speaking, walking and looking at things. In this key are to be interpreted greater or lesser feelings of emotion, distractions, preferences for reflection or formulas, and periods of tiredness.

With all this necessarily in mind, we must recognize that the prayer of the Christian is always a gift. Christ is the only one who prays. He incorporates us into his prayer in the Spirit. Of ourselves we know neither what to say nor how to say it. The Spirit puts on our lips what we should ask for: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God".⁸⁹

"Often", writes one author, "books and guides talk about prayer as though it were an ability we must acquire by our own efforts like a science or a particular skill (...), but we get lost in the intricacies of the process and our desire to be able to pray is once again frustrated". "Lord, teach us to pray".

Our life needs to combine reflection and practice, study and activity, silence and being with others, even though in our case we are not tied to a rigid timetable. And this in the ordinary circumstances of life in which we are exposed to a multiplicity of factors, to stress and strain, to the piling up of commitments.

Introducing young people to prayer.

A last point, but by no means one of least importance, is that of introducing young people to prayer. As thanksgiving to God, a first general level is offered to everyone through catechesis, well prepared daily prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist and feasts.

⁸⁹ Rom 8, 26-27

Youth groups that follow Salesian Youth Spirituality are better able to integrate explicit prayer with the offering of themselves for others according to God's plan. In these groups emerge animators and leaders, who must not be mere managers or coordinators but true animators, according to their age and preparation, of a human and spiritual experience. It is a good thing if among the groups and for the members there are specific occasions and schools of prayer.

The participation of young people in our community prayer, when times and circumstances permit, can also be both a stimulus and a challenge. Let us not forget that from this can spring wisdom of life through listening to the Word, sharing, awareness of our particular kind of approach, and attention to the Spirit.

Mary, personification of our prayer.

Mary is the icon, model and inspiration of this form of prayer: in the dialogue of the Annunciation, in the grateful joy of the *Magnificat*, the surprise in the temple, the attentive care of Jesus, and the following of him even to the Cross.

There is a specific moment when Mary's attitude appears in simple but essential splendour. The moment of the Incarnation is an event of little apparent significance, taking place in a small country, in a largely unknown town, away from places where important things happen and decisions are made which have a great influence on people. Bethlehem was just about the opposite of Rome, Jerusalem or Babylon. The grotto was the antithesis of a throne, a temple or a palace.

And the fact could have remained like that for ever: hidden and without significance. It was the proclamation of the angels that gave it its news value for the shepherds who heard not only the story of what had happened, but also its saving significance: the newborn child was not just any person, but the long awaited one, the Saviour.

Thus does Luke reproduce the nature of the evangelization. It is not a doctrine about God and the world, nor does it merely teach religious or ethical truths, but relates events that actually took place, showing the significance they have for man and the message they contain. The light shining through the proclamation came from God, but it was contained and revealed in the facts of human history.

And here Luke emphasizes the different degrees of knowledge which the different people had of the Incarnation and its meaning, which is like the key for living in faith all the other events of personal and social life.

The *shepherds* had to go to the spot where the Incarnation took place and could be direct witnesses. They stayed for a short time and listened to Mary. Then they returned and recounted what they had been told about the child. They had no personal experience of what had happened earlier, like the annunciation and the virgin birth, and had not even been present when Jesus first appeared.

The *people* who heard what the shepherds said were astonished at what they had to say. They did not yet express any faith, but were caught up in that initial interest and curiosity that follows a surprising event that can be the beginnings of faith.

"*Mary*, for her part, treasured all these things in her heart".⁹⁰ She had no need to come, as the shepherds did, to the place of the Incarnation. She was already there; she was part of the event. She did not need to hear from others what had happened and its significance. She remembered all the promises that had been made to humanity, as is evident from the *Magnificat*, and was aware that he who had grown in her womb came from the Holy Spirit.

Mary did not leave the place of the event as the shepherds did, once they had seen the child. She stayed there. She could

⁹⁰ Lk 2, 51

not go away. Wherever Jesus is incarnate, she is indispensable. She did not yet understand all the significance stemming from the event, nor could she foretell all the force and energy that would flow from the Incarnation.

These were things to be revealed during Christ's life on earth and through the centuries. But Mary kept the remembrance of the event in her heart as something very dear to her; she was attentive to it and occasionally thought back on it and drew new consequences from it.

This is Luke's meditation, and it may suggest also to us some point of reflection on our pastoral spirituality.

It is not possible for us to be mere visitors, tourists of the word and mystery of Christ. Saint Augustine, comparing the attitudes of the three categories of persons of whom we have spoken, asks the Christian: Which do you resemble? Those who heard the proclamation and were merely amazed? The shepherds who came to the grotto, took note of what had happened and left to noise it abroad? Or Mary, who gathered the whole truth of Christ, kept it in her heart and meditated on it continually? The admiration of the first group soon wore off; the information of the shepherds, though dictated by faith, was imperfect and rudimentary. Only one who contemplates and makes his own the mystery of Christ can draw from it new light and significance for today's times and people.

Church history has many figures of first class evangelizers. They are all patient meditators on the Word and humble contemplators of the mystery. What they have reflected on deeply in prayer and study they express in their preaching, writings and their leadership of the Christian community in the guidance of souls.

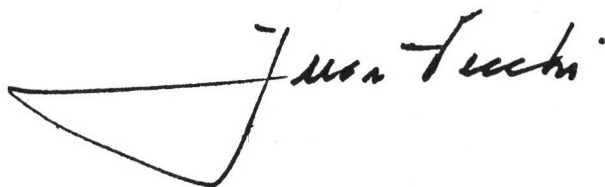
To communicate the event of Christ is our profession and the purpose of our vocation. In this we must be specialists; by approaching it calmly and unhurriedly, we draw light for our personal life, and we compare it as a community with what we observe in our environment: this is what we mean by *interioriza-*

tion. It is not a technical operation but the effect of zeal: "I became your father in Christ".⁹¹ We may say the same with respect to Christian education, where an expression of Don Bosco is very much *ad rem*: "I now see that we must safeguard the Congregation from spiritual coldness and decay by promoting the spirit of piety and religious community life".⁹²

We are called upon to make the presence of God transparently clear wherever we are: this before all else, and the rest will follow as a consequence.

With my prayers for a New Year rich in graces and blessings, I send you best wishes for a growth in your experience of prayer in the salesian spirit, so that being strengthened internally we can in truth be "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people".⁹³

With the protection of the Immaculate Help of Christians,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Juan Turchi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" that extends downwards and to the left, forming a large loop.

⁹¹ 1 Cor 4, 15

⁹² BM XIV, p. 436

⁹³ C 2

FOR A RENEWED COMMITMENT IN FORMATION: REVISION OF THE RATIO CALLED FOR BY THE GC24

Fr. Giuseppe NICOLUSSI
Councillor General for Formation

On 8 December the Rector Major Fr Juan E. Vecchi promulgated the revised text of the salesian Ratio which, like the preceding editions, bears the title: ***Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco***. At the same time he promulgated the third edition of the booklet: *Directives and norms for salesian vocation discernment. Admissions*.

It is well to associate the word *Ratio* with the care of the Congregation for the vocation of each of its members. The *Ratio*, says the Rector Major, "bears witness in concrete form to the love of the salesian vocation and to those who are called to live it in the Church. It is an expression of the responsibility of the Congregation, which is committed to the discovery and acceptance of the gift of God, and to ensure its joyful and faithful realization".¹

The *Ratio*

The *Ratio* has the Constitutions as its fundamental point of reference, and from them draws its vision of the consecrated life, the profile of the Salesian, and the criteria and norms for formation.

In the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* and in the General Regulations are expressed the purpose and features of the *Ratio*.

¹ Presentation of *Directives and norms for salesian vocation discernment*

In *Vita Consecrata*, in fact, we read: "The ratio responds to a pressing need today. On the one hand, it shows how to pass on the Institute's spirit so that it will be lived in its integrity by future generations, in different cultures and geographical regions; on the other hand, it explains to consecrated persons how to live that spirit in the different stages of life on the way to full maturity of faith in Christ".²

And our Regulations specify the content and fundamental thrust of this "practical guide at world level" for salesian formation as follows: "The *Ratio* sets out in an organic and instructive way the complexus of principles and norms concerning formation which are found in the Constitutions, general Regulations and other documents of the Church and of the Congregation".³

Reasons and purpose of this revision

What were the motives which prompted the GC24 to ask for the revision of the *Ratio* 1985, while recognizing the validity of its set-up, and the criteria and directives it contained? In the decree of promulgation the Rector Major summed them up as follows:

"The Chapter:

- took into consideration the guidelines of the Church on the consecrated life and priestly ministry which had appeared after the publication of the previous edition, particularly the apostolic exhortations *Vita Consecrata* and *Pastores Dabo Vobis*,
- the challenges of evangelization and inculturation, of considerable impact for a vocation which develops at world level in a variety of contexts,

² VC 68

³ R 87

- the new aspects of salesian vocational experience underlined by recent General Chapters,
- the need to make a suitable response to present day requirements and to problems of formation.”

Certainly between 1985 and the present day there has been a considerable change in the *vocational and formative situation* in the Congregation; one need think only, for example, of the development that has taken place in Africa and in some parts of Asia and Oceania, of the changed conditions in Eastern and in Western Europe. New emphases and problems characterize salesian religious life and experience, new challenges confront the charismatic responsibility of the Congregation, new requirements crop up in every project of consecrated life and pastoral mission.

These motives and other considerations prompted the members of the General Chapter to consider a *strategic renewal of formative practice*, a greater *practical coherence* with the existing guidelines and, in this perspective, the *revision of the Ratio*. It is clear that such a revision was wanted for the purpose of a renewal of formative practice at the service of the quality of formation and of salesian vocational experience, and not as a simple updating of a book on formation.

The revision

In carrying out the revision the *intentions and indications of the GC24* were kept in mind, as further specified by the Rector Major and by the General Council, and careful attention was given to observations and suggestions coming from the Provinces, which had been asked to make such contributions, and from specialists who were consulted.

The text preserves a *substantial continuity* with the preceding edition (as is suggested by the very word ‘revision’), continuity in structure, basic criteria and style.

The *text* is arranged in *two parts*, followed by four appendices.

The *first part* – *Salesian formation in general* – deals in four chapters with the main elements of salesian formation: its points of reference and, in particular, vocational identity, values and attitudes to be cultivated, and methodological procedures to be preferred.

The *second part* – *The salesian formation process* – covers in eight chapters the various phases of formative experience seen in the perspective of ongoing formation.

The *appendices* refer to the provincial directory, the provincial plan of formation and the studies. The fourth provides a list of church and salesian documents which concern formation.

Each chapter has a section with the title: *Practical Guidelines and Norms*. This section gathers together some normative elements or suggested procedures helpful for formation.

As a supplement to what is said in the *Ratio* concerning vocational discernment, is added the booklet *Directives and norms for salesian vocation discernment. Admissions*.

Some aspects needing emphasis

It is not the purpose of this brief presentation to emphasize the characteristic elements of the revision that have been made, not least because some of them do not refer to individual points but affect the entire document transversally. Those with a certain familiarity with the previous document will spot them quite easily.

It is easy to see, even at a first glance, *some structural modifications*, e.g. a simplification of the initial part and a different arrangement of chapter four, which deals with lines of methodology; the taking of the four aspects of formation (human, spiritual, intellectual and educative-pastoral) as the scheme for the presentation of formative experience in the individual phases; a more balanced integration of intellectual formation with the

other areas; the importance attributed to the prenovitiate and to preparation for perpetual profession in the dynamics of the salesian formative process; the greater amplitude given to pedagogical and methodological indications.

Among the *aspects given particular importance* may be noted: the criterion of charismatic identity and vocational quality, and the central nature of apostolic consecration; the personalization and inculturation of formative experience; the perspective of ongoing formation, the sharing of the mission and spirit with the laity, and formation together; the role of the Salesian in the new working model; the importance of a true formative attitude in every confrere and in formation guides, and an animation corresponding to an organic and unified project; the consistency of communities and teams, the responsibility of every Province shown in a real capacity for reflection, verification and proposals, and the need for decisive inter-provincial collaboration.

An invitation and a responsibility: taking the *Ratio* and translating it into renewed formational practice.

The revision of the *Ratio* is meant to be a sign, a stimulus and a demand for a renewed and coherent practice.

The text is consigned by the Congregation to all Salesians. Confreres in formation will find in it a reasoned and practical invitation to a personal identification with their vocation.

The document is entrusted in a special way to the Provinces, and "directly concerns the Provincial and his Council, the Directors of communities, the Provincial Delegate and Commission for Formation, those holding responsibility for formation, and all those who are animators of vocations and of initial and ongoing formation".⁴ It is their duty to *know it, make it known,*

⁴ FSDB 17

and get it absorbed into the reality of the Province, and in general see to it that it becomes a *constant point of reference*. In the course of the process of revision some Provinces have found that the preceding *Ratio* was little known and valued.

The Provinces are committed to formation and quite a number are giving real priority to this responsibility. The publication of the *Ratio* and of the booklet *Directives and norms for salesian vocation discernment*, must constitute for all of them *the beginning of a process of careful and responsible comparison* between the formative situation of the province and the guidelines and indications of the Congregation, and of a consequent decisive reappraisal of the policy and practice of the province in this vital area. This process, which must involve all confreres in different ways, can also lead to a revision of the Provincial Directory (formation section), of the provincial plan of formation, and of the forms of interprovincial collaboration and shared responsibility.

As a first step in this process of consignment and acceptance, the Formation Department, in agreement with the Regional Councillors, will organize during the year 2001 meetings of Provincials, provincial delegates, members of provincial formation teams and formation guides. Other initiatives will follow at various levels and in different forms.

"More than new formulations", said the Rector Major at the end of the GC24 speaking of formation, "what is needed is adequate formative back-up",⁵ i.e. to ensure a greater practical coherence with what we have already.

"For a Province, which is the community responsible for inculturating the Salesian charism, accepting the spirit and the mind of the *Ratio* means establishing a formation climate and mentality at the level of the Province, a service of animation and government which accords real priority to the care of vocations".⁶

⁵ GC24 245

⁶ FSDB 18

“Formation”, declares the GC24, “aims at rendering the individuals capable of living at the present day the experience of their own life with maturity and joy, of fulfilling the educative mission with professional competence, of becoming educators and pastors, and of being solidly animators of numerous apostolic forces”.⁷ To foster the attainment of this objective the Chapter wanted the revision of the *Ratio* at the service of an authentic, faithful and creative vocational experience.

⁷ GC24 138

4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

In the months of October and November the Rector Major, while continuing the treatment prescribed by the doctors, took up again with an appropriate rhythm his work at headquarters and, though obliged to avoid long journeys, was able to take part in many significant events.

1 October, Sunday. He took part with the Holy Father in the solemn concelebration for the canonization of the salesian Martyrs, Bishop Aloysius Versiglia and Fr Callistus Caravario, included by the Pope in the group of 120 Chinese martyrs, together with Mother Maria Joseph of the Heart of Jesus, Mother Katharine Drexel and Sister Josephine Bakhita.

The salesian festivities continued in the afternoon with the official commemoration of the two martyrs in the Aula Magna of the Salesian Generalate. With the Rector Major and his Council were present two salesian Cardinals (Rosalio José Castillo Lara, and Antonio María Javierre Ortas), the Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Chris-

tians (Mother Antonia Colombo), the Bishops of Turin and Tortona (the native dioceses of the new saints) and a numerous group of Chinese pilgrims.

The central point of the function was the commemorative address given by Cardinal Castillo, and the final speaker was the Rector Major, who expressed the great joy of all the Salesian Family for its two new Saints, and gave the participants the first news of another coming event: the martyrs of Valencia, Spain, would be beatified on Sunday, 11 March 2001.

9 October. The Rector Major went to the UPS for the solemn opening of the Academic Year, and returned there again on 29 October to meet the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and to visit Fr Archimdes Pisanazzi.

27 October. Fr Vecchi received at the Generalate some thirty students of the senior course of the College "Gral. Belgrano" of Tucumán (Province of Córdoba, Argentina), who were visiting Italy to see the salesian holy places and

to receive from the hands of the Rector Major the past-pupil's badge. It was a very cordial meeting and Fr Vecchi celebrated Mass with them.

29 October, Sunday. He went to the "Madre Canta" house of the FMA to meet the Sisters and bless a new extension to the premises. After a reading of the word of God and the blessing he gave a brief reflection on the significance of the event in which they were engaged.

31 October. Opening in the Aula Magna of the Generalate of the 3rd International Convention on the History of Salesian Work, which ended on **5 November** with a Eucharistic Concelebration at which the Rector Major presided, and with the election of the new presidency of ACSSA. Fr Vecchi introduced the work on the 31st and gave a concluding address in the evening of 4 November.

11 November, Saturday. The Rector Major went to Turin to preside at the solemn Concelebration and function for the presentation of the missionary crucifix to the 113 departing missionaries. Many priests were present.

The Basilica was filled to capacity. At the beginning of the celebration Mgr. Peradotto brought greetings from the Archbishop of

Turin, Mgr. Severino Poletto. Before the reading of the gospel Fr Luciano Odorico spoke and presented each of the missionaries by name and destination. It was a list heard with emotion as each one responded personally. Fr Vecchi gave the homily (cf. n. 5.2. of these Acts).

After the Eucharistic concelebration everyone moved over to the theatre, almost completely restructured, for the entertainment in honour of the Rector Major. This was the second of the day's events: the Rector Major's Feast-day. The Mother General of the FMA was present with a large crowd of other persons. The spectacle consisted in a musical presentation entitled: "A dream without frontiers" given by the "Bearzi" Theatrical Group of Udine. It was a representation of a dream of Don Bosco, presented in the light of the gospel parables of the Sower and the Good Samaritan. At the end Fr Vecchi went on to the stage to say a few words of gratitude and explain the significance of the feast.

12 November, Sunday. The Rector Major went to the "Andrew Beltrami House" at Valsalice to visit the sick confreres. He greeted the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary

and presented them with a copy of his book on salesian spirituality. He then went to the chapel to celebrate Mass for the sick Salesians and others who were gathered there, and gave the homily.

He explained to the confreres the reason for his visit: "I wanted to visit you today to tell you that our pastoral work for the young, our educative activity, our missionary efforts, are all sustained by God's grace through the contribution of the life and suffering of Salesians, of Salesian Sisters, and of all the other members of the Salesian Family, who offer to God not so much the material quantity of the things they can do, but the power of love and the desire the Kingdom of God can maintain to a high degree among young people and adults. I wanted to be in communion with you in this situation and circumstance. You are always in my thoughts, but I have thought of you especially between last July and the present day. Together we are all fulfilling the work Jesus has entrusted to us.

In the evening Fr Vecchi returned to Rome.

22 November. From this day until the morning of the 25th the assembly of the Union of Superiors General met at Ariccia. The

Rector Major took part in the initial deliberations in the evening of the 22nd.

26 November, Sunday. Solemnity of Christ the King. Fr Vecchi went to the "Valsé Pantellini" house of the FMA to celebrate Mass with the community.

29 November. This day marked the conclusion of the study seminar on: "The Oratory: its verification and relaunching in the new Italian context at the dawn of the third millennium". The Rector Major visited the participants and gave the Good Night.

30 November. Fr Vecchi went to the UPS, and specifically to the Community of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He was accompanied by his sister Rose and his niece Rosanna. The purpose of the visit was to greet and congratulate Fr Archimedes Pianazzi who that day reached the age of 94. Fr. Vecchi then presided at a Mass at which several confreres concelebrated. The four Sisters of the Sacred Hearts were present with others.

2 December. The Rector Major met the Cooperators and many Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Delegates in the Association of Cooperators, who were assembled at the "Sale-

sianum" from 1-3 December for the annual leaders' gathering. After a few words of greeting, Fr Vecchi reflected on the coming Congress of the Italian and Middle East Region, programmed for the early months of 2001.

3 December. Sunday. The Rector Major went to the FMA Generalate to celebrate Mass with the Sisters. He was warmly received and greeted by the Mother General Sr Antonia Colombo, the Vicar Sr Rosalba Perotti, the members of the General Council and other Sisters.

5 December. The plenary session of the General Council began, with the Rector Major presiding.

6 December. Fr Vecchi was once again at the UPS for the meeting of the Academic Senate.

7 December. The Rector Major traveled to Turin for the concluding ceremony of the salesian Jubilee year, held in the Church of St Francis of Assisi on 8 December, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. In the evening he went to the Leumann community, where he presided at the community's act of entrustment to Our Lady and gave the homily. Afterwards he stayed for supper and then returned to Valdocco for the night.

8 December. At 10 a.m. the Rector Major went to the Church of St Francis of Assisi for the solemn closing of the Salesian Jubilee. He was received by the Rector of the church, Fr Luigi Losacco, who accompanied him to the altar of the Guardian Angel, where Don Bosco celebrated his first Mass, and then to the sacristy to vest for Mass.

The church was full of people, many of them members of the Salesian Family. Fr Vecchi gave the homily (cf. n. 5.3 of these Acts). Before ending the Mass, all present proclaimed the act of entrustment to Mary. Before leaving, the Rector Major left a written record of the event in the memorial book, which contains the signatures of Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Castillo Lara, and other illustrious visitors. Then after a final visit to the room where Don Bosco first taught catechism and the tiny playground where he gathered some 80 youngsters, Fr Vecchi returned to Valdocco for lunch.

In the afternoon he went once again to visit the sick in the "Andrew Beltrami" House, and recounted to them the events of the morning, before returning to Valdocco, where he presided at Vespers with the combined commu-

nities. The following day he returned to Rome.

11 December. The Rector Major gave the opening address at the international meeting of provincial and national delegates for social communication. The same evening, accompanied by Fr Nicolussi, he went to the UPS for the traditional Christmas greetings to the confreres of the various communities. He spoke to them about various points: the jubilee process, the missionary expedition, the conclusion of the salesian jubilee, the historical convention, the meeting of salesian bishops scheduled for next May, and the run-up to the GC25.

12 December. The Rector Major met the confreres who had taken part in the course of missionary formation. They watched a missionary film together, and afterwards he gave the Good Night.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Councillors

The Vicar General

In the period August-November 2000, because of the state of the Rector Major's health, Fr Van Looy preferred to stay in Rome as

much as possible.

5 August. He presided at the celebration of the perpetual profession of the FMA at Rome.

12 and 13 August. He accompanied the Rector Major to Turin (Valdocco and Colle Don Bosco), to participate in the Forum 2000, the international meeting of the SYM.

18 August. He went to Argentina to take part in the celebrations for the centenary of the "Leo XIII" Institute and the "Don Bosco" College at Buenos Aires. He visited the mission of Río Gallegos, the novitiate at Alta Gracia and preached the retreat for the SDB and FMA superiors of the Provinces of Buenos Aires and of La Plata.

4 September. He returned to Rome, and the same day left for Belgium to spend a few days with his family.

25 to 27 September. He took part in a meeting at Bonn on globalization, organized by the Missions Office in collaboration with the "Adenauer Stiftung" institution. Taking part in the same meeting were Salesian Bishops, Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians of all continents.

1 October. He was at the ceremony in Rome for the canoniza-

tion of our two martyrs of China.

7 October. He went to Mestre for the meeting of the Triveneto Past-pupils.

8 October. He was at Milan for a SDB and FMA provincial convention on the Oratory.

19 October to 29 November. He made the annual canonical visitation of the Generalate community "Blessed Michel Rua".

27 and 28 October. He was involved with the Council of the World Union of Catholic Educators (UMEC) at Rome.

31 October to 5 November. Convention of salesian historians in Rome.

11 November. He was with the Rector Major in Turin for the ceremony of the departure of the missionaries.

22 to 27 November. He represented the Rector Major at the meeting of the Union of Superiors General on the theme of globalization.

25 November. He passed the whole day at the "Villa Sora" Institute at Frascati in celebrating the centenary of the work with the educative community, the civic community – in the Town Hall – and the Salesian Family.

From 5 December he was involved in the plenary session of the General Council.

The Councillor for Formation

The basic and almost exclusive task of Fr Nicolussi and the members of the Department during this period has been the completing of the revision of the salesian Ratio, Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco, and of the booklet Directives and norms for salesian vocation discernment. Admissions; with the integration of the indications given by the General Council during the June-July session, and the preparation of this third edition for printing.

The two documents were promulgated by the Rector Major on 8 December. Members of the Department undertook the task of making translations in English and Spanish. The French and Portuguese editions are being made by other confreres at the Generalate and are in an advanced stage of preparation.

The Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work

On 3 August Fr Domenech took part in a meeting with other members of the Department for the immediate preparation of the World Forum of the SYM, which

began at Colle Don Bosco on the 6th with the participation of 200 young animators representing all countries and provinces. With Sr Georgina McPake, the corresponding General Councillor of the FMA, he accompanied the young people during the days of the Forum (6-13 August) and was with them also in Rome for the World Day of Youth from August 15-20. These were periods of powerful experience for all concerned, for a deepening of salesian spirituality and for a development of the universal and ecclesial sense of the SYM.

From 22 to 25 August Fr Raul Rojas represented the Department at a meeting of provincial delegates of the salesian schools of Brazil. From there he went on to Cochabamba (Bolivia) for a meeting with the provincial animators of the Andean countries and of the central commission of coordination for the preparation of the American meeting on the salesian school. These meetings form part of the process which is taking place together with the FMA in the American continent for the animation of the sector of the salesian schools and professional formation centres.

From 1-3 September the Councillor was present at a meeting of

rectors, parish priests and local councillors of the Roman Province, to explain more deeply the fundamental lines of salesian youth pastoral work.

From 9-10 of the same month he presented to the Salesians and young people of the SYM of the Milan Province the pastoral project for the year 2000-2001. On the same occasion he presided at the celebration of the perpetual profession of four confreres.

On 27 September he left for a visit of animation to the Manaus Province of Brazil, where he had a meeting from 2-4 October with the pastoral animators of the communities. From there he went on to the Vice-province of Haiti, where he had a meeting with the provincial pastoral commission and visited some of the salesian works.

From 8-13 October he was at Jarabacoa (Santo Domingo) to animate a retreat for the rectors of the Antilles Province on the theme of the coming General Chapter.

From 16-20 October he was at West Haverstraw (New Rochelle), where he took part in a meeting of the Provincials of the Inter-american Region, with whom he examined the situation of youth pastoral work in the Region.

In the meantime Fr Raul Rojas took part at Jarabacoa (Santo Domingo) in a second meeting from 2-6 October with the provincial delegates for marginalization of the provinces of the Interamerican Region.

On 20 October the Councillor was present at the annual assembly of the SYM of Spain, and on the 27th left for Manila to animate the course of youth pastoral work for the delegates and teams of the provinces of East-Asia.

11 November he returned to Italy to accompany the Rector Major at the solemn ceremony of the departure of the missionaries.

From 20-25 November he was at Nairobi in Kenya for the meeting of the Africa and Madagascar Region on marginalization. In this meeting with 45 confreres and lay collaborators from all the circumscriptions of the Region, a study was made of ways of responding with better educative and salesian quality to the challenges posed by the present state of poverty in Africa and Madagascar to the salesian mission.

Fr Domenech then returned to Rome for the plenary session of the Council.

The Councillor for the Salesian Family and for Social Communication

A. SALESIAN FAMILY Sector

In the period August–November 2000, Fr Martinelli has been involved in the following activities of a general character:

1. The drafting of the Mission Statement of the Salesian Family

The meeting of the General Councils of the Groups of the Salesian Family, from 1-5 June 2000, concluded with the commitment to finish the drafting of the Common Mission Statement, incorporating the observations expressed in the assembly. Basically the request was to reduce the length of the text without losing any of its content. Furthermore it had seemed necessary to clarify certain expressions and obligations indicated in the document.

With the collaboration of members of the Department, and the help of a group for reflection from the same Department the new draft was duly made. The Rector Major gave a final reading to the text and approved it on 25 November, the anniversary of the death of Mamma Margaret.

On 8 December the text was sent to those responsible for the various groups.

So far it is available in the following languages: English, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

2. Participation in some Regional Congresses of the Association of Salesian Cooperators.

The season of Cooperators Regional Congresses began some months ago. There are two fundamental points on the agenda of each congress:

- the election of the new World Councillor. Those elected, together with another five persons indicated by the Rector Major with the General Council, will form the next World Council;
- the study and deeper analysis of the themes laid down by the World Council and stated in the "working instrument" prepared by the Association. The nucleus of these concern the Association's autonomy with its consequent responsibilities for the plan of life and organization of the centres; and the communion of the Association with the other Groups of the Salesian Family.

3. The study of projects for the formation of leaders of the Don Bosco Past-pupils.

The Confederation of the Don Bosco Past-pupils is becoming ever more aware of the need of formation for its members. The World Council is therefore concerned about studying a formation program to be proposed to National and Provincial Federations. The aim is to be able to give more space to formation aspects during Past-pupil meetings.

To meet a need that has been expressed, time has also been given to a set of regulations for animation during congresses and conventions.

Meetings have been arranged with Federation Presidents and delegates to examine more deeply some aspects concerning local problems.

From 1-5 December 2000, finally, the Councillor took part in the 7th Congress of Asia and Australia at Bangkok. A characteristic of this meeting was the participation of Past-pupils, men and women, of all the Groups of the Salesian Family present in Thailand. It was an experience which deserves deeper reflection to reveal the care needed for the success of such meetings.

4. *The animation of some Provinces.*

In the period August-November 2000, the Councillor visited the following Provinces:

– *USA West.*

The visit of some two weeks, from 30 September to 11 October, provided an opportunity to meet rectors of communities for a two-day discussion on the theme of the 25th General Chapter. The SDB and FMA Provincial Councils held a joint day of work, to examine practical ways of working together and foresee methods of collaboration. The visit also provided an opportunity to meet groups of the Salesian Family and to celebrate the Family Feastday of the province.

– *Angola.*

From 1-11 November Fr Martignelli was engaged in the following activities in Angola:

- a Retreat for salesian confreres and some FMA;
- a visit to such SDB and FMA communities as could be reached in the time available; the visit served as an encouragement to the confreres in the difficult work they are doing;
- a meeting of the Salesian Family with a numerous represen-

tation of all Groups for an evening of reflection and fellowship;

- meetings with young confreres in formation.

5. *Participation in a regional meeting of the VDB in Turin.*

Profiting by the occasion of the promulgation of the Common Mission Statement, the Turin Region of the VDB organized a meeting (Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning) to reflect on the content of the document. A surprisingly large number of persons took part in a meeting which proved very profitable for an introduction to the rich contents of the Common Mission Statement.

B. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION Sector

The Department for Social Communication registered the following events in the period August-November:

1. *Reorganization of the Department.*

Fr Vito Orlando, formerly in charge of the information section, has gone to the UPS on the teaching staff, and Fr Sagayaraj Devadoss, formerly in charge of animation and formation, has gone to

Gerini as animator of the young salesian students of theology.

Fr Renato Butera, of the Province of Catania, has taken the place of Fr Orlando and Fr Devadoss has been replaced by Fr Peter Gonsalves of the Province of Mumbai.

2. *Meetings with directors and editors of Salesian Bulletins.*

Following the indications of the program for the present six-year period, after the general meetings for renewal and relaunching, other meetings have followed with editorial staffs of the Bulletin in different regions.

There have been three such meetings:

- *at León, in Spain.*

The participants were Salesians and lay people involved in the editing and publishing of the Salesian Bulletin from the whole of Europe, north and south, east and west. In a week's work from 24 August to 2 September practical questions were examined concerning editing, content, graphics and photography, administration and distribution, etc.

The same scheme was followed in the other two meetings.

- *at Cebu, in the Southern Philippines.*

From 16 to 21 October a similar meeting was held for those involved in the publication of the Salesian Bulletins of Asia. As at León lay people took part and showed great interest in this typically salesian work.

- *at Guadalajara, in Mexico.*

The third meeting was organized in the period 13 – 18 November for the whole of America: North, South and Centre.

After these meetings it must be recognized that the work done in recent years is beginning to bear fruit. The work of support and encouragement must be continued. It still remains to finish the work for Africa, with the possibility of a Salesian Bulletin with English and French editions.

2. *The convention of provincial delegates for social communication.*

Announced some time ago and after lengthy preparation, this convention finally took place at the Generalate from 11 to 20 December. The participation was highly significant having regard to the number involved and the commitment required to study, deeper analysis, and practical application.

The title of the convention was: Don Bosco communicator. Organizing social communication in the salesian provinces.

The aim and purpose were eminently practical. First, to outline, as clearly as possible, the figure and role of the provincial delegate and of his service for the benefit of the Provincial and his council, of the salesian communities, and of our young people.

All the reflection was carried out under three aspects all represented in the Department.

- *animation and formation.*

Intense dialogue between all the participants brought to light new elements in the work of social communication. The young confreres in particular, and the confreres in communities were the primary point of reference in the reflections and conclusions.

- *information.*

It was in the field of information that some of the most interesting questions were asked:

- how to put across the salesian image,
- to what extent is the educative and pastoral presence of the community significant and effective in the local context in which it is called to work.

Resources and instruments are already available. What is needed is a more unified coordination.

- *business enterprises and aspects of social communication.*

It was wonderful to note the extent of the social communication structures that the Congregation has available. They are the fruit of the ingenuity of certain confreres. It is important to develop them in line with the ever increasing lay presence in respect of the spirit and typical charism of Don Bosco.

The visit of the Councillor to the Provinces of San Francisco and Luanda provided an opportunity to verify what is being done in the field of communication and to see how the activities and initiatives of communication can be oriented.

The Councillor for the Missions

From 2 to 8 August, Fr Odorico made his Retreat. Then, after a brief stay in Rome he left for Harare in Zimbabwe for a rapid missionary visit.

He noted the positive development of salesian work and, accompanied by the Superior and

Economer of the Vice-province of Zambia, he visited also the Diocese of Hwange. With the Bishop, they studied the proposal for a second salesian work in Zimbabwe.

From 23 to 28 August he went to Paraguay for a visit of missionary animation to the training houses and a brief meeting in Chaco Paraguay with the Bishop, Mgr Ortiz and some missionaries.

From 28 to 30 August he was in Uruguay and on the 30th and 31st in Bolivia: in both provinces he engaged in missionary animation, with a meeting with departing missionaries and with volunteers.

In the period 1-7 September he visited the salesian works in the Pampas of the Province of La Plata, Argentina, accompanied by the Provincial and Vice-provincial. This visit helped to complete the vision of what were the first salesian missions together with those of Patagonia. It was a visit filled with deep memories of missionary history.

After this and a brief pause in Rome, Fr Odorico went to Brussels (18-19 September) to preside at the meeting of the International Mission Offices. The meeting reviewed projects in preparation and in execution and studied the

statutes of the Don Bosco network.

From 21 to 24 September he visited the Delegation of Myanmar (Burma), where he had a meeting with all the confreres and those in formation regarding the missions and missionary presence in the Congregation. The Delegation is at present in a period of positive development.

Before returning to Rome he made a brief visit to the Province of Vietnam (26-27 September). He had a meeting with the Provincial and his council to explain to them our commitment for Mongolia which is being entrusted to them. He presided also at a numerous assembly of Salesians and spoke to them of the missionary situation in the Congregation. He then returned to Rome, accompanied by a group of young confreres from Vietnam who were leaving for the missions.

1 October, he took part at Rome in the solemn canonization of our Chinese Martyrs, which truly placed the seal on salesian missionary praxis.

11-12 October, he made a brief visit to Ireland to meet departing missionaries who were busy learning English. He thanked the Provincial and the Irish Province for this missionary service.

14-15 October. Fr Odorico was in Sardinia for various meetings of missionary animation, with groups and adults and with animators of the SYM.

16 October. At the Salesian Institute in Florence he had a meeting with 20 young confreres in practical training in the Genoa Province, of whom 17 were non-Italians. He shared their experience of inculturation in an Italian context and of missionary reciprocity.

25-29 October. He went to the Cape Verde islands and with the Provincial visited the two salesian works and took part in the inauguration of new educative structures. The Portuguese Province has preserved these works for many years, with gratifying pastoral and vocational results. Returning to Portugal, he had two meetings for missionary animation at Fatima and Mogofores respectively.

From 5 to 12 November there took place, partly at Rome and partly at Turin, the meeting of the missionaries leaving in the Extraordinary Missionary Expedition. This was truly a historic event, not only because it was the 125th anniversary of the first expedition (1875), but because of the intense spiritual and voca-

tional intensity felt by all in the celebration. The culminating moment of this event was the function at Turin on 11 November, at which the Rector Major presided.

After some days in Rome, Fr Odorico left for Eritrea where he visited the promising salesian work at Dekemhare. Unfortunately the war situation prevents communication between the Salesians of Ethiopia and those of Eritrea and this will oblige us to re-plan salesian development in this area.

1 December. The Councillor went to the "San Zeno" Institute at Verona to preach the monthly retreat to the confreres of the community and to the Salesian Cooperators.

From 5 December he was at headquarters for the winter session of the Council.

The Economer General

30 July – 4 August. Fr Mazzali preached a retreat to a group of members of the Salesian Family at Como. From then until mid-August he was involved in dealings with the Piedmont Region concerning agreements for the leasing of part of the property of the SEI.

28 August - 4 September. He animated the summer-school for boys and young people of the Don Bosco Oratory of Sangano, Turin.

19-21 September. After a period of rest with his family, he participated with members of his Department in a meeting at the Generalate with the Provincial Economers of Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Hungary.

2-4 October. he animated the meeting of the Provincial Economers of the German and Austrian Provinces at Munich.

7 October. Fr Mazzali animated the day's retreat of the Dominic Savio community of the UPS, and on the following day that of the postnovitiate community of San Tarcisio.

20 October. He gave a conference to the confreres of the San Zeno community of Verona on poverty.

20 November. In addition to other matters of ordinary administration, during the month Fr Mazzali preached a half-day retreat to the Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco community. In the same month he represented the Salesian Headquarters in court at Savona, and provided for management rotation necessary at the SEI, with frequent contacts with his collaborators.

Particular care has been given throughout the period to the raising of funds for the Don Bosco Library at the UPS, and means for restoring the Aula Magna of the same University.

The Regional Councillor for Africa and Madagascar

During these months, Fr Antonio Rodríguez Tallón carried out the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the "San Luca" Province in Venezuela and Curaçao.

On 10 August, after a meeting at Caracas with the Provincial Council, he began the Visitation in the Vicariate Apostolic of Puerto Ayacucho, in the state of Amazonia. He was able to visit all the salesian foundations except those of Rio Negro. At Maroa he was able to participate in the funeral ceremonies for Fr. Wieslaw Kaczmarczyk, who had died tragically in a river accident. He had spent 27 years of his life working tirelessly in the area, and was greatly loved by the people.

After the visitation of this extensive missionary area, on 1 September he continued the visitation of the rest of the province which kept him occupied until 14 November. In the normal course

of events he participated on 28 October with numerous Bishops and Salesians of Venezuela at the Episcopal ordination of Mgr Luigi Secco SDB, who had been appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Willemstad, Curaçao, in the Dutch Antilles.

On 15 November he had a meeting with the Provincial and his Council, and on the following day with the Rectors, to share his first impressions of the Visitation.

17 November. Fr Antonio Rodríguez left for Rome where he spent a few hours before going on to Nairobi.

20–24 November. He took part in the Regional meeting organized by the Youth Pastoral Department on marginalized youngsters and young people in difficulties. All the circumscriptions of Africa and Madagascar were represented. The work was followed with great interest by the participants, who were able to get to know at first hand the works of the AFE Province in Nairobi for youngsters at risk.

Profiting by his presence in Nairobi, the Regional took part in a meeting with the AFE Provincial Council and spoke of the situation of our works in Sudan. He blessed, in the name of the Rector Major and together with the

Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work, the new house for the students of theology from all parts of English-speaking Africa.

25 November. He took part with many of the participants at the previous convention at another meeting entitled Streets-2000. Institutions in the state of Nairobi, dedicated to work for street-children had come together under the presidency of one of the Bishops and had gathered together also a goodly number of youngsters at risk. The meeting was intended to give hope to many people, and to urge all to seek other educative processes in the future, so as to avoid life on the streets.

On the same day the Regional flew to Khartoum to spend a week with the confreres and Sisters in the capital, visit the new work at Obeid, and see for himself the vast amount of ecclesial and salesian work being done in this country.

On 3 December he returned to Rome, and on the following day took part in a meeting with those responsible for salesian life in Angola and Mozambique to reflect on what collaboration is possible in present circumstances, and what can be done in the field of initial formation.

On 5 December the winter session of the Council began.

The Regional Councillor for Latin America - South Cone

4 August. Fr Baruffi began in Argentina the Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of Bahia Blanca which went on until 4 October.

During this period, on 27 August he took part in the annual pilgrimage to Chimpay, the birthplace of Zeferino Namuncurá: a popular manifestation centred on the figure of the young Mapuche.

1 October. He presided at the inauguration of the renewed Regional Missionary Museum at Fortin Mercedes, the most important memorial of salesian life in Patagonia.

4-9 October. The Regional was in the Province of Córdoba, where he had meetings with all the confreres in formation – prenovices, novices, practical trainees and students of theology – with the Rectors and the Provincial Council. He presided also at a meeting of the CISUR (Conference of Southern Provinces) and of the JIAR (Union of Argentinean Provinces) from 6-8 October.

From Argentina he went on to Brazil, where he took part at Porto Alegre in the opening of a new house for street-children and a meeting with salesian young peo-

ple, to whom he spoke about salesian youth spirituality.

14-18 October. In the Province of Belo Horizonte, Fr Baruffi took part in a meeting of salesian youth and in the function commemorating the centenary of the monument to Mary Help of Christians at Niteroi, the first salesian foundation in Brazil. He profited by the occasion to meet the Provincial Council and to speak to the Rectors gathered at Barbacena for a course of formation organized by the CISBRASIL.

20-29 October. He was in Recife to meet the Provincial Council and the Rectors and to visit the houses of formation. In the period 26-28 at Salvador (Bahia) he presided at a meeting of the CISBRASIL and took part in the closing celebrations of the centenary of the Salesian High School in Salvador.

30 October - 8 November. The Regional was in the Province of Manaus, where he had a meeting with the Provincial Council and the formation team, and visited the houses of formation of the province.

9-15 November. Finally he went back to Argentina, to the Province of Buenos Aires, where he had meetings with the Provincial Council and with all the Rectors,

and took part in the inauguration of the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians in the city of Rio Grande, Tierra del Fuego.

25 November. After a final day at Port Alegre for a medical check-up, Fr Baruffi returned to Rome.

The Councillor for the Interamerican Region

23-24 July. Fr Pascual Chavez, after leaving Rome for Mexico, spent two days on a visit to the communities of both Mexican Provinces.

25-27 July. He went on to Bolivia for a visit of animation to that province. At La Paz he had a meeting with the Provincial and those responsible for the Bolivian Salesian University, to study with them questions concerning the location and expansion of the University. On the 27th he had a meeting with all the confreres of the La Paz area, during which they said special prayers for the health of the Rector Major.

28-31 July. Fr Chavez was in the Province of Ecuador, with a lengthy program of activities: a meeting with the prenovices; another with the team of the Salesian Regional Centre; a visit to

the Salesian Polytechnic University and a meeting with the new community; a visit to the new premises of the "Spellman"; a visit to the communities of Quito and Guayaquil; greetings to the new FMA Provincial, and a meeting with the Provincial (Fr Esteban Ortiz) and some Councillors.

1-4 August.. The Regional visited the Province of Bogotá (COB), where he had a meeting with the Provincial, Fr. Camilo Castrellón, and with the Provincial Economist to study the situation of the Fundación Educativa Don Bosco. He also had a meeting with the provincial team for youth pastoral work, and met the new Provincial of Medellín, Fr. Armando Álvarez. He spent an entire day in a meeting with the Provincial Council and another in personal dialogue with Salesians. He concluded his stay in Bogotá with a friendly meeting with various groups of the Salesian Family.

5-8 August. Fr Chavez went to the Central American Province, where he visited the communities of Guatemala, had a meeting with the Provincial and his council. made further visits to get to know the splendid missionary work being done, and on returning to Guatemala had a meeting with the formation communities.

9 August. He travelled to Mexico and Monterrey, where he had a first meeting for discernment purposes with the north-eastern communities in view of the appointment of a new provincial for Guadalajara. On the following day the same procedure was followed with the houses of formation of the novitiate and postnovitiate. He also visited the confreres of the community of the postnovitiate who were in hospital after an accident in which they were involved on their way to Mexico City.

23-26 August. After some days of rest with his family, the Regional made a visit of animation to the Province of Mexico (MEM).

27-30 August. He continued the meetings and consultations in connection with the appointment of the new provincial for Guadalajara. At León he was able to admire the work of restructuring of the National Sanctuary of Don Bosco, including the Museum.

During September Fr Chavez made the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the Vice-province of Canada, where the new Superior, Fr Luc Lantagne had just taken over. The Visitation concluded with the celebration of the annual provincial feastday. Before the closing Eucharist, the Visitor

read his report to the assembled provincial community.

In the months of October and November, Fr Chavez made the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the San Francisco Province (SUO), which ended appropriately on the Feast of St Andrew Apostle, Patron of the Province.

15-21 October. The Regional took part in the annual meeting of Provincials of the Interamerican Region at Stony Point in the New Rochelle Province. For the first three days was also present Fr Antonio Domenech, Councillor General for Youth Pastoral Work, who presented the situation in that field in the Congregation and the Region, with the fundamental elements of the pastoral animation of a province. The presentation of the themes was followed by group-work of provinces and plenary assemblies. After a day given over to a visit to the salesian communities of New York, the meeting continued with reflections on the themes of the Region.

At the end of the Visitation of the Province of San Francisco, the Regional returned to Rome on 4 December.

The Councillor for the Australia-Asia Region

5 August. Fr Joaquim D'Souza took up again in the Province of Guwahati the Extraordinary Visitation, which had been interrupted in the months of June and July for the summer session of the General Council. On his way back to Guwahati he stopped briefly at New Delhi in the house of the Indian Provincial Conference, the so-called SPCI House, for a programming meeting with the National Delegates who are resident there.

The Visitation at Guwahati went on till 5 September, when it had to be interrupted once again to allow the Regional to go to Hong Kong to begin the consultation for the new Provincial of the China Province. From Hong Kong he went on to Sendai, in Japan, to take part on 9 September in the Episcopal ordination of the new salesian Bishop, Mgr Francis Xavier Mizobe.

14 September. Returning once again to Guwahati, the Regional continued with the Visitation for another month until 11 October, when he paused for four days to preside at the meeting of the Indian Provincial Conference at Shillong and a meeting with pastoral

workers in the sector of youngsters marginalized and at risk from all the Provinces of India. This meeting saw the setting up of a national coordinating commission and network among all the salesian institutes in India working for young people at risk. In this period too the Regional participated at the solemn inauguration and conclusion of the VIII National Scout-Camp, attended by more than 2,000 boys and girls from Indian schools who, with their animators, had gathered at Shillong to celebrate the "Boscoree" event on the theme of peace. At the beginning of the celebration were present also civic authorities, including the First Minister of the Shillong State, and at the closing of the event the Governor of the same State was there.

Continuing the Visitation Fr D'Souza eventually visited every house of the Province, scattered over the four States of Meghalaya, Lower Assam, Tripura and Mizoram – covering a total distance of 5,367 Km. in a mainly mountainous territory, and reaching a total of 60 houses and works.

14 November. The Visitation finally ended and the Regional left Guwahati for the postnovitiate at Nashik in the Mumbai Province for a week of animation.

At the end of November he returned to Rome for the winter session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the West Europe Region

21 July. Fr Filiberto Rodriguez left Rome for Madrid to take part on the following day in the celebrations organized by the Salesian College of Astudillo for its 75th anniversary. As part of the celebrations he received on 23 July the perpetual profession of two confreres of the Province of León.

25 July. In the morning he had a meeting with the Rectors of the Province of León, at which the theme dealt with the situation of the Congregation in a secularized society and the challenges presented to confreres and communities by the evangelization of the young. In the evening he presided at the ceremony of the change of Provincials from Fr José Antonio San Martín, who was finishing his term of office, to Fr Ángel Fernández Artime who was just beginning.

26 July, accompanied by the Provincial of Madrid, he had a meeting at Cabrera with the new Rectors of the Province, and in the following two days visited sev-

eral houses and met confreres from other provinces resident in Madrid.

3 August. He was at Urnieta for a conversation with confreres beginning the year of preparation for perpetual profession and with young priests and coadjutors from the whole of Spain.

5-9 August. The Regional returned to Italy and was at Colle Don Bosco to take part with the young people in the Youth Forum of the SYM. He presided at the Eucharist for them on the 7th.

15-16 August. After spending a few days with his family he went to the Novitiate of Sanlúcar la Mayor, where he received the first professions of 14 Spanish novices.

18 August. He accompanied a numerous group of Salesians of Salamanca to La Peña in France and to La Alberca, a mountainous area, which has given many vocations to the Salesian Congregation.

20 August. He began the preaching of a Retreat for parish priests of the Provinces of Spain, held at Cercedilla.

28 August - 3 September. Fr Filiberto was present in León at a meeting of the directors of the Salesian Bulletins of Europe.

6-9 September. He visited some communities of Galizia.

11 September he left for Brussels to begin the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the Province of South Belgium. The visitation continued until 29 October, interrupted only by a brief break from 29 September to 3 October to allow the Regional to be present at the ceremonies for the canonization of our martyrs of China.

In the course of the Belgian Visitation, in addition to personal conversations with the confreres there were also meetings with various local councils, sessions with the Provincial Council, and the perpetual profession of a Brother at Liège on 16 September.

At the end of the Visitation the Regional went to Bilbao to start up the consultation for the new Provincial in that Province.

During November Fr Filiberto made his base the Don Bosco House in Madrid, which belongs to the Iberian Provincial Conference.

9-12 November. He was in Paris to take part in the annual meeting of the SDB and FMA Provincial Councils of the French-speaking Provinces of Europe.

17-19 November. He was at the meeting of the Iberian Conference and their study of the salesian school which took place at a El

Plantío (Madrid). There were 45 persons present between SDBs, FMAs and lay people, with Sr Georgina McPake among them. There is great concern about the living identity of the salesian school in a secularized society, and as a platform for the evangelization of young people marked by so much poverty, isolation and exploitation at the present day.

23-26 November. Fr Filiberto was at Lyons at the congress on salesian pedagogy organized by the French Province. Also present was the Vicar General of the FMA.

27 November - 2 December. He made a rapid visit of animation to the communities of the León Province in Spain, accompanied by the Vice-provincial.

4 December. He returned to Rome for the winter session of the General Council, but returned briefly to Seville from 7-10 December to be present at the concluding deliberations of the First Cooperators Congress of the whole East European Region.

The Councillor for the North Europe Region

9-13 August. After a few days rest at Conge, Fr Van Hecke took

part at Colle Don Bosco in the Youth Forum of the SYM.

14-31 August. He was at Breslau (Poland) for a course in Polish.

26-28 August. He went to Moscow for the installation of the new Superior of the Circumscription and to receive the first profession of the Novices at Oktiabrskij.

1-3 September. He was back at the Generalate before going to Colle Don Bosco to take part in a Retreat (4-8 September).

9 September. The Regional began the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the Austrian Province, which went on until 21 October. It was interrupted by a journey to Benediktbeuern (14-15 October) for the ordination of three confreres to the diaconate and a meeting of the Curatorium.

21-23 October. He presided at Warsaw at a meeting of the consulting group of the Polish Provinces and the Eastern Circumscription (CISP). Among the various matters dealt with were the Salesian Bulletin, the Interprovincial Youth Centre at Krakow, the Polish translation of the new Ratio, the Federation of Salesian Schools in Poland, and the Interprovincial Missionary Centre located in Warsaw.

27-29 October. After returning to Rome for two days (24-26), the Regional presided at a meeting of the CIMEC group of provinces (CEP, CRO, SLK, SLO, UNG), at Marija Bistrica, the national Marian sanctuary and pilgrimage centre of Croatia. The agenda included: a reflection on the formation of the Rector and a verification of events following the Team Visit; sharing of news between the various provinces, and the preparation and carrying out of the Provincial Chapters in preparation for the GC25.

After another brief stay in Rome, the Regional began the second Extraordinary Visitation, this time to the Province of Hungary.

11 November. He went to Turin to join the Rector Major and other members of the General Council in the ceremony of the Departure of the Missionaries and the Feast of the Rector Major. He then went back to Hungary to conclude the Visitation on 3 December.

The same day he returned to Rome for the winter plenary session of the General Council.

The Regional Councillor for Italy and the Middle East

6-13 August. Fr Fedrigotti was present at the Youth Forum of the SYM.

22 August - 5 September. He was in Kenya at the invitation of the Provincial to preach a retreat and visit the communities, including that of Moshi in Tanzania.

8 September. He was at Turin to receive the professions of the Italian novices, all from Pinerolo.

21 September. He began the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the Genoa Province.

26 September. He took part in the meeting in Rome of the National Catholic School Centre.

28 October. He took part in Rome in the jubilee day of the Catholic school.

11 November. He joined the Rector Major in Turin for the special missionary departure ceremony.

12-13 November. At Turin he presided over a meeting of the Presidency of the CISI. The President of the CNOS presented the annual report. Fr Francesco Cereda, as Delegate of the CISI,

brought the meeting up to date concerning problems of the schools and centres of professional formation and our relationship with the FIDAE. The Provincials also discussed the contents and manner of deeper analysis of the chapter theme on the structures of government. The same meeting also approved the abandoning of the "Assicurazione Cattolica" and entry into "ARCA". In the field of University reform, the question was raised of the possibility of a first-cycle degree for Italian post-novices, and it was decided to pursue the matter with the competent authorities.

27-29 November. At the Generalate Fr Fedrigotti, as President of the youth pastoral section of the CISI, took part in the three-day period of preparation for the congresses of 2001 on the renewal of the Salesian Oratory.

2 December. He concluded the Visitation at La Spezia Canaletto, and took part in the entrustment to Mary for the ending of the Jubilee Year, together with members of the Provincial Chapter, gathered for their first session, and a fervent group of laity.

5. DOCUMENTS AND NEWS ITEMS

5.1 The 130th Missionary Expedition. Message of the Holy Father.

On 11 November 2000, at Turin in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, full to the doors with representatives of the various groups of the Salesian Family, the Rector Major Fr Juan E. Vecchi gave the missionary mandate and crucifix to 113 missionaries (86 Salesians, 4 FMAs and 23 lay volunteers). It was the 130th expedition from the time of the first one sent off by Don Bosco in 1875 from this same Basilica, the heart of his entire work inspired and sustained by Mary. On this occasion of the 125th anniversary of the first departure ceremony and because of the Jubilee Year, the Rector Major had wanted this to be an "extraordinary" event. And extraordinary it certainly was, for the number of those departing, for the number of countries to which they were going (including the new frontiers of Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Iraq, Kuwait, Mauritius), and for the massive presence of the Salesian Family around the Rector Major at Valdocco, a sign of adherence to the missionary message which the Successor of Don Bosco had been passing on.

For the occasion His Holiness John Paul II had sent to the Rector Major a special message of good wishes which we reproduce below.

To the Very Reverend Father
JUAN EDMUNDO VECCHI

Rector Major of the Salesian Society
of Saint John Bosco

1. In 1875 the first Salesians left for Argentina. For your religious Family it was the beginning of a promising missionary period which has become ever more flourishing as the years have passed. As you recall this year the 125th anniversary of the event, I send heartfelt good wishes to you and your whole Institute, as a manifestation of my grateful appreciation to all your Confreres for the apostolate they have carried out in the typical spirit of Saint John Bosco.

Can anyone be unaware of the outstandingly missionary spirit of your Founder? Many confreres, numerous Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and very many lay people have followed in his footsteps and realized in the salesian charism their own missionary vocation. In the course of these 125 years more than ten thousand religious have left for mission

lands; before their departure many of them received the Crucifix in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin.

I know that you, Very Reverend Father, recalling the missionary beginnings of your Institute, have addressed a renewed missionary appeal to the Congregation, and 124 men and women religious and lay people have responded. These generous religious will receive at your hands the mandate and Crucifix that will accompany them in their apostolic ministry. They come from every continent, an indication of the spreading of salesian work to all parts of the world, and are sent in the name of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, to work all over the world and carry out an intense activity for the evangelization and education of the young. In centres opened for the benefit of the new generations, in trade schools and others for training those about to enter employment, in schools and parishes, among the working classes and with street-children, they are called to form and prepare for life in society and religion those entrusted to them by divine Providence, so that they too may become in turn proclaimers of the Gospel and be its witnesses.

And how can we forget that many Salesians are in the frontiers of evangelization and offer their services among peoples who are unfortunate and in need? Continue, dear Brothers and Sisters, in this so very useful apostolic work, which my venerated predecessors have always encouraged and blessed. Go ahead with the same missionary enthusiasm of those who have gone before you.

2. The first group of Salesians sent to Latin America in 1875 are remembered for their vibrant missionary spirit, and are pointed out even today as examples for those of the Salesian Congregation who ask to go to the missions. Their witness is to some extent the exemplar of every apostolic enterprise involving the whole Salesian Family and stemming from the oratory of Turin.

This is the style of Saint John Bosco, who asked his missionaries to make passionately their own the same Gospel as was preached by our Saviour and his Apostles. "This Gospel", he used to say, "you must jealously love, profess and preach to the exclusion of all else" (*Biographical Memoirs*, XI, 362).

The consigning of the mandate and the Crucifix, which is done to

recall the first missionary expedition, takes its place in the broad context of the Great Jubilee and serves to give a fresh impulse not only to the missions of the Congregation but to the spiritual life itself of the Salesian Family. Men and women religious of the great Salesian Community are today committed to working together by combining their individual efforts. To them is joined the significant and important presence of lay people. The discernment and formation of local vocations form, in fact, a necessary though delicate part of the ministry of the new missionaries, continuing in this way what Don Bosco had begun.

The presence of no fewer than 23 laymen and women among the new missionaries who are being sent on this occasion, highlights what the sons and daughters of Don Bosco are doing to give proper value to the laity in the Church. They are young people who have heard the missionary call while they were involved in the Congregation's pastoral work for young people. Now they want to dedicate a period of their lives to their brothers and sisters who live in foreign lands, going to them as witnesses of Christ in fulfilment of the Father's will (cf. Heb 10, 7).

3. I thank God with all my heart for the missionary animation carried out by the members of your religious Family in the vast field of the Church. At the same time it is my earnest hope and prayer that this auspicious event, embellished by the significant act of the consigning of the missionary mandate and of the Crucifix to the new workers in the harvest, may be for the communities and every individual Salesian an occasion for renewing their commitment to gospel witness and missionary activity. To this end I invoke the motherly assistance of Mary Help of Christians, the intercession of Saint John Bosco and of the salesian Saints and Beati. May the divine protection always accompany your spiritual Family, and in a particular manner the missionaries, men and women, their parents and relatives. With these sentiments I impart with all my heart to you, Very Reverend Rector Major, to the Confreres, to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the lay people who collaborate in every sector of your salesian activity, the Apostolic Blessing which I willingly extend to all who take part in the solemn jubilee celebrations.

From the Vatican, 9 November 2000.

JOHN PAUL II

5.2 The extraordinary missionary expedition (130th). Message of the Rector Major.

We print the missionary message given by the Rector Major to all the members of the Salesian Family, on 11 November 2000 during his homily at the solemn Concelebration in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, on the occasion of the presentation of the Crucifix to the departing missionaries.

"Go into the whole world and preach the gospel"
(Mk 16, 15-20)

We are gathered together in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. It was from here that the first salesian missionary expedition set out one hundred and twenty-five years ago.

After some mysterious dreams, with the convinced collaboration of his sons and the lively and enthusiastic participation of the youngsters of the Oratory in their characteristic style, Don Bosco was able to give effect to his missionary plans and desires.

He had listened personally to the interior voice by which the Lord had showed him the whole world as his field of work, and had bestowed on his recently formed society enthusiasm for the spread-

ing of the Gospel.

A glance of faith at the realities of the world spurred him on. He was encouraged by his own personal experience of the educative force of the word and mystery of Christ. The promise of Jesus "I shall be with you" was his support in every difficulty.

From that time the missionary trait has remained engraved in the spirit and initiatives of the Salesian Family. We are all of us missionaries, because one and all we want to go to young people and to those places not reached by the normal pastoral and educative service. "Missionaries of the young" was the definition given us by Pope John Paul II.

A missionary of the young is what the Lord wanted Don Bosco to be rather than go himself to far distant lands, foreseeing the extraordinary fruits that would follow this first step.

The missionary thrust of our pastoral charity, wherever it becomes committed, finds concrete and significant expression in the uninterrupted sequence of departures of brothers and sisters, members of the Salesian Family, for lands not yet evangelized or new Churches in which the salesian charism needs to be engrafted.

Leaving their own country behind them, they take everywhere the light of the Gospel and human advancement; the good news of Christ and a greater dignity for each individual, a youthful sensitivity and the educative ability with which God has enriched the Church through the holiness of Don Bosco.

Since that first missionary expedition, no fewer than 13,000 confreres and sisters have left in 130 expeditions, all of them from this Basilica, under the gaze and protection of our Mother the Helper of the Church, the inspirer and model of our trust and apostolic temerity.

In this Jubilee Year of the Incarnation, at the beginning of a new millennium fraught with expectations and challenges, we want to hear once again with the heart and generosity of Don Bosco the same appeal and the same mandate of the Lord: "Go out to all the world, preach the Gospel to every creature".

We want to make our own the pressing call to the new evangelization, which we see as an urgent task; but also as a singular grace for ourselves.

The mission is in progress everywhere: it is universal. Its spirit is

lived in every geographical area, in every culture, in the heart of every human situation.

1. "*Every creature*" to whom the Lord refers in his mandate, includes all human beings, all realities, every phenomenon of history for which the Gospel must still become the leaven of humanity, the energy of life, light for the senses, and the fire of love.

2. But today's world is made one by means of communication. This not only leads to the discovery of new frontiers and the bringing of people more closely together, but is a challenge to a solidarity of new dimensions and an indication of new values to be lived.

To us, who are disciples of Christ, it reveals the vast spaces in which the Gospel must still resound, and shows us the new possibilities which are opening up through the meeting of Christians with believers of other religions, called together to serve the cause of humanity.

New openings, new ways, new energy! We want to enter and participate decisively in this movement of the Church and of humanity – an authentic sign of our times which has enlightened our jubilee pilgrimage through the

word and prophetic gestures of the Holy Father.

3. Today the Spirit has made the communion of the Church more visible and effective. The different vocations complement one another and themselves become enriched by working together in the ecclesial mission; the sharing of resources and the mutual exchange of gifts becomes a normal fact in the life of the Churches. Ecumenical dialogue and interreligious collaboration are making progress for the service of mankind.

These too are the signs which give direction to our own pilgrimage with the young: the Salesian Family is asked in its entirety to revive, express and communicate the missionary spirit. The Salesian Youth Movement is called upon to develop its missionary dimension and give rise to a volunteer crusade with a commitment that is spiritually consistent, international and involving large numbers of people.

Sustaining us in this proposal and common effort will be those words of Christ: "He who believes will be saved". We have a foretaste of the joy of participating in the work of salvation and in the

happiness of those who will be freed from the dominion of the devil, from the evil capacity of the world, from the domination of men. They will hear themselves speaking a new language and proclaiming a new way of life with regard to their being men and women, young and old. A new light will shine in their mind and whole existence. They will know that God is their Father and that for them he offers his Son. Their souls and minds will be enlightened. The sick will be healed through the diffusion of charity and also through a new vision of suffering in the light of the cross of Christ. The world will become more human.

We are confirmed in this by the experience of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us or who are now working in the various mission fields. They bear witness to the truth of those words of the Gospel: "The Lord worked with them and confirmed their word with wonders". We have seen prodigious transformations of persons and of communities. Where the Gospel penetrates, man is saved also in his temporal existence. Present conflicts and sufferings bear witness to the substantial change that can be

brought to a situation of pain and humiliation by a bearer of love, a witness of the compassion of the Good Shepherd.

Our confidence is strengthened by the thought that we are all called by the Father to be "fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the same promise" (Eph 3, 6). We therefore are committed together with the Father in making of humanity a single family, living in love and solidarity, and moving forward in peace to its destiny of communion with God. And we are sure moreover that the Father, through his Spirit, is moving internally every human being towards Christ and every human enterprise of good will towards man's salvation. Many, even without knowing it, are awaiting the message and offering of Christ. An immense harvest is waiting to be gathered and its owner is the Father. We are not frightened nor held back by the few means we have available, nor by our limitations and personal poverty. "My Father is continually at work", we are assured by Jesus.

We are gladdened too by the awareness of a grace we have received: "To us, though the very least of all, this grace was given, to preach the unsearchable riches

of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God".

Faith is a precious gift to be shared with others. Human dignity which stems from the Gospel is a benefit to be promoted. The vision of existence that flows from Jesus – who is the way, the truth and the life – is a light to be passed on to others. We have experienced it in contact with Don Bosco, who was a mediator of the love of Christ. And we are called to spread it further in his style, rooted in a spirituality which makes us sharers in the solicitude of Jesus "who was consecrated and sent into the world".

I call upon the Salesian Family and the Salesian Youth Movement to live with a new spirit, new initiatives and new ways of preparation, this special hour of the world and of the Church: a new millennium, the Jubilee of the Redemption, the 125th anniversary of our missionary enterprise.

5.3 Marian conclusion of our jubilee journey. Message of the Rector Major.

Below is the text of the homily given by the Rector Major during the Concelebration on the Solemn-

nity of the Immaculate Conception, on 8 December 2000, in the Church of St Francis of Assisi in Turin. In recalling Don Bosco's meeting with Bartholomew Garelli on 8 December 1841, the first beginning of the mission to young people entrusted to him by the Lord, with the motherly help of the Immaculate Virgin, and the seed of the great family which subsequently developed, the Rector Major wanted it to be from this place so full of memory and prophecy, that a special Marian message should go out to the Congregation and the whole Salesian Family at the end of the salesian jubilee year.

Today **we conclude our jubilee pilgrimage**. It has led us to relive the more important elements of the salesian vocation: active fidelity to our consecration, reconciliation, the Eucharist, our mission to the young, and the missionary dimension.

I am glad to be able to address you today from the Church of St Francis of Assisi in Turin, where on 8 December, under the eyes of Mary, the seed was sown of our works and congregations. The salvation brought us by Christ became tangible in Don Bosco's meeting with Bartholomew Garelli on the Feast of the Immaculate

Conception. In our salesian spiritual tradition **Mary** is characterized by two titles: **the Immaculate Conception** and **Help of Christians**. This is how we invoke her every day in our prayer of entrustment, which we shall together renew today as we open ourselves with trust in our hope in the saving presence of God in the millennium which is beginning and which is already marked by various interventions of Mary. A brief but substantial comment on each of these titles is made in the Constitutions of both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: Mary Immaculate is the model of our total consecration to God and our desire for holiness. As Help of Christians she is the sign and inspiration of our pastoral commitment among the People of God, and particularly among the young (*cf. SDB, C 92; FMA, C 44*).

The two titles have not been chosen and linked together by chance, or by mere devotional feeling. They reflect, in fact, our salesian history and sum up the characteristics of the spirituality of our Family. It is true that above all these representations, we contemplate always the person of Mary, Mother of Jesus, Mother of the Church and Mother of each

one of us. Today as we face with confidence the events of the third millennium, we want to live that same founding experience of our Father beneath the gaze, the inspiration and the protection of the Mother of the Incarnate Word.

Mary Immaculate is the dominating element in the oratory experience. Certain providential coincidences led Don Bosco to attribute to her a particular intercession in the early part of his work: "All our great initiatives", he would say later in his life, "had their beginning on the feast of Mary Immaculate" (*MB XVII*, p. 510). The archetype was the Oratory, 8 December 1841.

The image representing Mary with the serpent beneath her feet reminded him of the triumph of grace over human passions and the victory of faith over wickedness in world history.

Don Bosco made her a living presence among the boys of Turin. Mary Mazzarello did the same among the girls of Mornese. The overriding concern at that time was to educate young people in their own context. All efforts were directed to making them aware of their dignity as human beings and to open them to the faith. The boys or girls had to be

conscious of themselves and of the life of grace, and to realize that it was possible to overcome evil. Their educators gave them an attention which was both paternal and maternal. It was the time in which the Preventive System was born and took shape.

In the oratory environment one fact was evident: Mary was felt by both educators and youngsters alike as a living and powerful motherly presence.

This realistic presence left its mark on the pedagogy of the Oratory. The celebration of the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, with its accompanying spiritual preparation, became a central point (*cf. BM VII*, p. 197). And so it still continues to be in our own times wherever there is an oratory or youth centre.

In the oratory was born the sodality of Mary Immaculate, which corresponds to what we call nowadays the group of young collaborators. It was the seed and harbingers of the future salesian congregation. Nine of the sixteen members who met in Don Bosco's room on 18 December 1859 were members of the Sodality of Mary Immaculate (*cf. BM VI*, 181).

In this Marian atmosphere matured those themes which are

most important for the education of the young: grace, purity, familiarity with the supernatural, and the love of Jesus, while for the Salesians and Salesian Sisters the preventive system took shape as motherly care and a process leading to holiness, calling for generous self-dedication to God and to the young. Dominic Savio is the fruit of such an environment.

Several insights developed also on the pedagogical value of devotion to Mary. We must count on the motherly but invisible presence of Mary in our work. She loves every single person, but especially those who are young, because she helps them to grow as she did with Jesus. This is a truth of Christian faith, but lived in an unusual manner and transferred to the sphere of education.

The motherly presence of Mary is felt within themselves by the young, and gives them security and hope for building themselves as persons at a difficult and delicate moment of their lives, because of instability, physical development, and discussion about the faith.

Mary Immaculate, as the ideal of purity, exerts an attraction on the young and gives the taste and desire to commit themselves to noble endeavours.

There is a certain aesthetic component to Don Bosco's pedagogy. From the outset he used to speak of the beauty of virtue and religion, and of the ugliness of sin. "To a young person thirsty for light, innocence and kindness, Don Bosco presents Mary as the ideal of humanity, unstained by sin, as the embodiment of his wildest dreams. A luminous ideal, neither cold nor abstract, but incarnate in a person who loves him intensely because she is his mother" (C.Colli, *Patto della nostra alleanza con Dio*, p. 438). This is the psychological and pedagogical aspect.

Moreover devotion to Mary is a help to becoming familiar with supernatural realities and to feeling God a little nearer and incarnate. We think of him in relationship with a woman who is always presented as a Mother and our Help. This is the spiritual incentive.

The manner of teaching catechism at the Oratory tended therefore to make this image accepted and internalized, to such an extent that it penetrated the life of the youngsters and became a guarantee of their future perseverance. This was the underlying motive behind triduum, novenas, daily pious practices, decorations, pilgrimages and outings to Marian shrines. For Don Bosco the

"oratorian" stage lasted until the establishment of Valdocco itself, and for Mother Mazzarello it covered the whole period of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, until the foundation of the Institute of consecrated life.

Then there developed the consideration of Our Lady as the **Helper**, with the universal vision of the Church and the concept of the works as its definitive experience.

The building of the church was more than a technical undertaking, a concern with all its material and financial planning. For Don Bosco it was rather a spiritual experience, a maturing of his pastoral mentality. At that time he was between 45 and 50 years of age, the period when his priesthood was fully developed and his social projects had taken firm shape with some works already organized and others in an early stage. When the building was finished, something had changed in him. For what reason?

In the first place because what he had accomplished far exceeded his original idea: from a church for his house, his local area and his congregation, the idea was growing of a basilica, a place of pilgrimage, the centre of devotion and a point of reference for a spir-

itual family. The reality had grown in the process of building.

Financial problems were solved by graces and miracles that prompted unimagined generosity on the part of the people. It all led to Don Bosco's deep-rooted conviction that "Mary has built her own house", "every brick corresponds to a grace received" (cf. *BM IX*, p.127; *MB XVIII*, p. 338).

A priest of that time, the theologian Fr Margotti, said: "They say Don Bosco works miracles. I don't believe it. But here something has taken place that no one can deny: this magnificent temple which cost a million has been built in only three years through the offerings of the faithful" (*Ordinary Process I*, p.511 ff; *Our Lady for difficult times*, p.118).

The building process coincided with and was followed by the foundation of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. They represent the extending of the charism to the world of women and girls, with the consequent enrichment; just as another foundation, that of the Archconfraternity of Mary Help of Christians is, with the Cooperators, an extension towards lay people.

If the oratory experience had been followed by positive results in pedagogical practice, the work

of the sanctuary brought into salesian work a vision of the Church as God's people all over the world locked in a struggle with the powers of evil: a perspective which would be presented later in another form in the dream of the two columns (1862), represented today in a painting on the back wall of the sanctuary. It betokened a pastoral style based on courage and trust: to be able to begin with little, to go bravely ahead when good is at stake, putting one's trust in the Lord. It carved out a conviction in the heart of the Congregation: "Spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are" – and this in every field, whether social, economic, pastoral or educational.

With the foundation of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco, and after him his successors and the superiors of the Sisters, spoke of a "spiritual and living temple", of a "monument of gratitude" to Mary Help of Christians. And it is interesting to see what they meant. "It is the name of an educative, catechetical and missionary congregation", said Mother Angela Vespa (*Circular of 24 Oct. 1965; cf. C.Colli, ibid., pp.455-456*) – "the name of an Institute in

which Mary must live in her daughters in such a way that they make her present throughout the world" (*Don Rinaldi: cf. E. Ceria, Life of the Servant of God, pp. 294-295*), and that each of them may be a living copy of Mary (*Mother Luisa Vaschetti: Circular of 24 April 1942; cf. C.Colli, ibid. p.445*).

And so in the female branch too the name of Mary Help of Christians emphasizes the apostolic characteristic, the leaving of one's home circumstances to go to the service of the Church and the world.

The founding of the two congregations left Don Bosco with the feeling of being an instrument in a project inspired and realized through the particular mediation of Mary: "Our Lady wants us to start up a society...we shall call ourselves Salesians", he said on 26 January 1854, and he frequently repeated it. On returning from Spain he said: "It is all the work of our Lady. Everything began with the 'Hail Mary' that I said with a boy with faith and hope". Or still more during his Mass in the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, when he had to stop fifteen times through emotion, as he thought of all that had taken place and recalled the words of his first dream: "In due

time you will understand everything" (*MB XVII*, p. 340).

And Mother Mazzarello used to repeat that the Institute is nothing other than our Lady's family, the "hearth and home" she made for herself; that she is the true superior and has a vicar who every night places the keys of the house at her feet. And so we can accept the statement: "Don Bosco experienced in a quite extraordinary way the intervention of Mary as his guide throughout his life and in the realization of his work. As his life on earth drew to a close, after so many interventions of the heavenly Mother, he summed up in the following expression the conviction that had been maturing throughout his life: "So far we have always gone ahead with certainty. We cannot go astray. It is Mary who is our guide" (*cf. Colli, ibid.*, pp. 433-434).

From this charismatic experience we receive a text of spiritual life and pastoral style which emerges very clearly from our Constitutions.

When we read with the eyes of faith the history of our Institutes and of the Salesian Family, we see that Mary has been the inspirer of the whole enterprise and also the Mother of our communal vocation

and the Teacher of our spirituality (*cf. FMA, C4; SDB, C1*).

Our personal vocation and our formation finds in her a model, a guide and a teacher. "In her we find a living presence whose help directs our lives decisively to Christ and makes our personal relationship with him ever more authentic" (*FMA, C 79; cf. SDB, C 98*).

And so we keep a special place for her in our prayer: "Let us turn to her in simplicity and confidence, celebrating her liturgical feasts and honouring her in those forms of prayer proper to the Church and to salesian tradition" (*FMA, C 44; cf. SDB, C 92*).

All this leads us to make her presence felt in the education of the young and in pastoral work among the people. "Let us also help them to know Mary, the Mother who welcomes and understands them, the Help of Christians who instils security, so that they will learn to love and imitate her in her openness to God and to her neighbour" (*FMA, C 71; cf. SDB, C 34*).

The same spiritual features are represented in the painting above the high altar of the Basilica.

In our spirituality it well expresses the unity between the sense of God's initiative and our

own pastoral enterprise. Our vocation comes from the Father, and for Him we dedicate ourselves to the work of education. It immediately communicates the ecclesial sense of service: we participate in the Church's mission and work in it, following its needs and guidelines. It also sets out well the missionary commitment of evangelization, and is a model of our educative presence: motherly, protective and preventive.

We have tried to live a jubilee year marked by interior conviction. **Today**, with a sense of being united with all Salesians throughout the world, we bring it to a conclusion by reviving our faith in the effective presence of the Word in our history and particularly in favour of the young, as we look forward with trust to the time that lies ahead, and look to Mary as the one who through the work of the Holy Spirit continues to give Jesus to us and to young people. And so we shall make our **act of entrustment** to her with the simple and well-known words which already form part of our history. We too believe that Mary will do everything. Let us therefore renew our resolve to live in communion with her and to spread devotion to her among the young and all peoples.

5.4 Opening address of the Rector Major at the Convention on the History of Salesian Work.

We print the address of greeting and encouragement with which the Rector Major opened the work of the Third International Convention of the History of Salesian Works on 31 October 2000, in the Aula Magna of the Generalate. The Convention, organized by the Salesian Historical Institute (ISS) in collaboration with the Association of the Students of Salesian History (ACSSA) took place from 31 October to 5 November, on the theme: "The effectiveness and social contribution of salesian work from 1880 to 1922".

Your Excellency, illustrious Professors, dear Confreres and Sisters,

It is my duty, but still more a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Generalate, and to thank you sincerely for your presence at this Third Convention of the History of Salesian Work, which I hope will prove to be very successful.

1. This initiative of yours is enshrined in a policy of the Congregation committed to giving proper

value to the historical dimension, praiseworthy for many reasons, but especially because of the theme to be studied, which is of great interest for us: the story of the “Sons” and “Daughters” of Don Bosco; i.e. the story of the historical and charismatic legacy which Don Bosco (and with him Mother Mazzarello) left to those continuing their work, to make use of it, multiply it and spread it throughout the world. This they did by their words and action, and by their personal testimony. If it is true – as has been said – that the greatness of a man lies not so much in what he does as in that to which he gives rise, then Don Bosco is truly an outstanding figure in the panorama of the nineteenth century, not only in Italy but at an international level.

Nowadays Don Bosco is known well enough in the world, and at every level, popular as well as academic. The bibliography about him is plentiful, varied and up to date. In nearly every language in the world there is a biography of him; books, video-cassettes and CDs illustrate his life and personality, his system of education and his holiness. On the other hand the situation of the Salesian Congregation and of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of

Christians is different. It is true that various volumes exist like the *Annals* and *Chronicle*, but the history of the two Institutes founded by Don Bosco still lacks a careful historical presentation, based on rigorous methodical and logical criteria, and based on an exhaustive documentation, which will evidently need the work of a team of experts. And it is not just a matter of the material recording of events but of discerning the criteria, the manner of insertion in widely differing contexts and the original contribution they have given to the education of the young and the working classes.

2. The 2nd Convention on Salesian Work of 1996, and the 3rd which is now opening, seem to take this line of approach: to lay a foundation, to suggest lines of work, to indicate possible schemes for the history of a house, a Province, and the Provinces of a country, in view of a history of the Salesian Family first in each country and, in due course, in the whole world. Certainly the perspective you have before you for observing the salesian reality is of great value: the social impact of the Salesians and of the FMA in the period you are considering has

been great; but it is to be hoped that, following your example, other specialists will pursue studies along other lines, different but complementary and convergent. I have in mind at present a study of salesian pedagogical experience, and of the spiritual and cultural counterparts, to name only the three main ones. At present they are only partial and somewhat limited in scope.

These are objectives which are not easy, and will require a good deal of time, given the world scale of salesian activity, but they need to be considered seriously by two Institutes like ours, which have been able to expand rapidly thanks to the abundance of vocations they enjoyed in the first century of their existence up to a time well beyond the middle of the twentieth century.

3. For my own part and that of the General Council of the Congregation, committed as we are to the government and animation of 17,000 Salesians spread over more than 130 countries, we strongly feel the responsibility of inheriting a pedagogical and spiritual legacy with a century of life behind it, to be preserved as a precious family treasure on the one hand, and on the other to be kept

up to date by lucid initiative and constructive activity.

Is it not our task now, perhaps, in the field of history to seek critically the reasons why at the present day the figures of the Salesians and of the FMA seem to find it difficult to stir up the interest in the various sectors of social life – from the world of the school to that of work, from that of education to that of social welfare, from that of culture to that of politics – which the first generations of Salesians were able to do so evidently?

Is it not perhaps also a task of history to give a rational response – with facts and their representation – to the questions the Salesians are continually putting to themselves: who are we? where do we come from? and especially: where are we going?

4. When I think back over the salesian realities I have visited in five continents in these decades of service at the vertex of the Congregation, I find the need of:

- a practical experience linking charity (*Da mihi animas*), charism and educative competence;
- a request from Salesians to have all this available through means they have at hand;

- requests of civil and religious authorities, which challenge our present possibilities and resources, and not only from a quantitative aspect.

5. I therefore express the hope that this Convention may contribute to the construction of that living memory, the dispenser of truth, that can help who all who take their inspiration from the charism of Don Bosco to be faithful to him, in creativity and far-sightedness, at the service of the human advancement and evangelization of the young and the working classes, who form our main interest.

I conclude with some points of reference which may seem linked haphazardly, but are in fact central and illuminating:

- salvation as history;
- the Decree of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Goods of the Church;
- on our part: the care of Archives (collection, preservation and classification of documents) and study (*nulla die sine linea*).

5.5 New Salesian Bishop

Mgr. Luis Felipe GALLARDO, Bishop Prelate of the Mixes Prelature, Mexico.

On 17 December 2000, the *Osservatore Romano* published the news of the appointment by the Holy Father of Fr *Luis Felipe Gallardo*, at present Provincial of Mexico, as the *Bishop Prelate of the Mixes Prelature*. He succeeds the Salesian Mgr. Braulio Sánchez.

Luis Felipe Gallardo, was born at Irapuato, Mexico, on 12 December 1941; he entered the salesian college of San Pedro Tlaquepaque, where he studied until 1957, when he entered the novitiate at Coacalco. There he made his first profession on 16 August 1958. After the study of philosophy and practical training he was sent to Turin for the study of theology at the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum. Subsequently he completed his studies in Rome, obtaining the Licentiate in Theology, and was ordained on 22 December 1967.

Returning to his Province, he was Rector and Director of Novices at Coacalco (1972-75), and in 1973 became a provincial councillor. In 1980 he became Provincial.

After six years as Provincial he was once again Rector at the novitiate of Coacalco (1986-89), and then at Mexico-Don Bosco (1989-90). From 1990 to 1995 he was Rector of the formation community of the students of theology at Tlaquepaque. In 1995 he became rector of Tehuacán, Pue., but in the following year after the GC24 he once again became Provincial.

Now the Holy Father has given him this Episcopal appointment.

5.6 Pontifical appointments

1. Erection of the "*missio sui iuris*" of Baku, Azerbaijan, and appointment of the Superior.

On 10 November 2000 the Holy Father John Paul II erected the new "*missio sui iuris*" of **BAKU**, in the Republic of **AZERBAIJAN**, taking it from the territory of the Apostolic Administration of the Latin Caucasus, and entrusting it to the pastoral care of the Society of St Francis de Sales (Salesian Society of St John Bosco).

At the same time he appointed the salesian priest **Jozef Daniel PRAVDA** as the first **Ecclesiastical Superior** of the mission.

Jozef Daniel Pravda was born at Blatné (Slovakia) on 6 July 1950 and made his first profession on 15 August 1969. He was ordained at Bratislava on 4 June 1977. He holds a Licentiate in Theology.

He did pastoral work in Belgium, then in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1988-91). Returning to Slovakia he spent a year at the Provincial House at Bratislava, and was then sent by the Superiors to begin salesian work in Siberia, first at Aldan, and then at Yakusk. Eventually he returned to Slovakia, and there received his pontifical appointment.

2. Erection of the new Prefecture Apostolic of Gambela in Ethiopia, and appointment of the Prefect Apostolic.

On 26 November 2000, the Osservatore Romano published the news of the canonical erection of the new **Prefecture Apostolic of Gambela, Ethiopia** – with territory taken from the existing Prefecture of Jimma-Bonga – which is being entrusted to our Society. At the same time was published the Holy Father's appointment of the first **Prefect**

Apostolic in the person of Fr **Angelo MORESCHI** SDB.

In the official letter sent to the Rector Major, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples expressed the gratitude of the Holy See to the Superior of the Salesians and all the Congregation "for the generous collaboration given by the Salesian Society of St John Bosco in the first evangelization *ad gentes*".

Fr *Angelo Moreschi*, the first Prefect Apostolic, was born at Nave (Brescia) on 13 June 1952, and made his first profession in the Milan Province on 1 September 1974. Perpetual profession followed on 15 August 1980, and he was ordained at Brescia on 2 October 1982 after theological studies at Cremisan in Palestine. In the same year he joined "Project Africa" and left for Ethiopia where he worked for some years in our foundation at Dilla – animated at that time by the Milan Province – where he was Rector and parish priest from 1991. Passing to the Vice-province of Ethiopia-Eritrea, he became in 1998 a member of the provincial council. Now he has been entrusted with this new ecclesial responsibility.

3. Mgr. Vincenzo Savio, Bishop of Belluno-Feltre.

The Osservatore Romano of 9-10 December 2000 gave the news that the Holy Father had promoted our confrere Bishop, **Vincenzo SAVIO** to the residential See of **BELLUNO-FELTRE**, in the Region of Venice. Since 1993 he had been Auxiliary Bishop of Leghorn (cf. AGC 345, p. 86).

5.7 Appointment of the Director of the Salesian Central Archives

We print the Decree by which the Rector Major has appointed Fr Francisco Castellanos the new Director of the Salesian Central Archives. He takes the place of Fr Myeczyslaw Kaczmarzyk, who has returned to his Province of Cracow, Poland.

Prot. N. 00/1617

THE RECTOR MAJOR
OF THE SOCIETY
OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

– in view of the Regulations of the Salesian Central Archives, promulgated on 24 May 1985 (AGC 314, p. 54ff.);

– and having heard the opinion of the General Council and the Secretary General, in the sense of the same Regulations (art. 6, §1);

appoints

Fr. Francisco CASTELLANOS
Director of the Salesian
Central Archives

with all the rights and duties indicated in the above-mentioned Regulations (cf. art. 6-7).

He wishes the new Director a profitable period of work in the service of the Salesian Society, with the Lord's blessing.

Rome, 20 December 2000.

Fr. Juan VECCHI
Rector Major

Fr. Francesco MARACCANI
Secretary General

5.8 Our dead confreres (2000 - 4rd 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.
L ALVES Arsénio Augusto	Manique (Estorile)	16-10-2000	76	POR
P AROKIASAMY Lourdunathan	Madras	09-07-2000	63	INM
E ARROYO Luis Teodoro	Quito	13-10-2000	71	—
<i>Eletto Vescovo nel 1981, fu per 12 anni Vicario Apostolico di Méndez</i>				
P ASTORGA José Humberto	San Isidro (Bs. As.)	29-10-2000	76	ABA
P AUDISIO Carlo	Torino	09-11-2000	82	ICP
L BAZZAN Marino	Biella	29-10-2000	85	ICP
P BINGÉ Theofiel	Hoboken	22-10-2000	80	BEN
P BOSIO Augusto	Moncalieri (TO)	24-10-2000	82	SUE
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
P BRANDIS Hans-Bernd	Bad Wörishofen (Baviera)	17-12-2000	83	GEM
P BRUNELLI Ezio	Varazze (SV)	11-12-2000	78	ILT
P CARRILLO QUERO Francisco	Córdoba	12-10-2000	66	SCO
P CIPOLLETTA Giovanni	Castellammare di Stabia	08-11-2000	85	IME
P DENTZER Joseph	Mulhouse	05-10-2000	79	FRA
L DEZANI Pietro Angelo	Hobart (Australia)	09-11-2000	75	AUL
P DI GUARDO Domenico	Bronx, New York City	04-12-2000	91	SUE
P DRAGO Carlo	Castello di Godego (TV)	04-12-2000	97	IVE
L GARNERO Walter	Colle Don Bosco	14-10-2000	73	ICP
L GONZÁLEZ CORTES Abel	Santafé de Bogotá	10-12-2000	81	COB
P GONZALEZ RUBIO Germán	Úbeda (Jaén)	12-11-2000	67	SCO
P GRÓF Ivan	Bratislava	20-12-2000	65	SLK
L GUERRINI Angelo	Roma	11-12-2000	86	IRO
L HERRMANN Théodore-Joseph	Toulon	15-11-2000	102	FRA
P INNOCENTI Leonardo	Varazze (SV)	29-12-2000	70	ILT
P JANSSENS Gustaaf	Johannesburg (Sud Africa)	01-11-2000	77	AFC
P KOCÍK Jozef	Presov (Slovacchia)	09-10-2000	75	SLK
P KRÓL Józef	Lódź	28-12-2000	84	PLE
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
L KRUTÍLEK Antonín	Praga	26-10-2000	80	CEP
P LAWS Patrick Joseph	Melbourne	06-12-2000	66	AUL
P LIBANI Riccardo	Novara	28-09-2000	75	ILE
P LJUBIĆ Augustin	Zagreb	16-11-2000	60	CRO
P LOBAZA Stanisław	São Paulo	25-11-2000	83	BSP
P LOCATELLI Giovanni	Ferrara	10-11-2000	87	ILE
L LUNARDI Giovanni	Cuenca	23-10-2000	73	ECU
P MARTIGNON Luigi	Vico Equense (NA)	18-12-2000	82	IME

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P MLINARIĆ Maksimiljan	Trstenik	10-09-2000	85	SLO
L MONTANI Brenno	Roma	06-12-2000	84	IRO
P MORO SANDOVAL Casto	Madrid	11-11-2000	75	SMA
P MOURLOT ECHAVARRIA Mauro	Jarabacoa (Rep. Domin.)	14-10-2000	83	ANT
P MURPHY Edward	Sydney	20-12-2000	59	AUL
P MUTH Quirinus	Nijmegen	12-11-2000	94	OLA
<i>Fu Ispettore per quattro anni</i>				
P OBBERMITO Michele	Torino	07-11-2000	91	ICP
P PACE Giuseppe	Torino	01-11-2000	88	ICP
P PACHECO José María	Palmares (Costa Rica)	16-10-2000	75	CAM
P PENNA Giuseppe	Torino	24-12-2000	85	ICP
P PIANAZZI Archimede	Roma	10-12-2000	94	UPS
<i>Fu Ispettore per 8 anni; per 6 anni Consigliere Scolastico Generale e per 6 Consigliere per la Formazione</i>				
P PLATANIA Antonio	Pedara (CT)	20-12-2000	92	ISI
P PRATESI Giorgio	Locri (RC)	27-11-2000	80	IME
P PRIGENT Antoine	Guingamp	15-10-2000	93	FRA
P RAMÓN GIL Manuel	Barcelona	30-08-2000	79	SBA
P REMERY Henry	Toulon	24-10-2000	90	FRA
L SCHOBER Thomas	Schwandorf (Baviera)	26-10-2000	88	GEM
P SCHOUTENS Johannes	Lima	17-10-2000	88	PER
L SCIPIONI Virgilio	Bahía Blanca	18-10-2000	80	ABB
L SOLDAINI Roberto José	Buenos Aires	24-11-2000	42	ABA
P SUAREZ GOMEZ Jesús	Coro	17-10-2000	74	VEN
L TRONCOSO Germán	Neuquén	26-10-2000	37	ABB
L URBANCZYK Alojzy	Oświęcim	29-10-2000	96	PLS
P USSEGLIO Giuseppe	Torino	06-12-2000	84	ICP
P VELLUTI Silvio	Varazze (SV)	05-11-2000	75	ILT
P VERDERIO Vittorio	Arese (MI)	16-12-2000	84	ILE
L VERSTRINGE Omer	Wilrijk (Blegio)	12-09-2000	83	BEN
P WRZOSEK Tadeusz	Warszawa	09-12-2000	65	PLE
L ZANELLA José Antonio	Panzacola	13-04-2000	84	MEM
P ZOLA Fiorenzo	Coimbatore	17-10-2000	80	INK



