



# acts

**of the general council**

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year LXXXV

july-september 2004

**N. 386**

official organ  
of animation  
and communication  
for the  
salesian congregation

Direzione Generale  
Opere don Bosco  
Roma





# acts

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

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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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Editrice S.D.B.  
Edizione extra commerciale  
Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco  
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*Finito di stampare: luglio 2004*

## 1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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***“Lord, to whom shall we go?  
You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6,69)***

### **THE WORD OF GOD AND SALESIAN LIFE TODAY**

#### SUMMARY:

- 1. Contemplating Christ by listening to the Word of God**
- 2. Listening to God's Word as Salesians**
  - 2.1 Don Bosco, “priest of the Word”
    - *Biblical formation and pastoral ministry*
    - *Effective pedagogical application*
  - 2.2 Young people, the context and reason for our listening to God
- 3. “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God” (Acts 6,2)**
  - 3.1 Listening to the Word to *gain experience* of God
    - *Silent adoration*
    - *Do not try to imagine what God looks like*
  - 3.2 Listening to the Word to *become community*
    - *Together because we are saved*
    - *Responsible for one another*
  - 3.3 Listening to the Word to *remain faithful*
    - *“Source of spiritual life” (C 87)*
    - *“Food for prayer” (C 87)*
    - *“Light to see God's will in the events of life” (C 87)*
    - *“Strength to live out our vocation faithfully” (C 87)*
  - 3.4 Listening to the Word to become *apostles*
    - *Creation of environments with a strong spiritual impact*
    - *Provide pastoral processes for spiritual maturing*
- 4. “We welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our heart” (C 87)**

Rome, 13 June 2004

*Solemnity of Corpus Christi*

*My dear confreres,*

I am writing to you on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the Lord's memorial, the mystery of his life offered on the cross and the sign of his unconditional love for us. It reminds us that the Church, as the authentic community of believers, is born of the Eucharist. We all remain wrapped in wonder at the unheard of plan of Jesus who became incarnate so as to become “food” for us and so communicate to us his own divine life.

Even though the readings of the liturgical cycle C for this feast offer us Luke's text on the multiplication of the loaves, we cannot fail to think about the eucharistic discourse of John which is the more penetrating. He shows us that the Word truly became flesh, and that we who hear what he said are invited today to eat at his table as was the case in the past.

It is my earnest hope that our eucharistic celebrations, in which Jesus feeds us at his table with the bread of his Word and his Body, may be a source of unity and fraternity in our communities, and a source of zeal for the salvation of the young. In this way we can give our life for them, so that they may have life in abundance.

This was the secret of the strength and the holiness of our newly beatified Fr August Czartoryski, Sister Eusebia Palomino, and Alexandrina da Costa; Alexandrina, in particular, lived the last thirteen years of her life without any food other than holy communion. The Eucharist was the source of the spiritual strength of our young saints Dominic Savio and Laura Vicuña; their fidelity to Christ was nourished by his Word and Body and led them to offer themselves for the benefit of others, even to the extent of giving their lives. And this is our path too, if we are to become genuine disciples of Jesus.

To be his disciples, to share his life and mission, is no easy option nowadays, it never has been. The four evangelists are unanimous in showing us that it was easy – even too easy (cf. Mk 1,16-20; Jn 2,1-11) – to call others to follow him, but he did not succeed in keeping them faithful to him for long (Mk 14,50, Jn 18,15.27).

The fourth gospel has left us a dramatic and unforgettable account of the difficulties that even the closest of Jesus' disciples found in staying with him. After the amazing multiplication of the loaves on the mountain before thousands of people (Jn 6,3-14), and after his unexpected appearance in the darkness to calm the stormy sea (Jn 6,16-21), Jesus presented himself in the synagogue at Capernaum to the crowds he had fed and to the astonished disciples, as bread of life come down from

heaven (Jn 6,35.41). He asked them to believe in his word and eat his body. For the first time, notes the writer, “many of his disciples drew back”, finding it a hard saying that scandalized them, “and no longer went about with him” (Jn 6,66; cf. 6,60).

In reply to Jesus’ question the Twelve, through Peter, expressed their determination to remain, not because they had understood all that Jesus had said, but because there was no one else with his authority to whom they could go; not because Jesus toned down his words in any way, but because they were recognized as the words of eternal life (Jn 6,68). And today as yesterday, his true disciples remain with Jesus, despite the hardness of what he says, because there is no one else who merits their faith and because his words alone give hope to their expectations and ensure eternal life.

Dear confreres, I wish so much that we could all listen to Jesus as did the Twelve, while we help him as they did to feed our young people with bread and the word of God. I would so much like us to listen to him, when as confused believers with our backs to the wall, he comes to us in our gloom and darkness. I yearn for the day when we could dedicate a bit more of our time to welcoming Jesus and hearing his word, “the only thing necessary” (Lk 10,42), because finally we have understood that no one else has the words that can give us hope and enable us to live now and forever. I invite you therefore to start afresh from Christ, the Word of God.

## **1. Contemplating Christ by listening to God’s Word**

When I presented the Chapter documents to you – together with our commitments for the present six-year period – I wrote that “our future vitality depends on our ability to create communities that are significantly charismatic today”; and I added im-



mediately that “the essential basis for this is a renewed commitment to holiness”.<sup>1</sup> In fact, as John Paul II reminds us, “To tend towards holiness: this is in summary the programme of every consecrated life, particularly in the perspective of its renewal on the threshold of the Third Millennium”.<sup>2</sup>

And so I would like to take up again with you what I was saying some time ago about holiness, and I want to go a step further and this time dwell at greater length on the “central position of the Word of God in personal and community life”.<sup>3</sup> The high level of ordinary Christian life, to which we are called, “is inconceivable unless we begin from listening again to God’s Word”.<sup>4</sup> If then “God must be our primary concern” and if “it is he who entrusts young people to us”,<sup>5</sup> we must have his Word “in our hands each day”,<sup>6</sup> so that by learning from the sublime knowledge of Jesus Christ (Phil 3,8),<sup>7</sup> “we may walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord” (C 34).

This letter is a continuation of the process I pointed out to you earlier.<sup>8</sup> *Holiness*, which is our “essential task”<sup>9</sup> and “the most precious gift we can offer to the young” (C 25), has as its primary mission that of *speaking of and giving God to the young*. Moreover ours is a *consecrated holiness*, i.e. a *living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting* as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren”,<sup>10</sup> “the prolongation in history of a special presence of the Risen Lord”,<sup>11</sup> almost “a kind

<sup>1</sup> Presentation, *The Salesian Community Today*. Chapter Documents: AGC25, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Vita consecrata*, 93.

<sup>3</sup> AGC25, 31.

<sup>4</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> AGC25, 191.

<sup>6</sup> *Perfectae caritatis*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> “Dear Salesians, be saints” (AGC 379); “You are my God, my happiness lies in you alone” (AGC 382); “Looking at Christ through the eyes of Don Bosco” (AGC 384)

<sup>9</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Discorso ai partecipanti al Capitolo Generale*, in “L’Osservatore Romano”, 13-04-2002, p. 5. Cf. GC25, 170.

<sup>10</sup> *Vita consecrata*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Vita consecrata*, 19.

of Gospel spread out through the centuries".<sup>12</sup> In order to become what we are called to be, a living memorial of Christ, the sacrament of his presence in history, a manifestation of the gospel to the world, we must dedicate ourselves with a firm conviction and the use of all our resources to the contemplation of Christ.

In fact, "every vocation to consecrated life is born in contemplation, from moments of intense communion and from a deep relationship of friendship with Christ, from the beauty and light which was seen shining on his face. From there the desire to be always with the Lord – and to follow him – matures: 'how good it is for us to be here' (*Mt* 17,4). Every vocation must constantly mature in this intimacy with Christ".<sup>13</sup>

To meet with the Risen Christ at the present day is not an unrealizable dream – it is not a case of crying for the moon; it is a grace that is possible, a gift within hand's reach. We can all find him, "for *Jesus is present, alive and at work in his Church*. He is in the Church and the Church is in him (cf. *Jn* 15,1ff.; *Gal* 3,28; *Eph* 4,15-16; *Acts* 9:5). He is present in Sacred Scripture, which everywhere speaks of him (cf. *Lk* 24,27.44-47)".<sup>14</sup>

To meet us, "when the time had fully come" (*Gal* 4,4) God became man in Jesus of Nazareth; but first – in the beginning – "was the Word" (*Jn* 1,1). As the Word outside of time and as a man in history God came to meet us: in the Scriptures which are the "incarnation" of God's Word, and in Jesus who is the incarnation of the Son of God, we come into direct contact with God, without any further persons or intermediaries. The Bible and the biography of Jesus are only two aspects of the one incarnation: God's Word became flesh in Mary's womb and became the book of Scripture, "veiled in the first case by flesh and in the second by written words".<sup>15</sup> Hence Scripture is "a unique book,

<sup>12</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ecclesia in Europa*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> ORIGEN, *Homilies on Leviticus* I, 1: SC 286,66.

Christ himself; because the whole of Scripture speaks to us of Christ and finds its fulfilment in him".<sup>16</sup> Boldly did Ignatius of Antioch write: "I take refuge in the gospel as in the flesh of Christ".<sup>17</sup> For this same reason St Jerome declares: "Anyone who is ignorant of the Scriptures does not know Christ".<sup>18</sup>

To get to know Christ we can do no better than approach the Word of God. Contemplation of Christ passes necessarily, even though not exclusively, through the knowledge of the Scriptures: an intimate and personal knowledge, which is acquired in the heart, because "only the heart sees the Word".<sup>19</sup> When the heart that reads and the eyes that discern are those of a believer,<sup>20</sup> the written Word comes to life and gives rise to identification with Christ. And this precisely is *our first commitment*, as the Pope has reminded consecrated persons: "Every reality of consecrated life is born, and reborn every day, of the incessant contemplation of the countenance of Christ. The Church herself derives her impulse from the daily vision of the inexhaustible beauty of Christ her Spouse. If every Christian is a believer who *contemplates God's countenance in Jesus Christ*, you are so in a special manner. For this reason you must never grow weary of meditating on the *Sacred Scriptures*, and especially on the holy *Gospels*, so that they may impress on you the traits of the Word Incarnate".<sup>21</sup>

Prolonged listening to the Word is therefore a necessary condition for the contemplation of Christ, which leads us naturally to love, and this in turn to the free and necessary self-giving which is the beginning of exclusive acceptance. Martha learned from Jesus himself "the one thing that is needed": to give oneself to lis-

<sup>16</sup> HUGH OF ST VICTOR, *De arca Noe morali* 2,8: PL 176, 642.

<sup>17</sup> IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Ai Filadelfesi* 5,1.

<sup>18</sup> JEROME, *Comm. in Is.* prol.: PL 24,17. Cf. DV 25.

<sup>19</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Commentary on the Letter of St John* 1,1 in *Opere* XXIV/2, Città Nuova, Rome 1985, pp. 1638-1639.

<sup>20</sup> The figure is St. Jerome's, *Comm. in Is.* 15, 55: PL 24,536.

<sup>21</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord*. V Day of Consecrated Life (2 February 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 febbraio 2001.

tening to the Word. Here you have the best way in which to welcome God (cf. Lk 10,42). "If a man loves me", said Jesus to the apostles gathered in the intimacy of the Last Supper, "he will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14,23). The familiarity stemming from a personal meeting with Christ is nourished by reading his Word and putting it into practice (cf. Lk 8,19-21), and leads us to identification with his person and mission. "Religious", as Vatican II had already told us, "*must follow Christ as the one thing necessary, listening to his word and full of zeal for the things that are his*".<sup>22</sup>

Rightly has the GC25, in declaring that "for this reason our communities are called today more than ever in the past to make visible to young people, especially those poorest and most in need, the *primacy of God*, who has entered our life, won us over and placed us at the service of his Kingdom",<sup>23</sup> led us to place God as the unifying centre of our common life, and so "foster the central place of the Word of God in personal and community life".<sup>24</sup> This is the principal guideline running through the three fundamental aspects to which the GC25 drew our attention;<sup>25</sup> in this way it has urged the Congregation to accept the Church's invitation, so frequently repeated, to return to listening to the Word, so as to become familiar with Christ's demands and become God's family (cf. Mk 3,31-35).

And so, if "the spiritual life must be given pride of place" in our consecrated life; if "apostolic fruitfulness, generosity in love of the poor, and the ability to attract vocations among the younger generation depend on this priority and its growth",<sup>26</sup> there is no doubt that its primary source is the Word of God, "which nourishes a personal relationship with the living God and his will.

<sup>22</sup> *Perfectae caritatis*, 5. (*Italics mine*).

<sup>23</sup> GC25, 22.

<sup>24</sup> GC25, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. GC25, 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 93.

Meditation on God's word, and on the mysteries of Christ in particular, gives rise to fervour in contemplation and the ardour of apostolic activity".<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Listening to God's Word as Salesians

We Salesians are firmly convinced that although "the gospel is one and the same for everyone, it is also true that it can be *read through salesian spectacles*, from which derives a salesian manner of living it".<sup>28</sup> Founders and foundresses were inspired by these texts in accepting their vocation and in discerning the charism and mission of their Institutes.<sup>29</sup> Don Bosco too "looked at Christ so as to try to copy in himself those features which corresponded most closely to his own providential mission and to the spirit which must animate it";<sup>30</sup> in art. 11 of the Constitutions are set out these traits of the Lord's figure of which when "reading the Gospel we become more aware".

We feel grateful to God, because we know that it is by a gift of the Holy Spirit that we have rediscovered these evangelical perceptions, i.e. the particular salesian manner of understanding the figure and mission of Christ<sup>31</sup> as Don Bosco understood them. He "made a salesian reading for his own times; and after him, in his light and with a filial spirit, and following the same principles, we must make our own salesian reading of the Gospel for our life of the present day".<sup>32</sup> This specifically salesian approach to the Word of God is part of that "charismatic sensitivity" of which, as I said

<sup>27</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 94.

<sup>28</sup> *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco*. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco* p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> SGC, 89.

<sup>32</sup> J. AUBRY, *Lo Spirito Salesiano*. Lineamenti (Rome 1974), p. 53.



on an earlier occasion, “we are aware and are proud”.<sup>33</sup> I would venture even further, and say in the words of the SGC: “our spiritual heritage lies first of all in this reading of the Gospel”.<sup>34</sup>

A deeper knowledge of the Christ of the Gospel, in the way Don Bosco understood him, will ensure the salesian quality of our contemplation of Christ. This is precisely what I have been trying to inculcate recently by inviting you to live as Salesians “by looking at Christ through the eyes of Don Bosco”.<sup>35</sup> The personal experience of Christ as lived by Don Bosco is the salesian interpretation of God’s Word; this means that for us the life and work of Don Bosco are a “Word from the incarnate God”,<sup>36</sup> a living and charismatically compelling reading of the Word of God.

## 2.1 Don Bosco, “priest of the Word”

In Don Bosco’s time the Bible did not have a strong presence in the ecclesial and cultural context; the Scriptures were not considered the first among books about the faith. Though the Bible was not entirely absent from Christian life – it was attainable indirectly through the mediation of the Church – such mediation was almost exclusively liturgical or catechetical, and in its interpretation priority was given to its edifying application and the accommodated sense.<sup>37</sup>

### – *Biblical formation and personal ministry*

The religious teaching given by Mamma Margaret to young John, or better the religious atmosphere in which she brought him up,

<sup>33</sup> AGC 384 (2003) p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> SGC, 89.

<sup>35</sup> Letter of Rector Major, AGC (2003) 384, pp. 3-41.

<sup>36</sup> C. BISSOLI, “La Linea Biblica nelle Costituzioni Salesiane”, in AA. VV., *Contributi di Studio su Costituzioni e Regolamenti SDB*. Vol 2 (Rome 1982), pag 292.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. C. BISSOLI, “La Bibbia nella Chiesa e tra i cristiani”, in R. FABRIS (a cura di), *La Bibbia nell’epoca moderna e contemporanea*, ed. Dehoniane (Bologna 1992) 182-183.

even though it may have been without specific references to the Bible, was permeated by biblical notions and sensitivities, which expressed "the living sense of the presence of God, candid admiration of his works of creation, gratitude for his benefits, conformity to his will, and fear of offending him".<sup>38</sup> Don Bosco's God, like the God of the Bible, is a personal God who lies hidden behind the realities of which he is the origin and end; a God who is reached through events, referred to through recounting facts, and to whom recourse is had in daily life.<sup>39</sup>

Of Don Bosco's biblical formation in his seminary years little is known and that not very helpful; the study of Sacred Scripture seems to have been of rather marginal importance. In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco lists a series of biblical readings with which he was engaged and speaks of his love for Greek and Hebrew;<sup>40</sup> of the results of this study the *Biographical Memoirs* bear witness here and there, perhaps with some exaggeration.<sup>41</sup> In his writings numerous scriptural quotations can be found, usually for edifying purposes: "When Scripture is incorporated into a narrative as a reliable statement, it is generally used in a moral sense, often even in extended sense (...) or even daringly accommodated (...)".<sup>42</sup>

Much sought after as a preacher because of his "great facility in expounding the word of God", Don Bosco tells us that in preaching "he used to begin with a scriptural text"; the effectiveness of what he had to say was due, in addition to doctrine and spiritual emphasis, to his custom of "basing himself on Sacred Scripture or on the Fathers of the Church".<sup>43</sup> It is important to recall that

<sup>38</sup> E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*. Ed. S.D.B. (Rome 1988), p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella Storia della Spiritualità Cattolica*. Vol. II: *Mentalità Religiosa e Spiritualità*. Ed. LAS (Rome 1981) pp. 13-27.

<sup>40</sup> G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, dal 1841 al 1855*, A. Da Silva Ferreira (a cura di). Ed. LAS (Rome 1991) pp. 106-108.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. MB I, p. 395.423; II, pp. 510-511; XVII, p. 122.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella Storia della Spiritualità Cattolica*. Vol. I: *Vita e Opere*. Ed. LAS (Rome 1979) p. 239.

<sup>43</sup> G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, ed. cit. p. 97.112. Cf. MB III, p. 62; IX, p. 342.

the grace he fervently asked for in his first Mass was that of efficacy in speech: "I think I can say", he wrote towards the end of his life, "that the Lord heard my humble prayer".<sup>44</sup>

Though not excluding the fact that the Bible is the "word of God" par excellence, Don Bosco followed the custom of his contemporaries in using the expression to indicate the whole of the Church's teaching.<sup>45</sup> A Christian, he wrote, is one who has "the Divine Word as his guide".<sup>46</sup> "God's word is called light because it enlightens man and directs him in believing, working and loving. It is light because it gets into all the details and shows man what path he should follow to gain eternal life and happiness. It is light because it calms human passions, which are the real darkness, a darkness so dense and dangerous that it can be dispersed only by God's word. It is light because when it is preached as it should be it pours the light of divine grace into the hearts of listeners and leads them to a knowledge of the truths of faith".<sup>47</sup>

### – *Effective pedagogical application*

The relative importance given to the study of Sacred Scripture during his years in the seminary makes still more striking – and very indicative – the way in which Don Bosco was able to make good use of biblical data in his educational activity. In his pedagogy there is constant reference to the "word of God"; he built the holiness of his boys on a solid evangelization, based on and clarified by the "word of God".

<sup>44</sup> MB I p. 519. Cf. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> A single quotation will suffice as a demonstration: "Just as a body without food becomes sick and dies, so the same thing happens in our souls if we do not feed it. The food and nourishment of our soul are the word of God, i.e. sermons, explanations of the Gospel and catechism" (Don Bosco, *Companion of Youth* (Turin 1885), in OE XXXV, pp. 145-146.

<sup>46</sup> J. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria Ss. Immacolata*, Tip. Paravia (Turin 1858), in OE X, p. 356.

<sup>47</sup> J. BOSCO, *Il Cattolico nel secolo*. Libreria Salesiana (Turin 1883), in OE XXXIV, 369-370.

In his life of Dominic Savio, when Don Bosco is describing his spiritual growth, he notes at one point: "Rooted in his heart was the notion that God's word is man's guide on the way to heaven". Speaking of Dominic's concern to find an explanation for a part of the Scriptures that he had not understood, he added: "This was the starting point of that exemplary tenor of life, of the continual progress in virtue, of the exactness in the fulfilment of his duties, that could not be further improved".<sup>48</sup> And in fact, in the Rules of the Immaculate Conception Sodality drawn up by Savio, n.12 reads: "We shall take the greatest care of the holy word of God, and frequently recall the truths we have heard".<sup>49</sup>

The work in which Don Bosco best exhibits his biblical sensitivity in an educative context is without any doubt his *Sacred History*. In the Preface to this he explains why he has taken a different approach to the subject and points to the others then in circulation: too long or not long enough, lacking chronological references or pedagogical sensitivity. And he sets out the positive qualities of his own text: the accurate presentation of all the most important information contained in the holy books; care not to arouse in the young ideas that are less opportune; availability of the text to any young person, so that he could say: "take it and read it". Don Bosco added that he had achieved this result following a long and practical experience of contact with the young, during which he studied carefully the reactions his presentation could cause in them.<sup>50</sup>

Another text that reveals the importance Don Bosco attributed to the Bible is the *Companion of Youth*, of which it has been said

<sup>48</sup> G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*. Tip. Paravia (Torino 1859), in OE XI, pp. 188-189.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid* p. 229.

<sup>50</sup> He concluded as follows: "In every page the same principle applied: to enlighten the mind for the good of the heart and to popularize as much as possible knowledge of the Holy Bible, the foundation of our holy Religion, while giving dogmas and their proofs so as to facilitate moral and religious teaching, for which no other method is more useful and important than this" (J. BOSCO, *Storia Sacra*, in OE III, pp. 7-9).

that "in the field of ascetics it has a value equal to that of the preventive system in pedagogy", that it is a "proclamation of the programme of spirituality that Don Bosco gave to the young, and to which he remained faithful to the end of his life".<sup>51</sup> Don Bosco himself presented it as a "book of devotion adapted to the present day"; "I have tried", he wrote, "to compile a book suitable for young people, based on the Bible and adapted to their religious ideas, which would express the fundamentals of the Catholic religion with the greatest clarity and brevity".<sup>52</sup> In fact, an analysis of the recommendations given by Don Bosco to the young reveals that they are based on more than 40 biblical quotations, even though not all of them are explicit.

A particular fundamental "biblical slant" has been detected by one historian who is somewhat critical of Don Bosco's style of writing.<sup>53</sup> As a good educator and able communicator Don Bosco knew how to make imaginative use of the means of communication he had available: games, music, theatre, outings, liturgy, feast-days etc. One of these was the quotations from the Bible that he wanted posted up under the porticos of Valdocco. "It was his wish", said the biographer, "that even the walls of the house should speak of the need for saving souls".<sup>54</sup>

But it would seem that the ultimate decisive factor for his recourse to the Bible in his work of education was the theological reason: the Bible is the holy book par excellence. Other weighty reasons were the education he had received in his own family, permeated with genuine devotion and hence substantially biblical; his mysterious encounters with the supernatural manifested,

<sup>51</sup> P. STELLA, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane Provveduto" di San Giovanni Bosco*. Extract from a doctoral dissertation (Rome 1960), p. 48. 80-81.

<sup>52</sup> J. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, ed. cit. p. 169.

<sup>53</sup> «How can one not be struck by the extraordinary similarity between some events recounted in the *Memorie* and well-known passages in the Old and New Testaments?» (M. GUASCO, *Don Bosco nella storia religiosa del suo tempo*, in *Don Bosco e le sfide della modernità* (Torino 1988) 22).

<sup>54</sup> MB VI p. 948.



for instance, in his dreams which were markedly biblical; his temperament and inclination for positive studies, whether historical or exegetical; and perhaps to a lesser extent the cultural climate and formative experience of the seminary. Recourse to the Bible had for him a moral and educative purpose: it guided man's response to the action of God.

As a priest and educator, Don Bosco placed the Word of God at the centre of his apostolic work, to such an extent that he became known as the "priest of the word". "A worker of the word", wrote Fr Ceria, "is one who by both taste and inclination makes the word his work; but a priest of the word, we would say, is one who makes the word a ministry, the *ministerium verbi*..., a sacred use of the word made in the name of God for the spiritual service of one's neighbour, because of a duty flowing from vocation".<sup>55</sup>

## 2.2 Young people, the context and reason for our listening to God

Service of the Word as a vocational obligation! There you have an apt and well-chosen description of the objective and motive of *salesian evangelization*, which clearly requires a *salesian reading* of the gospel. We Salesians, "evangelizers of the young" as the GC21 calls us, "accompany our work by accepting as a necessary preliminary the *evangelization of ourselves*. Set in the midst of the world we are often tempted by idols and we know that we have a constant need to listen to the word of God and to be converted to it".<sup>56</sup>

How are we to read the gospel and why are we to do it *as Salesians*? To read the gospel today as Don Bosco would do it and update its options, we must begin from within the salesian tradition that takes its origin from him; it was there that his evangelical intuitions were developed and maintained, analyzed more deeply

<sup>55</sup> E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*, p. 184.

<sup>56</sup> GC21, 15.

and realized.. “Our Congregation’s dynamic and living fidelity to Don Bosco’s mission in history”,<sup>57</sup> is the first and best guarantee to ensure that we are listening to the word of God in a *salesian* manner.

The salesian reading of Scripture depends not only on an accurate scientific exegesis, even involving the most up-to-date research, but more especially on renewed fidelity to our mission: to young people (C 3). It is their needs that prompt and shape our pastoral activity (C 7); and we “with Don Bosco reaffirm our preference for the young who are ‘poor, abandoned and in danger’, those who have greater need of love and evangelization” (C 26). The Salesian who wants to hear God’s voice through reading the Bible begins by listening to the voice of the young, their needs and aspirations, their silences and their hopes, their shortcomings and dreams; in effect, the young are the “other source of our inspiration in spreading the gospel”.<sup>58</sup>

“Sent to young people by God” (C 15), the Salesian is present among them “with a fundamental disposition: an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them” (C 39). The mission will prompt him “to go to them where they are to be found and meet them in their own lifestyle” (C 41); he will meet them “at their present stage of freedom” (C 38). This unfailing presence opens him to a “true understanding of the world of the young” (C 39); and so in this way the Salesian, immersed in the world and in the cares of the pastoral life, “learns to meet God through those to whom he is sent” (C 95) and “to recognize the action of grace in the lives of the young” (C 86), as Don Bosco did.

And so we can never detach our hearts from the young, nor abandon our work for those entrusted to us. They are “our destined mission field”.<sup>59</sup> They form part of our salesian ‘credo’: “We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of

<sup>57</sup> GC21, 377.

<sup>58</sup> GC21, 12.

<sup>59</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *Consagración apostólica y novedad cultural*. Ed. CCS (Madrid 1987) p. 159.

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".<sup>60</sup> If we want to live contemplating God, if we are willing to hear his voice and listen to his Word, we must be with the young and stay among them. Then God will speak clearly to us. In fact, "we stay among the young because that is where God has sent us, and we examine the condition of youth with all its problems because that is precisely the channel through which *we are challenged by Christ himself*".<sup>61</sup>

Hence to be with God and hear his Word, there is no need for us to separate ourselves from young people affectively and/or effectively, and to abandon the salesian mission. When this is carried out by us as representatives of Christ and at his command, it is the best way for going to him and remaining with him. Not even in moments of deepest contemplation must the salesian community fail to keep in mind the vision of young people with souls to be saved!<sup>62</sup> When Jesus welcomed back his apostles, full of enthusiasm after their first apostolic mission, before calling them to step aside and rest he let them recount "all that they had done and taught" (Mk 6,30). To be with the young, to feel their needs and share their requests, can never be an obstacle to nor an excuse for not seeking God and willingly accepting his Word. From whom can we learn compassion for young people who are poor, abandoned or in danger, if we do not contemplate how much Christ suffered for them and if we fail to hear the "many things" he has to tell us (cf. Mk 6,34)?

And so, the imitation of Don Bosco, minister of the Word, and the conviction that we are "missionaries of the young",<sup>63</sup> are the necessary preconditions for listening to God *as Salesians*, and

<sup>60</sup> GC23, 95.

<sup>61</sup> E. VIGANÒ, "Confirma fratres tuos": ASC 295 (1980) p. 26. Italics mine.

<sup>62</sup> *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco*. 671

<sup>63</sup> JOHN PAUL II: cf. GC22, 13.

for contemplating Christ. The SGC said the same thing already in other words: “to understand more deeply the Christ of the Gospels, and the way Don Bosco understood and imitated him; this enables us to *revive* the gospel intuitions of the salesian spirit and to *gear them* to the new possibilities and the immense needs of the world of today”.<sup>64</sup>

### 3. “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God” (Acts 6,2)

I have always thought indicative and far-sighted the account in the Acts of the Apostles of the difficulties that arose within the first Christian communities and the immediate and classic apostolic reaction: “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6,2-4).

The Church of Jerusalem, because of its recognized success in the work of evangelization (Acts 2,14-41; 3,12-26; 5,12-16), had very soon to face hostility on the part of the authorities (Acts 4,1-22; 5,7-33), and suffer severe internal problems that tested its fraternal life (Acts 2,41-47; 4,32-35) and even its very survival. The crisis within the community was in fact more dangerous than the persecutions: the clash that put at risk the ability of the two ethnic groups of believers – Hellenists and Jews – was in the first place of social origin (Acts 6,1). In the face of the threat of division in the community, the apostles decided to create something new, the *diaconate* – the first *ecclesial* institution – a service for the common meals that healed fraternity and strengthened unity.

<sup>64</sup> SGC, 89.

From then onwards, freed from the daily distributing of benefits, they decided to give themselves exclusively to apostolic concerns. In this way a community crisis led not only to a new ecclesial ministry on behalf of charity, but especially to a real “conversion” in the apostles, who were able to return to their more specific duties: the practice of prayer and the ministry of the word.

As well as providing an example for us, that apostolic reaction remains normative at the present day. We recall the account of the episode precisely because it is the word of God. One who in the Christian community gives himself to preaching preserves unity of faith by restoring charity, but then he must return to those activities which are his characteristics: praying and serving the Word. The apostles saw the threat to their efforts at evangelization and were compelled to return to the essentials; some offices could be delegated to others, but never prayer and preaching. Not even care for the common life can allow an apostle to neglect prayer and the word of God; any other concern, even though it be urgent, must be passed on to others. For the Twelve it became clear that their task was to guard and ensure the common life of the believers but without neglecting prayer and the Word, otherwise they would have betrayed the apostolic ministry entrusted to them.

Some of you may point to a fact – not always noticed and even then not well understood – that would seem to contradict what I am saying: in our Constitutions, in fact, Chapter VII, “dealing with salesian prayer, understood in its deepest meaning of dialogue with the Lord”, is placed at the end of the second part, “as a concluding synthesis of the entire description of the salesian plan”.<sup>65</sup>

Now, “it would be quite wrong to interpret this as any lessening of the importance given to prayer because it is treated ‘after’ the themes of the mission (chap.IV), the community (chap.V) and the evangelical counsels (chap.VI). Quite the contrary! By plac-

<sup>65</sup> *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco* p. 274.



ing prayer here at the conclusion, the GC22 wanted to make it clear that the salesian consecrated and apostolic life ... has a character so supernatural, so far above the capabilities of our good will, that it would not be practicable nor even possible without the Holy Spirit, without the grace of God... . It is suggested too that all the concrete commitment of the Salesian's life and activity are destined to 'blossom' into prayer and themselves 'become' a deep communion with God".<sup>66</sup>

"Prayer is the soul of the apostolate, but the apostolate also gives life to prayer and stimulates it".<sup>67</sup> And so there is no conflict between mission and contemplation, between apostolic life and prayer life; on the contrary the former flows from the latter and is nourished by it; in fact, our project of life and our apostolic mission are born of God (cf. C 1), and in him are always reborn. Thus the life of prayer, which for us is a *gift* of God and a *response* to him (cf. C 85), maintains an intimate link with every element of our vocation and remains its permanent stimulus: one who neglects listening to God, one who has no time for him, will sooner or later leave the young aside from his pastoral activity, neglect the common life and community fraternity, and abandon the following of Christ by the evangelical counsels. Dear confreres, let us return to God "with the Sacred Scriptures daily in hand" (C 87), and the salesian mission will once again be our joy and the reason for our consecrated life.

### 3.1 Listening to the Word to *gain experience* of God

For believers, listening to God is not just a pleasant pastime or something to be done just occasionally, but an unavoidable necessity. The trait that best defines the true God is his will to manifest himself, his commitment to meeting man through his word,

<sup>66</sup> *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco* p. 662-663.

<sup>67</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 67.

first and many times subsequently through the prophets, and then definitively in the Son (Heb 1,2). "Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1,15, 1Tim. 1,17) out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends (cf. Ex. 33,11; Jn 15,14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar. 3,38), so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself".<sup>68</sup>

The Word not only discloses God's existence, but is in the first place his very essence: God is the Word (Jn 1,1-4); he differs from the false gods "who have mouths but do not speak ... no sound comes from their throats" (Ps 115,5.7), the one God has a voice that is powerful and full of splendour, thundering and shattering (cf. Ps 29,3-9); he is different from the dumb idols (1Cor 12,2) who silence people and lead them astray; he gives speech to those who listen to him, and they become prophets! (Amos 3,8; cf. Jer 1,6.9; Is 6,5-7; Ezek 3,1). And while we await the day when we shall see God "face to face" (1Cor 13,12), we are spurred on by the certainty that we do not search in vain, as though he had spoken in secret (Is 45.19); rather do we reach God in his Word and meet him in his Son: "no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known" (Jn 1,18).

To draw near to and meet with the Word, some particular spiritual attitudes are needed: "presenting the Word in its bare objectivity is not enough to make present the very power of God";<sup>69</sup> the "obedience of faith is due to the God who reveals".<sup>70</sup> In order to meet God we need to submit ourselves to the discipline of listening, which involves two attitudes of faith little appreciated at the present day but which unfailingly ensure contact with the Word who is God: silent adoration as a precondition, and not trying to imagine what God looks like.

<sup>68</sup> VATICAN II, *Dei Verbum* 2.

<sup>69</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *In Principio, la Parola*. Letter to the clergy and the faithful on the topic: «The Word of God in the liturgy and in life» for the pastoral year 1981-82 (Milan 1981) p. 29.

– *Silent adoration*

“Keep silence and hear, O Israel” (Deut 27,9). The peremptory tone of the biblical command removes all doubt: one who wants to listen to God must love silence. St John of the Cross explains this rule of the spiritual life as follows: “The Father speaks one Word which is his Son, and repeats it for ever in an eternal silence; and so in silence it must be heard by the soul”.<sup>71</sup> God’s supremacy is recognized and accepted by the believer before all else “in silent adoration and prolonged prayer”.<sup>72</sup>

The comment on art. 87 in our Project of Life is quite explicit: “The first attitude of the praying community is not that of speaking; as in the case of every believer, it must be silent and listen”.<sup>73</sup> To remain in silence before God is not a waste of time, without either activity or meaning, but an expression of the wonder he provokes in us and a sign of the adoration and respect he deserves. Without external silence, the absence of voices, sounds and noises, and especially without that interior silence which quiets our desires and the will to live for ourselves alone, the Word of God can find in us neither space nor cordial welcome: the Master, as St Augustine used to say, speaks within the heart and teaches within the intimacy of our being, silencing all voices from outside.<sup>74</sup>

If on God’s part in the beginning was the Word and in this Word we have been given grace and truth (Jn 1,1.14), on our part the starting point must be a reverent and welcoming silence. But it is an active silence, awaiting the desired Word and detached from all other voices; it is a complete silence that knows it is in the presence of the adorable God and remains as a servant with the

<sup>70</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 5. Cf. Rm 16,26; 2 Cor 10.5-6.

<sup>71</sup> ST JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Sentenze*. Spunti d’amore, 21, in *Opere* (Rome 1967<sup>2</sup>) 1095.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. CARLO M. MARTINI, *Il sogno di Giacobbe*. Partenza per un itinerario spirituale (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1989) p. 80.

<sup>73</sup> *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco*, p. 678.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. ST AUGUSTINE, *Meditation on the letter on love of St John* (Rome 1980<sup>3</sup>) p. 107-110.

eyes on his master (cf. Ps 123,2). "What God can say to man, with what intensity and communicative force, is not for man to anticipate, deduce or decide. The only anticipation or decision that is in man's power is that of a silence full of expectation, respect and obedience".<sup>75</sup> To live as believers at the present day we must be able to live with silence; filling one's life with noise and chattering is the road to incredulity: "each one is invited to rediscover in silence and adoration the fact that he is called to be a person before another Person who converses with him by his Word".<sup>76</sup>

*– Do not try to imagine what God looks like*

"To whom will you liken God? Or what likeness compare with him?", asks Isaiah (40,18). Since God is Word (Jn 1,1), listening is the only way to find him, conversation is the way to treat with him. The true God does not allow himself to be seen, not even by his closest friends (cf. Ezra 33,18-20), those who like Moses were able to speak with him "face to face" (Ezra 33,11; Deut 34,10). Indeed the true God specifically forbids the making of images of him (Ezra 20,4; 2 Kings 11,18).

The believer is forbidden to make for himself images of God, either by his own hands or conceived in his imagination (Deut 4,16-18; 1 Kings 14,9; Hos 13,2), or sought after in his heart (cf. Ex 32,1); nothing made by human hand (Ps 115,4) can reflect the glory of the living God. To make an image of God is to convert him into a lifeless idol. To make a representation of God to fit one's own needs is neither liberating nor helpful (Ex 32,1-8), and indeed only increases tension. Israel wanted a god who would "go before it" (Ex 30,2), and was then obliged to carry one that had feet but could not walk (cf. Amos 5,26). There you have the tragic consequence of not accepting God who is Word: you end up by creating for yourself images of God and becoming, like the

<sup>75</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *La Dimensione contemplativa della vita*. Letter to the clergy and the faithful of the Archdiocese of Milan for the pastoral year 1980-81. Milan 1980, p. 20.

<sup>76</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *La Dimensione contemplativa della vita*, p. 27.

works you have created by your own efforts, dumb, blind and lifeless (Ps 115,8).

Anyone who wants to hear God must listen to him, i.e. must "perceive the Word" (cf. Deut 4,9), "looking on the Scriptures as God's countenance", "learning to recognize in them the heart of God".<sup>77</sup> The meeting with God in the Bible is an event of the senses, but not a visible one; those who succeed in finding God and developing an intimate relationship with him are not those who see but those who listen to the Word and preserve it. Saint Augustine declares that only the eyes of the heart can see the heart of the Word.<sup>78</sup> To guide us by his Word and feed us by his promises, God does not allow us to make figures of himself.

### 3.2 Listening to the Word to *become community*

"God brings our community together and keeps it united by his call, his Word, his love" (C 85). This statement of the Constitutions is a faithful reflection of a fundamental conviction of biblical faith, more explicitly repeated in art. 87: "The people of God are gathered before all else by the Word of the living God".

In fact when God speaks he gathers together those who listen to him; his people are born and convoked by the Word, and in listening to it they remain united. Before entering the promised land, Moses warned all Israel: "This day you have become the people of the Lord your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Deut 27,9-10). And Jesus declared that the members of his family were not those who remained outside and called for him, but those who were around him, listening to him and doing what he said (Mk 3,31-35). Listening to God is the origin and reason for living together. We become believers by accepting the Word of God and we remain believers by living the faith in common.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Moralia* I 16,43; *Epist.* 31: PL 77, 706.

<sup>78</sup> *De Doctrina christiana* 4, 5: PL 34, 92.

– *Together because we are saved*

For God's people life in common is the way of living his salvation; living as a group means safety from evil and freedom from ourselves. Israel learned this through a bitter learning experience in the desert (Ex 17,1-17.25): in what was a 'no man's land' only God was able to keep them united and free (Deut 7,4; 8,14; 11,2-28); only the nourishment of his Word enabled them to survive (Deut 8:3); and when the prophets dreamed of a new salvation, they would proclaim a new and definitive gathering together of those dispersed (Is 43,5; Ger 23,3; 29,14; 32,27; Ezek 11,17; 34,14; 36,24), which would be accomplished when one man would die for the whole nation, "to gather into one the children of God scattered abroad" (Jn 11,52).

If from listening to the Word the people of God is born, no one can deceive himself that he has experience of God without feeling at the same time that he is a member of a community listening to him. Since listening to God's Word gives rise to the community, the best way of responding to God is to accept shared responsibility for the common life. This criterion prompts us to strengthen the feeling of membership of the community, which is "gathered together before all else by the Word of the living God" (C 87), and to meet him in the company of confreres so as to listen to him together. This can be achieved only in a community born of and maintained by God's Word. In fact, it is only in assembly that we believers confess that the reading of Scripture is the Word of the living God.

If we avoid dialogue with confreres, if we withdraw from the common life, if we avoid the daily routine and common prayer, not only do we seem to be distancing ourselves from our confreres but God himself becomes more remote and finally of little significance. Very different is the experience of one who feels God close to him, because he feels himself to be a brother and is happy in the commitment to live together and listen to God. Genesis recounts how Adam's attempt to hide from God, refusing to meet

him and respond to him (Gen 3,8-9) caused him to experience the bitter fruit of the death of his dear ones and the break-up of the unity of his family. God and his Word make life together possible, because they lead us to discover our brethren. It is true that fraternal life depends on the good will and collaboration of all the members of the community, but especially on the fact that they listen together to what God is saying: “fraternity is not only a fruit of human effort but also and above all a gift of God. It is a gift that comes from obedience to the Word of God.”<sup>79</sup>

– *Responsible for one’s brethren*

The community, the context in which we listen to God, is therefore also the place of fraternity to which we are invited and in which we are entrusted with brothers to love (cf. C 50). It is not surprising therefore that when God comes to meet us he asks us about our brothers, This was the experience of Cain (Gen 4,9) who, by rejecting the mission to take care of his brother Abel, rejected also the companionship of God (Gen 4,10), even though this did not free him from God and his demands.

By giving us “brothers to love”, God has entrusted us with the duty of taking care of them. Our obedience to God finds its acid test in our responsibility towards the confreres entrusted to us. On the one hand it is a fine thing that God takes care of us, placing us on the road of love as the way of growth, the most excellent way according to Saint Paul (1Cor 12,31). On the other hand, what happened to Cain is a warning: anyone who neglects his brother becomes a stranger in his own land and a fugitive from home (Gen 4,14).

If we give to our neighbour the attention he deserves, and especially to those who are or feel themselves to be at a distance, in addition to being good shepherds we shall find the time and words for conversing with God. In the Sermon on the Mount

<sup>79</sup> CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 48

Jesus reminds us that a necessary condition for meeting God is a fraternity that is not broken or, if it should have been broken, has been subsequently made whole again (cf. Mt 5,20-24).

As John says in his first letter, “he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (4,20). The acceptance of our neighbour as someone who belongs to us, one to whom we must give our care and attention, disposes us to await God and receive the care he gives us. If we want to make of our common life the context in which we listen to God, it must first and always be an environment in which the brother is welcomed with open heart, accepted as he is, provided with what he needs, and sustained in moments of difficulty (cf. C 52).

### **3.3 Listening to the Word to *remain faithful***

“Faith comes from what is heard”, wrote St Paul to the Romans (Rom 10,17) A prayerful approach to God’s Word is “at the foundation of the Church’s spirituality and of all Christian spirituality, and is not exclusive to one or any other. A Christian spirituality not based on Scripture will find it difficult to survive in the complex modern world, so difficult, fragmented and disorientated”.<sup>80</sup> Even we Salesians will find it difficult to continue as believers unless we make listening to God’s Word the first concern of our life, and the source of our mission. The SGC already recognized this with bold sincerity when it noted that the Salesian, in the multiplicity of his concerns, can meet obstacles to such listening. “Although tempted to hurry and to be superficial he will find the secret of his renewal above all in a serious study of the word of God”.<sup>81</sup>

For the reawakening and nourishment of faith “It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-

<sup>80</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *Perché Gesù parlava in parabole* (Bologna 1985), p. 114.

<sup>81</sup> SGC, 287.



giving encounter”, “one that draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.<sup>82</sup> “It is there, in fact, where the Master reveals himself and educates the mind and the heart. It is there that the vision of faith matures, learning to look at reality and events through the eyes of God, to the point of having “the mind of Christ” (1Cor 2,16).<sup>83</sup> What is faith if not the contemplation of oneself and an examination of reality as God sees it? And to see reality as God sees it one must accept his Word so as to know his mind. Once the Word is accepted, “living and active” as it is (Heb 4,12), it becomes our life and God’s promises are fulfilled in us, and through us in the world.

I offer you some brief comments on “the benefits of listening to the Word in faith”,<sup>84</sup> as presented in our Rule of Life (cf. C 87).

– “Source of spiritual life” (C 87)

“The Word of God is the first source of all Christian spirituality. It gives rise to a personal relationship with the living God and with his saving and sanctifying will”.<sup>85</sup> From listening to the Word flows life in the Spirit; under his action “they resolutely keep times for prayer, silence and solitude, and they never cease to ask the Almighty for the gift of wisdom in the struggles of everyday life (cf. Wis 9:10)”,<sup>86</sup> and in this way “consecrated persons discover their own identity and find profound peace; they grow more attentive to the daily challenges of the word of God”.<sup>87</sup>

An exceptionally good instrument for growth in listening to the Word is the *lectio divina*; this is a believer’s method of reading

<sup>82</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39.

<sup>83</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 24.

<sup>84</sup> *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco* p. 678.

<sup>85</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 94.

<sup>86</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 71.

<sup>87</sup> *Ivi*.

Scripture, used from the beginning of religious life in which it is “held in the highest regard. By its means the word of God is brought to bear on life, on which it projects the light of that wisdom which is a gift of the Spirit.”<sup>88</sup> Rightly does the GC25, in its first practical guideline about evangelical witness, exhort the salesian community “to place God as the unifying centre of its being and to develop the community dimension of the spiritual life by fostering the *centrality of the word of God in personal and community life through the lectio divina*”.<sup>89</sup>

I hope that none of you will think that this guideline of the GC25 has introduced an element extraneous to our spirituality; “the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*”<sup>90</sup> has been at home in the religious life from its very beginnings, and at the present time is seen to be very necessary: “nowadays a Christian cannot be an adult in faith and able to respond to the needs of the contemporary world, if he has not learned the practice in some way of the *lectio divina*”.<sup>91</sup>

This is not the time to give a full presentation of this method of praying the Word of God, already so well known<sup>92</sup> and used successfully even among ourselves. I would rather remind you of its fundamental purpose and refer briefly to the method as a pressing invitation to each of you to know it well so that you can teach it to others.

I would say that the objective of *lectio divina* is that of listening to God praying his Word, in order to see ourselves as he sees us, and want ourselves to be as he wants us to be. This is achieved through a sapiential approach to the written Word, which draws on the experience of those who have consecrated their life to

<sup>88</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 94.

<sup>89</sup> GC25, 31. Emphasis mine.

<sup>90</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39

<sup>91</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *Diocesan Pastoral Programmes 1980-1990* (Milan 1991), 440-441.

<sup>92</sup> The classical presentation – and in my opinion, the best – is that of GUIGO II IL CARTOSIANO, *Scala Claustralium*: PL 184, 475-484. I strongly recommend that you read it.

listening to God so as to understand reality and themselves as words of God. In the *lectio* God's Word becomes the key to the understanding of ourselves; we try to let God tell us who we are for him and what he wants from us.

For us to be at home with it, the *lectio divina*, like any method of praying, needs practice, but it requires especially the will to listen and the willingness to obey. In its most traditional form it involves four stages or "spiritual degrees": reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), prayer (*oratio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*). In recent times, in an effort to up-date it, another stage has been added: action (*actio*). Often other elements are indicated as well (*discretion, deliberation, collation, consolation, etc.*), but in reality these seem to be nothing more than aspects of the fundamental stages.

- *Reading.* *Lectio divina* begins with an attentive reading, or better a re-reading several times, of the text in which we want to hear what God is saying. The chosen text may be easy to understand or well known – that does not matter; it needs to be read over until it becomes familiar, almost learned by heart, "emphasizing the main elements".<sup>93</sup> One must not pass beyond this first stage without being able to reply to the question: *what is the real meaning of this passage I have read?*

- *Meditation.* Once he has discovered the meaning of the biblical text, the attentive reader tries to become involved personally, by applying the meaning to his own life: *what is this text saying to me?* "To meditate on what we read helps us to make it our own by confronting it with ourselves. Here, another book is opened: the book of life. We pass from thoughts to reality. To the extent that we are humble and faithful, we discover in meditation the movements that stir the heart and we are able to discern them".<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *La gioia del vangelo*. Meditation for the young (Casale Monferrato 1988), p. 12.

<sup>94</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2706.

The Word has been heard and calls for consent; it has not been accepted unless it reaches the heart and brings about conversion. Understanding the text leads to understanding oneself in its light; in this way the text that has been read and understood becomes a norm of life: *what must I do to put it into practice, what must I do to give its meaning to my own life?*

- *Prayer*. To know, guess at, or even merely imagine what God wants leads naturally to prayer; in this way a burning desire arises for what daily life should become. The one who prays does not ask so much for what he lacks but rather for what God has enabled him to see and understand. He begins to yearn for what God is asking of him; and in this way makes God's will for him the object of his prayer.

- *Contemplation*. The desire to do God's will leads gradually and unconsciously to adoration, silence, praise and to "the poor and humble surrender to the loving will of the Father in ever deeper union with his beloved Son".<sup>95</sup> From the contemplation of ourselves and our own world in the light of God we pass to the contemplation of ourselves as God sees us, to know that we are in the presence of him who is the object of our desire, the sole focus of our prayer. As distinct from the preceding stages, which are activities that require a force of will, "contemplative prayer is a gift, a grace",<sup>96</sup> neither normal nor in any way our due; we can long for it, ask for it, and welcome it if it comes, but it is never automatic.

I can reveal to you that following the decision of the GC25, I feel personally obliged to "keep on reviving and expressing the primacy of God in the communities", by fostering the centrality of God's Word in personal and community life, first of all "through the *lectio divina*".<sup>97</sup> This is a matter of great importance to me – I will tell you why in the words of Cardinal Martini – "because

<sup>95</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2712.

<sup>96</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2713.

<sup>97</sup> GC25, 30.31.

I shall never tire of repeating that the *lectio* is one of the main means by which God wishes to save our western world from the moral ruin that threatens it because of its indifference and fear of believing. The *lectio divina* is the antidote offered by God in these recent times to foster the growth of that interior consciousness, without which Christianity risks losing out to the challenge of the third millennium".<sup>98</sup>

A particular and practical form of the *lectio divina* is the daily meditation (C 93).<sup>99</sup> Don Bosco recommended this insistently to his followers, even to the extent of writing in the confidential recommendations to the rectors: "Never omit the meditation each morning".<sup>100</sup> Taking up his thought, the Constitutions testify that "this indispensable form of prayer... strengthens our intimate union with God, saves us from routine, keeps our hearts free and fosters our dedication to others". And the article concludes by declaring that the faithful practice of meditation makes life joyful and is therefore a guarantee of our perseverance. I sincerely hope that the time has come for us to renew our esteem for meditation, which is not always and everywhere given sufficient attention.

– "*Food for prayer*" (C 87)

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4,4; cf. Deut 8,3). In the Christian life, God's Word is nourishment "for life, for prayer and for the daily journey"; "Prayer and contemplation provide the ambient for the reception of the Word of God and at the same time they spring from listening to the Word".<sup>101</sup> Not by chance did the GC25 speak of a certain weakening of faith present in our communities, manifested in the first place "in the abandonment of

<sup>98</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *Diocesan Pastoral Programmes 1980-1990*, 521.

<sup>99</sup> Cfr. *Project of life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*, pp. 715-716.

<sup>100</sup> *Epistolario I*, lettera 331, p. 288-290

<sup>101</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 24.25

prayer”;<sup>102</sup> in fact, “an authentic spiritual life requires that everyone, in all the diverse vocations, regularly dedicate, every day, appropriate times to enter deeply into silent conversation with him by whom they know they are loved, to share their very lives with him and to receive enlightenment to continue on the daily journey. It is an exercise which requires fidelity, because we are constantly being bombarded by the distractions and excesses which come from today’s society, especially from the media. At times fidelity to personal and liturgical prayer will require a true effort not to allow oneself to be swallowed up in frenetic activism”.<sup>103</sup>

It is possible that the problems and challenges that our common life must confront at the present day – and the GC25 has drawn up an ample list of them<sup>104</sup> – arise in part from the inability to live the faith in a *liturgical manner* and to live as a praying community. Symptomatic of this is the fact that we usually fail to discern the “signs of the times”, to identify what God wants from us, when we do not live as a community he has called together. The lack of the sense of belonging to a praying community, the pretext of going to God on our own, do not allow us to meet God nor hear his Word. We were reminded of this by Vatican II: “prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together”.<sup>105</sup>

The neglect of community prayer, that may exist in some communities or some confreres, makes more difficult the cordial and joyful active presence in the common life and makes us deaf to the Word God wishes to address to us. For the believer with an awareness of the Bible there is ordinarily a particular channel for the transmission of God’s Word: the liturgical community. A sincere searching for God’s will leads us to make the communi-

<sup>102</sup> GC25, 54

<sup>103</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 25.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. GC25, 54.

<sup>105</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 25.

ty liturgy the normal context and particular setting for listening to God. It is significant that in praying the psalms we frequently find God asking to be heard: "O that my people would hear me, that Israel would walk in my ways" (Ps 81,9; cf. 78,1). In the Bible, prayer is not only an occasion for the believer to make known to God his worries and personal needs, but above all an opportunity taken by God to speak make his will known. Anyone yearning to hear God's voice must remain with him in prayer, especially community prayer.

I would just like to refer here to two moments in our life of community prayer which are for us, "with the Scriptures daily in hand",<sup>106</sup> excellent occasions for practising listening to God's Word as we pray together.

The first obviously is the *celebration of the Eucharist*, "the central act of every salesian community"; in it "the hearing of the Word finds its privileged place" (C 88). This statement of our Rule of Life reflects a firm conviction of patristic tradition based on the teaching of Jesus, who declared himself to be the bread of life through his word and his body for those who believe in him (Jn 6,47.54): when we accept the Word we receive Christ, as we receive him in the Eucharist.<sup>107</sup> "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body."<sup>108</sup>

In the Eucharist, which we celebrate every day, we are provided with this double source through the one bread of life. It is a matter of a grace similar to that of the disciples at Emmaus, which enables us to open our eyes and see the Risen Christ and recognize

<sup>106</sup> *Perfectae caritatis*, 6.

<sup>107</sup> JEROME, *Breviarium in Psalmum* 147: PL 26, 1334; AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 56, 10: PL 38,381;

<sup>108</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 21. Cf. *Presbiterorum Ordinis*, 18; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 51

him as he breaks the bread (Lk 24,30-31). But for this to happen we have to walk with him and listen to him as he explains the Scriptures. Only in this way will we feel our hearts burning within us (Lk 24,32). The order is: first we listen then we see.

I am convinced that if we become more familiar with his word and his demands, it will be easier for us to recognize his countenance and discover him in our midst. But to hear him we need careful application and constant study as Fr Vecchi reminded us: "The Eucharist is totally permeated by the word of God, not only in the readings which are proclaimed, but because of the constant references to Scripture in the texts of the Missal. The richness of these in the eucharistic celebration cannot be understood without an appropriate introduction to the Bible".<sup>109</sup>

The second moment of community prayer in which the Word of God is particularly present, is the *liturgy of the hours*, "the pulsating heart of the believer's day".<sup>110</sup> The liturgy of the hours extends the grace of the eucharistic mystery throughout the day";<sup>111</sup> in it ... "the community praises and makes supplication to the Father, nourishes its union with him and *maintains an attentive attitude to the divine will*" (C 89. *italics mine*).

There is no doubt that "one of the most valuable achievements of recent decades has been the rediscovery of liturgical prayer by religious families". "Communal celebration of the *Liturgy of the Hours*, or at least of some part of it, has revitalized prayer in many communities, which have been brought into more lively contact with the word of God and the prayer of the Church".<sup>112</sup> And we are committed to celebrating it "with the dignity and fervour that Don Bosco recommended" (C 89).

<sup>109</sup> JUAN E. VECCHI, «This is my body, which is given for you», AGC 371, p. 51-2

<sup>110</sup> AMEDEO CENCINI, «Preghiera e formazione permanente. Il respiro della vita», in *Testimoni* 4 (2003), p. 10.

<sup>111</sup> C. 89; cf. GILH 12.

<sup>112</sup> CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community*. "Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor", 14



To pray with the Church and in the same manner as the Church is already a good reason for giving ever greater attention to the daily celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, the source and field of spiritual formation.<sup>113</sup> But I want to mention two other motives that I think it is important to keep in mind. In the psalms we find God's word addressed to us, because they are part of Holy Scripture; at the same time we find in them the word we can address to God as our own prayer; the same words serve both God and ourselves as mutual forms of expression. With the psalms we pray when God is telling us about himself, about us and others, about his plans; but we also pray in telling him what we want to say to him. Moreover morning and evening prayer, conveniently distributed through the working day, help us to find God again after seeking and serving him, and even unfortunately forgetting him, in our thousand and one daily concerns.

– *“Light to see God’s will in the events of life” (C 87)*

“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12,2). Nowadays a great deal is said about discernment, and in my opinion rightly so. It is the result of listening to the Word with patience and docility. Through it we can find what God wants of us today, and how he wants it. To interpret the signs of the times in a reality such as ours in which areas of darkness and mystery abound, the Lord himself must be our travelling companion as he was with the disciples as they walked towards Emmaus, and grant us his Spirit. Only the Lord, present among us, can help us to fully understand and carry out his word; he alone can enlighten minds and warm hearts.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Cf. GC25, 26.31.61.

<sup>114</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 2.

In fact there have always been “men and women of prayer, those who truly interpret and put into practice the will of God, who perform great works. From familiarity with God’s word they draw the light needed for that individual and communal discernment which helps them to seek the ways of the Lord in the signs of the times. In this way they acquire *a kind of supernatural intuition*”,<sup>115</sup> i.e. an outlook of faith without which “life itself loses meaning, the faces of brothers and sisters are obscured and it becomes impossible to recognize the face of God in them, historical events remain ambiguous and deprived of hope, and apostolic and charitable mission become nothing more than widespread activity.”<sup>116</sup>

Aware of the difficulties in the way of our community life being a “gift and prophecy of communion”,<sup>117</sup> the GC25 asked local communities to “promote the practice of community discernment in the light of the Word of God and of the Constitutions”<sup>118</sup> and to ensure the “necessary conditions so that every confrere can give a sense of deep unity to his being and working, by the practice of evangelical discernment as an attitude of searching for the will of God”.<sup>119</sup>

I must confess that I do not think true discernment is possible at either personal or community level without the daily practice of the examination of conscience.<sup>120</sup> What I mean is that life is a vocation; we exist because we have been created personally by God, “moulded and shaped by his hand” (Ps 119,73; cf. Gen 2,7); we are living, not because we wanted to, but because he wanted us, called us out of nothing (Gen 1,26); and precisely because life is the effect of God’s will it cannot be lived apart from or outside the

<sup>115</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 94.

<sup>116</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 25.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. GC25, 13

<sup>118</sup> GC25, 15. Cf. SGC, 287-288.

<sup>119</sup> GC25, 32.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. SILVANO FAUSTI, *Occasione o tentazione? Arte di discernere e decidere* (Milano 1999).

divine will; if we do not exist by our own choice, neither can we live as we might freely choose: life, which has been a free gift to us, has limits that must be respected (Gen 2,6-17) and obligations that must be fulfilled (Gen 1,28-31).

It would be of little avail were we to recognize God and our obligations in his regard if we made no attempt to seek him in our life and organize this accordingly – St Ignatius of Loyola would call it *ordering* our lives to him.<sup>121</sup> We must listen attentively to the voice of God to understand what he is asking of us today, to deduce what he wants to tell us (cf. Lk 1,26-38) through life's daily events. And so discernment is necessary, i.e. we must be "able to distinguish what in our actions is in line with Christ's Spirit and what is opposed to it", "not to act on impulse", and when we do act "to understand where the motive force comes from",<sup>122</sup> what effects it has and where it is leading us.

How do we set about discernment? By means of the examination of conscience. This is something more than a formal element of evening prayer; it is a true means of spiritual growth. It teaches the user to look at the reality of both himself and others through the eyes of God and in his heart. The examination is a prayer in which the object is his own life and whose purpose is the clear recognition of God's plan for him and his responsible acceptance of it. To follow the mark of God's hand in the daily routine and in what happens each day is the matter for examination and its finest fruit. "This is the kind of examen that leads to the discovery of the sense and significance of living, and so it begins by listening to God who speaks to us through people, meetings, events and history".<sup>123</sup>

As consecrated apostles, we Salesians should have the ability to construct life projects that enable us to make positive progress in

<sup>121</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 1.

<sup>122</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *Essere nelle cose del Padre*. Riflessioni sulla scelta vocazionale (Casale Monferrato 1991), p. 81.

<sup>123</sup> MARCO I. RUPNIK, *L'esame di coscienza*. Per vivere da redenti (Rome 2002), p. 74.

our spiritual development; as educators we ought to have the courage to propose the examination of conscience as a method of prayer to be shared also with young people and with our lay collaborators. And when you come to think of it, this is something that requires only ten minutes a day – but every day – and yet when carried out faithfully leads us to find God in the ordinary course of our daily life, recognizing what he has done in us and for us (Rom 8,28)!

I suggest the following to you as a brief outline of an easy way for re-reading your own life in God's presence:

- *In the presence of God*: Before beginning, place yourself as consciously as possible before God who is looking at you and who loves you so much. Before looking into himself, the believer knows that he is in God's presence and becomes used to seeing himself and wanting to be as God sees him and wants him to be.

- *Thanksgiving* ("confessio laudis"). Begin the examen usually "by praising and thanking God for his gifts, for his loving design, and for the kindness he shows in the life of each one of us. In the light of his gifts our own correspondence with his designs can be expressed more accurately and with more personal truth",<sup>124</sup> without self-satisfaction, but also without self-pity.

Memory of the eucharist is the obligatory starting point for a recognition of the good things we have received; the believer recognizes that he is filled with grace rather than judged, loved rather than accused, provided that he has understood what God has done in him (1Thess 5,18) before accepting his own limitations. The first scrutiny to be made in God's presence must be that of the gifts received or needed (cf. Jn 4,10); renewing the awareness of these gifts makes the presence of the Giver all the more imposing, for he gives himself in his gifts.

<sup>124</sup> CARLO M. MARTINI, *Mettere ordine nella propria vita*. Meditazioni sul testo degli Esercizi di sant'Ignazio (Casale Monferrato 1992), p. 59.

- *Recognition of debt* ("confessio vitae"). Recognition of the gifts received leads automatically to the debt that is owed; the greater the grace received, the greater the responsibility contracted. To know how much is owed and to accept it is the grace asked for, because it is the beginning of the return to God – gift for forgiveness. To recognize a sin or defect, there is no need to be able to explain or justify it, nor to live in peace with it. The grace to recognize oneself as a sinner in God's sight is, in reality, the gift of knowing that one is first loved by him and this without limit. And so, to admit our sin makes us humble, makes us return to our origins, to the *humus*, to the earth not yet enlivened by the Spirit, without being condemned to live in humiliation. When we ask pardon from God, what we are asking for is really the gift of his love.

"Surprise at discovering that we are loved is the strongest and most radical factor in renouncing evil and embracing a life of virtue. Finding that we are loved moves us deeply, leads us to repentance, to the recognition of sin, to its confession and the request for forgiveness. And the love the Lord has for us is the strength with which we defend ourselves against future sin. The will to improve, to sin no more, the decision to completely renounce sin will be soundly efficacious only if it is founded on a love which surprises me and even moves me to tears at times. To discover one's sin with the eyes of the Lord upon us, or indeed to have the grace to see that God has taken it upon himself, leads to repentance... and repentance takes us home".<sup>125</sup>

- *Commitment to conversion* ("confessio fidei"). When a sinner returns to God, he tries to remain with him; the gift of forgiveness produces the desire to let oneself be guided by him. The purpose of amendment is an effort that exceeds our own possibilities, nor will good intentions make up for all our defects. Correction will come from the contemplation of the grace with which we did not correspond; it is not the believer who determines the extent

<sup>125</sup> RUPNIK, *L'esame di coscienza*, p. 78.

of his conversion; at most he can only establish the goal and the way to reach it. The extent is decided by God who loves us so much and reveals to us what he wants from us. Through his grace and by his will, there is born in us the desire to return to him and stay with him. In this way the requested grace of conversion closes a process that began by us recalling the graces already received and experienced.

The purpose of the examination of conscience is not so much to analyze one's intimate feelings as to discover "God in everything and everything in God", to use the expression of one specialist in discernment. "Thanks to the familiarity with God fostered by the use of the examen, we succeed in becoming aware of how God manifests himself in us and of how we live in him, which truly matures our faith. The examen fosters the consciousness that we are always in his sight and what that relationship requires of us. This awareness of the presence of God is maturity in faith".<sup>126</sup>

– *"Strength to live out our vocation faithfully" (C 87)*

"Your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path" (Ps 119,105). The times in which we are living make us feel "the need for a continual change of mentality regarding lifestyles, educative and pastoral criteria and methods, and also of structures, in constant fidelity to the original charism".<sup>127</sup> This requirement comes down to us not only because we are part of a world which is changing nowadays at a frenetic rate, but because – even before that – salesian life demands that we be faithful to the world, i.e. a constant availability to respond to its challenges, and fidelity to our mission in the Church for the benefit of the young. As consecrated persons we shall succeed in remaining faithful if we are "capable of continually looking at ourselves afresh... in the light of God's Word".<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> RUPNIK, *L'esame di coscienza*, p. 85.

<sup>127</sup> GC25, 51.

<sup>128</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 85.

Living under God's Word means remaining in his presence just as we are, without any possibility of hiding from him (Gen 3,8-9; Ps 139,7). "The true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1,9), his Word brings out in us the truth about ourselves, not always faced up to and sometimes even denied. The often dark corners of our heart are enlightened and take on meaning, because they enable us to see what there is in us opposed to the Word, the frequently unacknowledged roots of certain less evangelical traits, those subtle motivational tendencies which risk perpetual concealment and which – precisely because they are uncontrolled – radically threaten every option of an evangelical life. "And so, dodging a meeting with the Father's Word precludes all possibility of access to him, and of deciphering *oneself*, of being understood and pardoned, welcomed back and possessed, of being part of God's plan and of being loved".<sup>129</sup> Listening to the Word leads to the feeling of being loved by God, and so of remaining faithful!

Living under God's Word means, furthermore, watching in admiration as God reveals himself, gazing in wonder at his progressive daily manifestation in the world and in the heart of each one. When God speaks to us he reveals himself and, by showing himself, seeks us because he loves us and manifests a faithfulness which is "new every morning and never comes to an end" (Lam 3,23-23); he examines us and lays us bare (cf. Ps 138,11-12) and, despite our incredulity, reaffirms his loyalty (Rom 3,3). It is in this unbreakable loyalty, unbroken even by our abandonment, that we can think of returning to the covenant and knowing his fidelity again (cf. Hos 2,21-22). Listening to the Word allows us to experience God's fidelity and gives us the courage and strength to remain faithful to him. Personally I find it difficult to imagine a life of fidelity to God unless it is based on attention, solicitude and welcome acceptance of his Word.

<sup>129</sup> MAURO M. MORFINO, "Scoprire le tue Parole è entrare nella Luce". "La Parola di Dio informa la vita del credente", *Theologica & Historica*. Annali della Pontificia Facoltà Teologica della Sardegna (Cagliari 1999), 42.

### 3.4 Listening to the Word to become *apostles*

“That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you” (1Jn 1,3). The Word we have heard must be passed on; it is not a gift to be jealously preserved for ourselves; obedience to God becomes a mission in the world because we are apostles. “Nourished by the word, made new, free and conformed to the Gospels, consecrated men and women can be authentic *servants of the Word* in the task of evangelization. This is how they carry out a priority for the Church at the beginning of the new millennium”.<sup>130</sup>

In a world in which indications of God seem to have got lost – and as Salesians we are much concerned about this in the world of youth – what is expected from us is a witness that is persuasive because of the coherence between *proclamation and life*, and prophetic because it *affirms the primacy of God and of the good things to come*. Now “*true prophecy is born of God*, from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history. Prophets feel in their hearts a burning desire for the holiness of God and, having heard his word in the dialogue of prayer, they proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin. Prophetic witness requires the constant and passionate search for God’s will, for self-giving, for unfailing communion in the Church, for the practice of spiritual discernment and love of the truth. It is also expressed through the denunciation of all that is contrary to the divine will and through the exploration of new ways to apply the Gospel in history, in expectation of the coming of God’s Kingdom”.<sup>131</sup>

As educators and evangelizers of young people of the third millennium, we have the apostolic responsibility of listening to God *on behalf of the young*, but also *with the young*. This is an indication to us of two tasks in our pastoral work for the young that must not be overlooked.

<sup>130</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 24.

<sup>131</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 84.



– *Creation of environments with a strong spiritual impact*

The pressing appeal *to return to the young*, that I have been making ever since my first address as Rector Major<sup>132</sup> and repeat wherever I go, is not prompted only by my conviction that “*God is awaiting us in the young* to offer us the grace of meeting with him”,<sup>133</sup> but also by the fact that today’s youngsters have an enormous need of God, even though they do not always know how to express it.

“Called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity”, we Salesians “walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the Risen Lord” to help them to discover “in him and in his Gospel “the deepest meaning of their own existence” (C 34). Building life with Christ as the fundamental point of reference is the objective of our pastoral work; if we want to help young people “to see history as Christ sees it, to judge life as Christ judges it, to choose and love as Christ does, to hope as Christ teaches him, to live in Christ the communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit”,<sup>134</sup> we must lead them to a personal meeting with the Christ who comes to us in his Word and in the sacraments (cf. C 36).

The Pope has spoken of the “need for a Christian life distinguished above all in *the art of prayer*”. “Is it not one of the signs of the times that in today’s world, despite widespread secularization, there is *a widespread demand for spirituality*, a demand which expresses itself in large part as *a renewed need for prayer*?”<sup>135</sup> Or is it not also our common experience, as it was of John Paul II, that youngsters are “yearning for prayer, meaning in life and friendship”?<sup>136</sup> It is therefore “essential that *education in prayer* should become in some way a key-point of all pastoral

<sup>132</sup> Pascual Chávez, “Closing address to GC25”: GC25, 185.

<sup>133</sup> GC23, 95; cf. Cost. 95.

<sup>134</sup> GC23, 114. Cf. SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry*. A basic frame of reference. (Rome 2000), 33.

<sup>135</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 32.33.

<sup>136</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 9.

planning”.<sup>137</sup> Our communities, like every Christian community, must become “*genuine ‘schools’ of prayer*, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly ‘falls in love’. Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God’s plan”.<sup>138</sup>

For this reason the GC25 has asked salesian communities to create strongly spiritual environments for our young people, many of whom are “in a secularized environment... which is looking for new spiritual experiences and feeling the irrelevance of faith”.<sup>139</sup> These “settings with a strong spiritual character” must in the first place propose and live “occasions of deep spiritual experience with young people,”<sup>140</sup> “leading, in ways proper to each person’s particular gifts, to setting up schools of prayer, of spirituality and of prayerful reading of the Scriptures”,<sup>141</sup> which form in the young a permanent attitude of personal prayer, of contact with God’s Word and with the Eucharist.

We shall become “enthusiastic teachers and guides, saints and formers of saints, as was St John Bosco”,<sup>142</sup> provided that our communities seek to be “places for hearing and sharing the Word, for liturgical celebration, for the teaching of prayer, and for accompaniment through spiritual direction”.<sup>143</sup> If as communities we open our heart to grace and allow God’s Word to pass through us to others with all its power, and if in an atmosphere of cordial welcome we offer to the young “valuable spiritual activities such

<sup>137</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 34.

<sup>138</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 33.

<sup>139</sup> GC25, 44.

<sup>140</sup> GC25, 47.

<sup>141</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 94.

<sup>142</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Message for the beginning of the General Chapter”: GC25, 143.

<sup>143</sup> CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 8.

as schools of prayer, spiritual exercises and retreats, days of recollection, spiritual dialogue and direction”, we shall be able to help them “to discern God’s will in their lives and to commit themselves to the courageous and sometimes heroic demands which faith makes of them”.<sup>144</sup> I could not wish you anything better, nor could I imagine a better apostolic service.

– *Provide* pastoral processes for spiritual maturing

“In the complex and fragmented culture of our day – asked the GC25 – how can the community carry out processes of discernment and pastoral conversion, and pass from a pastoral approach built around activities and needs to an approach centred on processes?”<sup>145</sup>

A valid though incomplete response had been already given by the GC23, when it recognized that the Congregation had followed out a renewal process which had led it to take up once more the specific salesian mission (GC20), assumed by the community in a project (GC21) and lived out as an ardent desire for God in the midst of the young, even to the extent of wanting to make with them a pilgrimage of faith in their particular way.<sup>146</sup> In giving practical form to such a process, which is substantially what we call *salesian youth spirituality*, the chapter members decided to do “everything in imitation of the Lord and following the way of charity of the Good Shepherd *on the way to Emmaus*”.<sup>147</sup>

The happy proposal to read over again the Emmaus story (Lk 24,13-35) is still a far-sighted one today, and is indeed essential for all who feel the need of the Word of God as a point of reference in providing a *model process* of salesian pastoral work for the young, in which are presented not only the goals to be reached but also the means to be used and the experiences to be

<sup>144</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 39.

<sup>145</sup> GC25, 44.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. GC23, 1-10.

<sup>147</sup> GC23, 92.93.

lived; it is a matter of making once again together with the young the pilgrimage of faith, and of "leading them to the Risen Lord" (C 34).

*"We take the first step in approaching the young and joining them* (GC23, 93), as did Jesus with the two disciples of Emmaus, and we go to them as his representatives wherever they are to be found, taking advantage of whatever good the situation may present; we join them and accompany them (cf. Lk 24,15), welcoming them without prejudice into our environments and with solicitude into our hearts. We are not put off by their bewilderment or confusion; we accept them as they are, without judgement or discrimination and we accompany them along their path in life. Our friendly and close presence will lead them to discover that Jesus is alive and is concerned about them.

*"We travel with them along the same road, listening to them and sharing their hopes and anxieties* (CG23, 93). Personal accompaniment, even though cordial, is not enough by itself; dialogue is needed, conversation about what concerns the young person and worries him, getting to know from him directly and not by hearsay what are his needs and dreams, understanding how he sees things and what he considers important. If we want to be accepted, we must first accept his world and get to know his motives so that we can share them if possible and make them our own; "hidden in their expectations they bear the seeds of the Kingdom".<sup>148</sup> *"Going to meet the young where they are to be found, ... attending to their requirements and aspirations, are for us fundamental steps that precede any other stage of education to the faith".*<sup>149</sup>

*"We patiently explain to them the demanding message of the Gospel"* (GC23, 93). After listening to what they say and getting to know their interests, what makes them unhappy and their bewilderment, we next have to convince them that Jesus is alive

<sup>148</sup> GC23, 95.

<sup>149</sup> GC23, 98. Il corsivo è mio.

(cf. Lk 24,23-24) and that what has happened is part of God's great plan. From what we have heard we pass on to its explanation in the light of the Scriptures (Lk 24,27): the problems experienced or still unresolved are filled with meaning and hope; wrong ideas or unrealistic plans take on a different aspect; "always and in every case we help them to be open to truth and to develop in themselves a responsible freedom" (C 32).

*"And we stay with them, to repeat the gesture of breaking the bread and stirring up in them the ardour of faith that will transform them into credible witnesses and proclaimers of God's word"* (GC23, 93). It will not be enough merely to talk to them of Christ; we stay with them and do not leave them until they have met him face to face. "With them we celebrate the encounter with Christ in word, prayer and sacraments" (C 36); "together with our young people we live a personal relationship with Christ who reconciles and pardons, who gives himself and creates communion, who calls and sends us, prompting us to become architects of a new society".<sup>150</sup>

Once they have discovered Jesus, alive in his Word which fills life with meaning, and in his Body broken for all, young people will find their way to return to the believing community (Lk 24,33), where they can testify to having found him, and will remember that their hearts burned within them "while he talked to them on the road and opened to them the Scriptures" (Lk 24,32). In this way they will become evangelizers of other youngsters, apostles of their contemporaries and witnesses of the Risen Christ.

#### **4. "We welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our heart"** (C 87)

Dear confreres, I cannot conclude this letter without passing on to you the pressing appeal addressed by the Pope to Christian Eu-

<sup>150</sup> GC23, 148.

rope to enter the third millennium with the gospel in hand: "In the careful study of God's word we will daily find nourishment and strength to carry out our mission. *Let us take up this book! Let us receive it from the Lord who continually offers it to us through his Church* (cf. Rev 10,8). *Let us devour it* (cf. Rev 10,9), so that it can become our very life. *Let us savour it* deeply: it will make demands of us, but it will give us joy because it is sweet as honey (cf. Rev 10,9-10). Filled with hope, *we will be able to share it with every man and woman whom we encounter on our way*".<sup>151</sup>

I myself, in presenting to you the documents of the last General Chapter suggested that we should "learn always to begin from the Word of God. This in turn means that we must make our own the attitude of our Blessed Lady in its regard: listen to it, obey it, make ourselves its disciples, and become believers".<sup>152</sup> With these words I was only reminding you of the text of our Constitutions, which exhorts us to take daily in hand the Holy Scriptures, following the example of the Blessed Virgin: "We welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our hearts, so that it will bear fruit and we may proclaim it with zeal" (C 87).

There is no better school than that of Mary<sup>153</sup> for introducing us to the contemplation and acceptance, to the preservation and proclamation of God's Word. "Having given her assent to the divine Word, made flesh in her, Mary is the model of the acceptance of grace by human creatures".<sup>154</sup> No other believer, in fact, was able to receive him as well as she did, to the extent of his becoming alive in her womb: Mary teaches us that the believer in the Word makes it his own flesh, that he who serves it with his life makes it his life itself, that he who obeys God (Lk 1,38) becomes his son (Lk 1,43). "Dare we perhaps call ourselves mothers of Christ?", wondered St Augustine; and unhesitatingly he replied:

<sup>151</sup> *Ecclesia in Europa*, 65.

<sup>152</sup> GC25, Presentation 2,2, p. 15

<sup>153</sup> Cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 1

<sup>154</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 28.

“But certainly we can dare to call ourselves mothers of Christ... Christ’s members are born by the spirit, as Mary bore Christ in her body: this is how we will be mothers of Christ”.<sup>155</sup>

It is not therefore just an illusion to think that Mary’s happiness is within our grasp. Mary’s God continues to sustain projects of salvation in our own day; he continues to seek out believers attentive to his Word who are willing to welcome it into their lives at any cost; to us he has reserved an adventure and graces similar to those he bestowed on his Mother. To be blessed like Mary (Lk 1,45) and live in the fullness of grace (Lk 1,28), it is enough for us to believe as she did: to entrust ourselves totally to God and behave as humble servants. If we are able to give ourselves totally to God as she did, we shall come to proclaim as she did that the Lord has done great things also in us.

We must not forget that Mary’s relationship with God and with Christ was not always the same and unchanged: it was logically more intimate just before and after the birth of her son (Lk 1-2); it remained hidden during Jesus’ public ministry (Jn 2,1-22; Lk 8,19-21; 11,27-28), with a new and intense contact during the week of the passion (Jn 19,25-27). Precisely because in any relationship with God it is always He who takes the initiative and decides on times and means, the relationship is never always the same. Mary learned this very soon: from the moment she gave birth to her son, she did not understand what was being said of him (Lk 2,18-19); the more she heard of the future of her son, the less did it coincide with what she had been told at the annunciation (Lk 1,30-33.35). The loss of the child Jesus in the Temple was a warning sign of a still more harrowing future: she had to live in the same house as a son who knew he was God but was for a time still submissive to her (Lk 2,49-51). No wonder that Mary, who could not understand it all, “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2,19).

<sup>155</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Discorso* 72 A, 8, in *Opere di sant’Agostino. Discorsi* II/1 (Rome 1983), p. 481.

Dear confreres, with all my heart I entrust you to Mary whom we believe to be present among us (C 8), and I ask her, “the model of prayer and pastoral love, the teacher of wisdom and guide of our Family” (C 92), to teach us to accept the Word and keep it in our hearts “so that it will bear fruit and we proclaim it with zeal” (C 87). At her school, and beginning always from the Word, who is Jesus Christ, we shall be able to live and even rejoice in a life lived with zealous enthusiasm for God and for the young, just as Don Bosco did.

*Pascual Chávez V.*

**Fr Pascual Chávez V.**  
*Rector Major*



## 4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

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### 4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

#### – *March 2004*

The Rector Major began the month of March preaching a Retreat at San José di Costarica, for the Provincials of both American Regions. As well as the 23 Provincials the two Regional Councillors Fr Esteban Ortiz and Fr Helvécio Baruffi also took part. Given the rather delicate political situation in their countries the Provincials of Haiti and Venezuela were unable to attend.

While he was in Costarica, Fr Pascual Chávez also met the Salesians in the country on Tuesday 2, in the Don Bosco College and the FMA from the Costarica Province on Thursday 4, in the Institute situated in Heredia.

At the end of the Retreat, the Rector Major and all the Provincials spent a day of relaxation before returning to their own houses.

On Monday 8 March Fr Chávez, accompanied by the Provincial of Central America, travelled to El Salvador. As soon as they arrived he went to the Retreat House at Ayagualo, where he had a very

busy day with the Rectors and those in charge of youth ministry in the Province, to whom he presented a view of the future of salesian youth ministry. At the conclusion of the meetings he presided at Mass.

The following day, in the morning he went to the Don Ricaldone Technical Institute, where after a meeting with representatives of the students he addressed all the pupils of the school speaking to them about St Dominic Savio on the actual day of his death. Later he met members of the El Salvador Salesian Family, celebrating Mass with them and with the Salesians. After lunch he had a meeting with the Salesians; then he left for Guatemala.

On Wednesday 10, in the morning at the Guatemala Salesian Theological Institute he met a group of representatives of the “Hermanas de la Resurrección” Congregation, founded by Fr Jorge Puthenpura, an Indian Salesian missionary who is working in the Kekchí area of Guatemala. They made a formal request to enter the

Salesian Family. Later Fr Chávez had a meeting with all the Salesians working in the country, celebrated Mass and had lunch with them.

From Guatemala the Rector Major went to Mexico, where he went to see his father and his family. On Saturday 13 he made his return journey to Rome.

Back in the Generalate he immediately began preaching a Retreat to a first group of Provincials, Provincial Councillors and Rectors from CISI. During these days, between 15 and 20 March, in the time available Fr Chávez worked in his office, received confreres who came to see him, met those responsible for salesian publishing houses in North Europe and presided at Mass on the Solemnity of St Joseph.

On Sunday 20, in the evening he gave the introduction to the second Retreat for the Rectors of CISI in the "Salesianum", and then during the following days continued to preach together with Fr Braido, who gave the afternoon conference.

On 22 March the Rector Major, accompanied by some Councillors, by the Rector and confreres of the community welcomed to the Generalate the casket of St Dominic Savio, presided at Mass in which

the priests on retreat also concelbrated.

At the end of the Retreat on Saturday 27 in the afternoon the Rector Major went to Belluno to visit Mgr. Vincenzo Savio, whose state of health had deteriorated considerably. In fact, having arrived in the Belluno community, he received a telephone call from the Vicar General, who thought that it would be best to visit the Bishop immediately after supper, since it was feared that Mgr. Vincenzo might enter a state of coma or even die. Accompanied therefore by the Rector of the community and the parish priest he went so greet Mgr Savio. Fr Chávez spoke with him alone and then had the others, priests of the diocese, family members, friends and Salesians come in while he gave the blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

On Sunday 28, he presided at the concelebration in the Don Bosco parish in Belluno, and then chatted with the youngsters and members of the Salesian Family, returning to Rome in the evening.

On Monday 29 March, in the evening he gave an introduction to the meeting of the Intermediate Council, which continued until Wednesday 7 April.

### – April 2004

On 2 April in the early afternoon, the Rector Major had a meeting with the novices from Pinerolo.

The following day he celebrated the second anniversary of his election as Rector Major. He presided at the community Mass, paid a visit to Mother Antonia Colombo to exchange Easter greetings, in the early afternoon received the Nuncio Apostolic of Paraguay, and in the evening gave the Good Night to the community of the Generalate with whom he shared some of his experiences during these first two years of his mandate.

On Palm Sunday Fr Chávez celebrated with all the Community. The following days while the meetings of the intermediate Council continued until Wednesday 7, the Rector Major received confreres and members of the Salesian Family; among these the Provincial of the Sisters of Miyazaki in Korea, accompanied by some other Sisters, and the Superior General of the Salesian Oblates of Mgr. Cognata, who came to give him their Easter greetings.

On Holy Thursday, the Rector Major concluded the Retreat of one of the communities of the

UPS with a homily, and in the afternoon presided at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The following day with all the community he took part in the various ceremonies for Good Friday. On Saturday he went to Sulmona, to meet the community and returned to preside at the Easter Vigil.

On Easter Sunday, 11 April, he celebrated Mass at Castelgandolfo for the community of the novices of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The following day he left early in the morning for Yaoundé, in Cameroon, where he preached a Retreat for the Provincials and Rectors of French and Portuguese speaking Africa. During the Retreat held in the Hospitality House in Mbalmayo between 12 and 17 April, the Rector Major, in addition to giving the conferences, presided at Mass, spoke with Provincials and Rectors who asked to speak with him personally, and gave the Good Night trying to answer the questions that had been put to him during the day; he also met the formation personnel.

After the Retreat was over, on Sunday 18 April Fr Chávez gave a conference to the students of theology from the Vice Provinces AFO and ATE, after which he

went to the Don Bosco parish in Mimboman, where he said Mass at which four confreres from the aforementioned Vice Provinces made their perpetual profession. At the end of Mass there was a press conference followed by lunch attended by the Nuncio Apostolic, Mgr. Eliseo Antonio Arotti. In the afternoon the Rector Major had a meeting with the Salesian Family at Cité Marie Dominique, the FMA house. The day ended at the Provincial house with a supper for all the Salesian Family and a Good Night. Fr Chávez often insisted during his talks on our task of collaborating in the building of peace in the different countries of Africa through our presence in the fields of education, evangelisation and human development.

The following day Monday 19, the Rector Major visited the house of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts and then went to Ebolowa. In the parish at Ebolowa he presided at Mass during which the first 10 Cooperators made their promise. After the Mass he paid a visit to the Don Bosco Professional Centre. After lunch Fr Chávez thanked everyone for the welcome he had received and for the attention of the confreres towards him, congratulating them for every-

thing that they were doing in this region of Africa, and encouraging them to face up to the present challenges and to renew our commitment for the future.

On Tuesday 20, at midday, the Rector Major arrived back home where he continued to work in his office. On Thursday 22, in the morning, he gave an interview to Vatican Radio on the occasion of the beatification of Fr August Czartoryski, Sr Eusebia Palomino and Alessandrina da Costa, and in the afternoon he received a group of SDB and FMA who were attending the Formation Course for Formation personnel at the UPS.

On the afternoon of Friday 23 Fr Chávez left for Alassio, where at the invitation of the local authorities he gave a conference on "Globalisation and the Preventive System". The following day he said Mass for the salesian community and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with whom he was able to have a conversation, and then went to Prè Martin, where Fr August Czartoryski died, and met the students of the Sixth Form College. After lunch on the way to the airport, he called in briefly to see the sick confreres in the Varazze community. Having returned to Rome, after spending

a short time in the Generalate, he went to the Sacred Heart Basilica where he presided at a Vigil in preparation for the beatifications.

In the morning of Sunday 25 April in St Peter's Square he took part in the Beatification ceremony, and in the afternoon attended the Academy in honour of our new *Beati* in the Palazzo Pio Auditorium.

In the morning of 26, he returned to the Sacred Heart Basilica where he presided at the Mass of Thanksgiving for the gift of salesian holiness.

The following day throughout the morning during the World Assembly of the Past Pupils, he received the three candidates for the Presidency of the World Confederation of the Don Bosco Past Pupils. Then he gave a talk to the Assembly in which he announced that Mr. Francesco Muceo was the new President for the next six years. In the evening he gave the Good Night.

On Wednesday morning 28 he received the new President of the "Auxilium" Faculty of Educational Sciences and her predecessor, and at the end of the morning the Superior of the UPS Vice Province together with the Rector Magnificus and the Vice Rector. On Thursday 29 he presided at

Mass for the closing of the Third World Elective Assembly of the Past Pupils and received the three candidates for the post of Dean of the Faculty of Social Communications at the UPS.

### – *May 2004*

Between 1 and 5 May the Rector Major made a visit to the León Province in Spain, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its erection as a province, and between 6 and 10 he visited the Seville Province, on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of Morón and the centenary of the house in Cádiz. In both Provinces Fr Chávez had the opportunity to meet the Provincial Council, the Rectors, all the confreres of the province, those in formation, the Salesian Family, the Salesian Youth Movement the leaders, the youngsters of the houses, the teachers, and gave a number of interviews to the media. In Santiago de Compostela he celebrated the Jubilee in the Cathedral, where he said Mass. In Seville at the *Colegio Mayor* he was given a decoration, he took part in the ADMA Provincial Assembly and gave a conference in the Theological Study Centre.

Having returned home on Monday 10 May, he stayed there until Thursday 13, when he went to Nizza Monferrato for the celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the FMA house. On Tuesday 11 in the afternoon he received the Minister of Health from Liberia, and the following day in the afternoon, he had a meeting with the Faculty of Christian and Classical Literature of the UPS.

At the weekend of 15 and 16 May the Rector Major went to Lecce for a gathering of the Salesian Youth Movement in southern Italy, and a celebration for children in the Basilica dedicated to St Dominic Savio, for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his canonisation.

On Monday 17 Fr Chávez presided at the Funeral Mass of Fr Lambert Petit, in the church of the Generalate. On the same day he replied to many congratulatory messages for his name day.

Between 19 and 22 May the Rector Major went to visit the north German Province, going to various houses, meeting confreres and young people, and where he had meetings with the Provincial Council, with Brothers from both German Provinces and with the Salesian Family.

Having returned home on Saturday evening 22, he stayed in the

house on Sunday and then in the evening presided at the procession in the Generalate; he then went to Turin for the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians on the 24.

Having returned to Rome on Tuesday 25, between 26 and 28 he took part in the Assembly of the Union of Superiors General. He ended the month visiting the Province of Valencia, with an intensive programme of activities, visiting the sick confreres, meeting Salesians, opening the Vth Inter-Salesian Games, visiting the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who were celebrating their centenary, meeting the ADMA, holding a meeting with the Provincial Council attending a Prayer Vigil with the Province Youth Leaders. The main event however was the meeting with the Brothers of the Province and with others who had come from the other Provinces in Spain, which concluded with the Pentecost Mass during which there was the perpetual profession of two confreres.

On Monday 31 May the Rector Major paid a visit to the Missions Office and then to Don Bosco House, the animation centre for the Iberian Provincial Conference. In the afternoon he returned to Rome to begin the summer plenary session of the General Council.

## 4.2 Chronicle of the General Councillors

### The Vicar of the Rector Major

Between 22 and 25 January Fr Adriano Bregolin was present at the *Salesian Family Spirituality Days*.

On 31 January, the Feast of St John Bosco, he said Mass at the Generalate of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and then left for Turin, where, in the absence of the Rector Major, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians he presided at the Solemn Concelebration, in the presence of various groups of the Salesian Family.

On 4 February he presented the Rector Major's Strenna to local groups of the Salesian Family at the Don Bosco Institute in Rome.

On 8 February he went to Nizza Monferrato, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the arrival of Mother Mazzarello in the house: he said Mass there, and in the afternoon had a meeting with the FMA from Piedmont.

On 10 February he went to Taranto to present the Rector Major's Strenna to the Salesian Family in that city.

On Sunday 15 February he went to Padua, where he had been invited for a formation day for the Provincial Councils of various groups of the Salesian Family.

On 24 of the same month he left for *Brazil*. Having arrived in São Paulo, on 25 he visited the studentate at Lapa and other salesian works in the city. On 26 he left for Campo Grande, where on 27 he met the Provincial and the Provincial Council. In the afternoon he went to the UCDB University and in the evening visited the work in São Vicente, the site of the local aspirantate and prenovitiate and also the residence of the Confreres who work in the UCDB. On Saturday 28, accompanied by the Vice Provincial he visited the Missionary Centres of Sangradouro and Meruri, where our Salesians are working with the native Xavante and Bororo. On Sunday 29, after Mass with the Bororo Community, he went to Poxoreu and Rondonopolis, and then on to Cuiabá. Here he met the confreres from the "São Gonçalo" work and those at Coxipó da Ponte. Having returned to Campo Grande on Monday 1 March, in the evening he went to visit the "Paolo VI" Postnovitiate in the city. On Tuesday 2 he was in the Novitiate at Dourados,

where he spent the whole day with the Salesian Novices. On 3, accompanied by the Vice Provincial and Provincial Economer, he visited the communities in Tres Lagoas, Araçatuba and Lins. On 4 March he returned to Italy.

On 7 March at Triuggio, in the province of Milan he began preaching a Retreat for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from the Lombard Province.

Having returned to Rome on 14, between 29 March and 7 April he took part in the *intermediate meetings* of the General Council.

On 17 he met the Confreres and lay people at the National Assembly of CNOS-FAP.

Between the afternoon of 24 and 28 April he presided at the *World Assembly of the Past Pupils*, on Sunday 25, taking part in the Celebrations for the Beatification of Fr August Czartorisky, Sr Eusebia Palomino and Alexandrina da Costa.

On 8 May at the Salesian Pontifical University he took part in the Seminar on St Dominic Savio and, in the afternoon, in the opening of the new Oratory in our Salesian work in Arezzo.

On 24, Feast of Mary Help of Christians, he went to the novitiate of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

On 25 he was at San Benigno Canavese for the celebrations for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the work. Here he gave a conference to the Educative Community.

From Wednesday 26 until Friday 28 May he took part in the work of the Assembly of the USG (Union of Superiors General). On the evening of 28 he began the meeting of the World Committee of the Salesian Family, following its work until 30.

### **The Councillor for Formation**

Between 9 and 12 January the General Councillor for Formation met the Provincials and Provincial Delegates for Formation from the *Italy Middle East Region* in Rome. Some issues examined were: the formation communities in the Region, the challenges facing formation, the statistics regarding those leaving; the introduction of self-evaluation of the formation communities; the fourth year of theological studies; a proposal for the specific formation of the Salesian Brothers was presented.

Between 25 January and 10 February Fr Cereda was in Asia. First of all he went to *Sri Lanka*, where he met the prenovices in Dungalpitya and the postnovices



in Kotadeniyawa; he visited the novitiate in Arabegama; in Dankutowa he met the aspirants and those doing practical training. He also went to the communities in Kandy, Negombo and Uswetakeiyawa; finally he had a meeting with the Formation Commission. Fr Cereda then went to *Vietnam*, where he met the young people in formation: the prenovices in Cau Bong, the novices in Ba Thon, the postnovices in Dalat, the students of theology in Ho-Chi-Minh City and various groups of aspirants. Particularly significant was the visit to Dalat, where on 31 January the 30th anniversary of its foundation was celebrated; he also had a meeting with the Provincial Formation Commission. Then he went to *Myanmar*; in Anisakan he visited the formation communities: the aspirantate, the prenovitiate, the novitiate and the postnovitiate; in Yangon he had a meeting with the Formation Commission. Moving on to *Thailand*, he visited Sampran, where there are the novitiate and the postnovitiate; then he went to Banpong, where he met the aspirants and prenovices and held a meeting with the Provincial Formation Commission; he also visited the communities in Bangkok. At the end of

his journey Fr Cereda went to *Manila* for the "Curatorium" with the Provincials of Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia - East Timor, Philippines and the Delegate from Sri Lanka.

Between 1 and 15 March, the Councillor for Formazion was in *Ethiopia and Eritrea*. He met the young men and the formation personnel in the formation communities; in particular he visited the aspirants in Dekamhare, Adua, Makallè, Addis Abeba and Zway; he was in the prenovitiate in Addis Abeba, the novitiate in Debre Zeit and the postnovitiate in Adigrat. He then paid a visit to the missionary community in Dilla and the Prefecture Apostolic in Gambella and the new churches in Addis Abeba, Dilla, Adamitullo and Adua. On the memorial of Blessed Artemides Zatti he spent a day of reflection and discussion with the Brothers in the Vice Province; finally he had a meeting with the Provincial Council.

Between 12 and 17 February he took part in the World Congress of Salesian Catechists giving an address: "The catechetical mission of the Salesians as seen by the Formation Department". Between 29 March and 7 April he took part in the intermediate session of the General Council.

Between 12 April and 2 May the Councillor for Formation was in *Brazil* visiting the formation communities in the 6 Salesian Provinces: Campo Grande, Porto Alegre, Manaus, Recife, Belo Horizonte and São Paulo. Where it was possible he also met those on practical training and the aspirants; he paid a visit to the Don Bosco Catholic University in Campo Grande; he spoke to the Rectors in Manaus; he met Salesian Brothers gathered together in Cachoeira do Campo. In the different meetings with the Provincial Formation Commissions he examined the situation of the aspirantate and prenovitiate. At the end of his visit he met the students of theology, the formation personnel and the teachers at Pius XI in São Paulo; here Fr Cereda spent three days with the Provincials and Delegates for Formation considering the topics: inter-provincial collaboration, self-evaluation by the formation communities, the promotion of the vocation of the Salesian Brother and his specific formation, the study of salesianity, formation of formation personnel.

Between 11 and 24 May the Councillor for Formation visited the four Provinces in *Poland*. First of all he had a meeting in

Warsaw with the Provincials and Delegates for Formation from Poland and the *EST Circumscription*; they gave particular consideration to the new vocational situation and set in motion a process of self-evaluation by the formation communities. He spent time visiting and discussing things with the young men in initial formation: the novices in Czerwińsk, Kopiec, Swobnica; the postnovices and students of theology in Łą, Łódź and Kraków; the aspirants in Aleksandrów and those on practical training in Oświęcim. He also met the formation personnel, teachers and Provincial Formation Commission. In all the provinces Fr Cereda visited some of the schools and youth centres; he went to the Marian sanctuaries at Czerwińsk, Częstochowa and Kawnice; the visit ended at Kraków on 24 May with ordinations to the priesthood conferred by Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga.

Between 27 and 31 May the Councillor for Formation visited the formation communities in the *EST Circumscription*. In particular he was in St Petersburg, where there are the postnovices and the students of theology; here he also had a meeting with the Provincial Formation Commission. He then

visited some communities in West Ukraine; in Leopoli he met the confreres from the three communities working in the parishes, oratories and schools; then he went to the prenovitiate for the Greek Catholics in Obroshyno and that for the Latins in Peremyshlany; finally he visited Bibrka. Returning to Moscow, he said Mass in the salesian parish of the Immaculate Conception; he visited the provincial house and the confreres who are working with street children and in an Oratory in Moscow - Fili.

### **The Councillor for Youth Ministry**

After the completion of the winter plenary session of the General Council, during the weekend of 24 to 26 January Fr Antonio Domenech took part in the opening ceremonies for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the canonisation of Dominic Savio in the Basilica dedicated to him in Lecce. He met the leaders of the Youth Centre and the Salesian Family, talking with them about the salesian way to holiness.

Between 5 and 7 February he had a meeting with the National Delegation for Youth Ministry

from Spain and Portugal, examining the challenges facing evangelisation in society at the present time. At the Pisana, between 12 and 17 February, he took part in the International Meeting of Salesian Catechists, organised by the Institute of Catechetics at the UPS to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation.

On 22 February the Councillor left for India, arriving in the Guwahati Province, first of all to visit the communities in that Province and then, starting on 4 March, the communities in the Dimapur Province. In these two Provinces he visited a considerable number of the communities, to get to know the situation regarding Youth Ministry, and then finally he met the respective Provincial Councils to share his impressions with them. At the end of this visit, on 16 and 17 March in Bangalore, he had a meeting with the Provincial Conference of the South Asia Region, for a presentation of the model of salesian youth ministry.

Back in Rome the Councillor had a meeting with the European Commission for Emarginalisation to assess the progress made in the Provinces in following the working guidelines proposed at the meeting in Barcelona in February

2003 about the attention to be given to the phenomenon of immigration.

Between 1 and 4 April the Department took part in a meeting of the European Commission for Schools with the European Committee (FMA); in which the topic was Salesian Professional Training in Europe and preparations were made for a European meeting next year for those in charge of Salesian schools.

After the meetings of the intermediate Council, on 14 and 15 April the Councillor was invited to a meeting of "Don Bosco Network" in Brussels, to present the Congregation's ideas about Professional Formation

Immediately afterwards he left for Buenos Aires, for a meeting with the Provincials of the South Cone and the Provincial Delegates for Youth Ministry (SEPSUR); with them he examined the situation regarding youth ministry in the Provinces. From there he went to São Paulo for a meeting on 21 and 22 April with representatives of the Brazilian provinces to study with them the animation of the parishes entrusted to the Salesians.

On 1 May in Rimini he was present at the XV PGS European Games and on 12 left for Johan-

nesburg, where he met representatives of the Provinces of Africa and Madagascar to study the situation regarding Technical Training/Professional Formation and together to find ways to ensure its educational and salesian quality, and the necessary resources.

During the weekend of 28 to 30 May at Colle Don Bosco the Department held the first meeting for those responsible for Salesian Houses of Spirituality in Europe, and with them examined the characteristics of an approach to salesian spirituality for the houses to offer.

### **The Councillor for Social Communication**

Between 26 January and 2 February the Councillor for Social Communication visited the Noth Philippine Province. He met the Provincial, the delegates and the *Salesian Media Board*, with SDB and laity from the SC commissions and periodical. He visited the Media Centres of the Jesuits and of the Pauline Sisters, the formation communities, other communities in Tondo, Batulao, Laguna, and took part in the closing ceremony of the Golden Jubilee of the school at Mandaluyong and

the opening ceremony of the Golden Jubilee of Don Bosco at Makati.

Between 3 and 5 February, with other members of the Department he took part in a meeting of Provincials and SC Delegates in the EastAsia - Oceania Region in Tokyo, Japan. Following the planning programme for the six year period, the meeting dealt with social communication in the region and the salesian system of social communion. On this occasion he also met in Tokyo some communities of the SDB, the FMA and the Sisters of Charity of Miyasaki.

On 9 and 10 March in Lyons, France the Councillor took part in a meeting of the West Europe Region to consider social communication in the region and the Salesian System of Social Communication. In Brussels, in the North Belgium Province he took part in a regional meeting on the subject of *Education and Social Communication*, between 19 and 22 March. After this on 27 March he was in Paris to commemorate the 125 years existence of the French Salesian Bulletin.

Between 21 April and 25 May he carried out the *Extraordinary Visitation* of the Vice Province of Sardinia (ISA).

Between January and the end of May the Department produced 412 news items, 64 pictures of the day, 3 ANSMag - one of which was a special printed issue for the two months March/April on the beatifications, 15 sets of ANS DigitalPhotos, 4 ANSService, 4 VideoInformation items in collaboration with EuroFilm Don Bosco Missions, a monthly production of the Bollettino Salesiano, ANS Agenda and ANSFoto, and started the ANSInfoLetter service sent out twice a week to subscribers. New documents have been put on the site such as the the letters of the Rector Majors (Vecchi, Viganò) in several languages, the Constitutions and Regulations in all languages, special material for the beatifications, a forum open to all visitors, and the Site was given a new colourful look adapted to the colours of the Logo. In addition the Department sent out preparatory material for the World Consultative Meeting for SC to be held at the Pisana between 25 and 28 July, prepared a first draft of a Manual/Style Guide for the Generalate, an Italian-English lexicon of key salesian words, and created a digital system for maintaining an archive of documents of the Department, which is also available

for use by others. It provided support for the World Assembly of the Past Pupils and for broadcasts on the Feast of Dominic Savio at Colle Don Bosco and that of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco.

### **The Councillor for the Missions**

Between 26 January and 25 March the Councillor for the Missions devoted himself to the second phase of the *Extraordinary Visitation* of the Bombay Province (INB). He began by visiting the only house we have in Kuwait, Salmiya, which depends on INB; then he went to the other houses in the province in Maharashtra. Between 15 and 20 February, when this Province was celebrating the Provincial Chapter, the Councillor visited Nepal, to encourage the confreres and with them examine missionary development in the region, according to the project of the Kolkata Province to which they belong. The Provincial and the Economist of the INC Province were present during this visit to assess the development of our presence in Nepal.

When the Extraordinary Visitation of INB was completed, the Councillor took part in the intermediate Council in Rome.

On 7 April he left for Bucharest, in order to visit Romania and Moldavia with the Provincials of INE and PLE, and study the possibility of a salesian presence in Moldavia.

Between 14 and 16 April he went to Brussels for a meeting of those in charge of Salesian Mission Offices and of salesian NGO. In this meeting the topic of the economic autonomy of salesian technical schools in mission lands was considered.

Between 18 April and 11 May he was occupied in a long journey through Korea, Mongolia, China, Macao, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In Korea, between 19 and 21 April, the Councillor was able to encourage various groups of confreres speaking about the Missions and inviting them to increase their already admirable involvement.

Between 21 and 26 April he was in Mongolia with the Provincial of Vietnam, on whom Mongolia depends, and was pleased to see the development of salesian presence in that country. A Convention was signed between the Vicariate Apostolic and the Province with regard to our presences in the capital Ulaanbaatar and the new mission that it is hoped to open in the Darkhan region.

From Mongolia the Councillor moved on to China, going first of all to the house in Yanji, where he remained for three days in order to look with the confreres at development and the future of the work. From Yanji he went to Shanghai, where with Fr Carlo Socol and Mr. John Wong, he met various people, with the intention of exploring the possibility of involving the "Don Bosco Foundation" in some work for youngsters in Shanghai. On 3 May the Councillor arrived in Shitan, where the "Don Bosco Foundation" has opened a technical school, and the following day he attended a meeting in which the development of the work was discussed.

On 5 May, accompanied by the Provincial Fr Savio Hon, he visited the leper colony of Ngai Sai, managed by a confrere Fr Roberto Tonetto. Then, via Macao, he reached Taiwan and visited the professional school at Tainan, where there are some young confreres from different countries studying Chinese. On his way back he stopped at Macao, visiting the works and speaking to the confreres about the missions.

On 8 May he moves on to Hong Kong: he once again spoke to the confreres about the salesian mission and about the possibilities of

a missionary work in the current Chinese situation. Between 9 and 11 May in Hong Kong he met the bishop Mgr. Joseph Zen, had a meeting with the Provincial Council and the confreres involved in our work in China. On 12 May he returned to Rome.

Between 17 and 31 May he made a visit to the East Africa Province (AFE). He originally intended to visit the works in Sudan, but because of the problems that arose regarding the Visa he was not able to enter North Sudan. Changing his programme he went to visit the salesian presences in Kenya, the formation house at Moshi in Tanzania, and the two salesian presences in Uganda. Finally he was able to go to Tonj, in the South of Sudan, on 27 May, in fact the day after the signing of the peace agreement between North and South Sudan.

From Tonj, on 29 May he went to Kakuma, where there are thousands of refugees from various countries in a camp. In this place the Salesians have three professional schools and parish for the refugees.

At the end of this journey on 31 May at Dar Es Salaam Fr Francis Alencherry presided at the ceremony of the blessing of new Mission Office, built with the help of

the Rector Major. That evening he spoke at the Provincial Chapter which was just beginning its work, and then returned to Rome.

### **The Economist General**

When the winter plenary session of the General Council was over, Fr Mazzali gave Days of Recollection on 24 and 25 January to a group of youngsters at the Our Lady of Lourdes Centre in Forno di Coazze. Then between 27 and 29 January he went to Jerusalem for meetings connected with the entrusting of the property of the "Ratisbonne Institute" to the Salesian Congregation. On 30 and 31 he celebrated the Feast of Don Bosco with the youngsters of the school and with members of the Salesian Family at the Salesian Institute of Genoa-Sampierdarena. On 1 February he took part in the feast of Don Bosco at the Salesian Institute of Borgomanero. On 8 February he took part in the traditional prize distribution for the winners of the Italian and Dialect Poetry Competition linked with the Salesians at Vasto.

Between 9 and 13 February he took part in the formation course held at the Generalate for the

Provincial Economers appointed in 2003. On 19 February Fr Mazzali took the chair at a meeting of the Council of Administration of the UPS at the Pisana and afterwards went to Ajaccio in Corsica, to become familiar with the works there between 20 and 22 February.

Between 29 February and 13 March Fr Mazzali paid a visit to Madagascar, preaching a Retreat, chairing a meeting of Rectors and Economers and visiting some of the communities in the Vice Province.

The Economist General went back to the Holy Land between 26 and 28 March for the final discussions regarding acceptance of the "Ratisbonne" and the transfer of the Cremisan studentate of theology.

After the intermediate General Council meetings, Fr Mazzali spent the last days of Holy Week and Easter in the parish of the Holy Martyrs at Sangano. Between 18 and 25 April he paid a visit to Angola: giving a course on accounting for the Economers of the Vice Province and for other religious and then visiting some communities in the interior and in the capital.

On 3 May the Economist General took part in a meeting of the



shareholders of the SEI to approve the accounts of 2003.

His last journey was to Uruguay where between 8 and 22 May, he preached a retreat to a group of confreres at Las Piedras, chaired a meeting of Rectors and Economers and was able to visit some houses in the Province.

After having taken part in the celebration of the feast of Mary Help of Christians in the salesian parish in Vallecrosia on 23, the Economer Generale presided at Midnight Mass in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin.

On 6 June the Economer General represented the Rector Major and his Council at the solemn celebration, both civil and religious, for the centenary of the death of Fr Antonio Belloni, the Apostle of Palestine held in the city of Imperia, where the famous missionary was born.

### **The Councillor for the Region Africa - Madagascar**

Fr Valentín de Pablo was present at Ghent in Belgium, 1-2 February, for the episcopal ordination of Bishop Luke Van Looy, after which he undertook the following activities between February and May 2004.

- *Visit of the Rector Major to Rwanda.* The Regional accompanied the Rector Major on his visit to Rwanda from 7-10 February, for the celebration of the golden jubilee of salesian work in that country. The visit was a source of comfort and encouragement for the confreres after the situations of great suffering and difficulty they had endured. Fr Chavez was able to see for himself the resuming of salesian activity in a variety of works for the benefit of the young and the promoting of vocations.

- *The "Curatorium" of inter-provincial formation houses.* Fr de Pablo was present at various "Curatorium" meetings for inter-provincial formation houses: 8-15 February in the community of the students of theology at (Nairobi), 18-20 February in the similar community at Lubumbashi (DRC), and 24-26 May in the post-novitiate community of Lomé (Togo). These meetings with the Provincials concerned and with the confreres in formation provide opportunities for evaluating the standard of formation and for adopting practical guidelines.

- *Consultation for the new Superior of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Vice-Province (AET).* During February

the Regional was in the area to launch the consultation. From 15-19 he visited the community of Dekamare (Eritrea) which is cut off from the rest of the Vice-Province because of the war between the two countries. From 23-29 he met the confreres gathered in groups in various communities for the consultation.

- *Extraordinary Visitation of the Tropical Equatorial Vice-Province (ATE)*. This circumscription is scattered over six countries with headquarters at Yaoundé (Cameroon). Fr de Pablo was able to visit every community and speak with each of the confreres. The Visitation lasted from 1 March to 23 May. The Vice-Province was erected on 31 January 1988 and has 110 confreres of whom 72 are African, the majority of them in formation, with 14 novices this year. There are 15 communities: 3 in *Cameroon*, 1 in *Central Africa*, 3 in *Congo*, 3 in *Gabon*, 3 in *Equatorial Guinea* and 2 in *Chad*. The social and political situation in many of these countries in recent years has been difficult for the whole population, and the Salesians have suffered the consequences of social instability and civil wars. Great efforts have been made by the confreres

to keep together and consolidate the salesian work in all six countries. In the Vice-Province as a whole the positive results of the efforts of recent years are evident. At the beginning of the Visitation Fr de Pablo presided at the installation of the new Superior, Fr José Antonio Vega. He was also able to celebrate the golden jubilee of the canonization of St Dominic Savio in the Parish of Pointe Noire (Congo) with a day with the "Friends of Dominic Savio" groups of the city and musical festivities involving hundreds of youngsters.

- *Visit of the Rector Major to the Region*. The Regional accompanied the Rector Major during his stay in Cameroon from 12 to 19 February, when he preached a retreat to the rectors and provincial councillors of the French and Portuguese-speaking areas of the Region. This was a high-point for the animation and ongoing formation of the rectors which will have beneficial repercussions on the various local communities. After the retreat the Rector Major was able to meet with the confreres of the communities of Cameroon: the theology students in the provincial house and the young people and adults of the parishes and profes-

sional training centres of Mimbo-man and Ebolowa.

- *Regional meeting on professional training.* From 12-15 May Fr de Pablo took part at Johannesburg (South Africa) in the first continental meeting of provincial delegates for professional training. Fr Antonio Domenech presided over the meeting. Professional training is something which has developed rapidly throughout the Region, but which is in need of some common study to ensure its quality and guarantee its future.

- At the end of May the Regional went to *Angola* for a short visit to meet with the confreres responsible, at a moment when salesian work is being consolidated after years of civil war. On 31 May he returned to Rome for the summer session of the General Council.

### **The Councillor for the Region Latin America - Southern Cone**

After the winter session of the Council Fr Baruffi left Rome for the Province of Manaus, Brazil, where on 31 January 2004 he presided at the installation of the new Provincial, Fr Dámasio Medeiros, and met the confreres.

In early February he made a short visit to his family and was then in the Porto Alegre Province from 18 to 27 February for a visit of animation and for medical checks.

From 28 February to 8 March he took part in the retreat preached by the Rector Major to all the Provincials of America in Costa Rica. Following this on 10 March he began the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of Belo Horizonte, Brazil*, which went on until 22 May with one or two interruptions. As well as personal contacts with each confrere and with the communities, the Visitor was able to meet the various groups of the Salesian Family, and to be present at the Province's provincial chapter which took place at Cachoeira do Campo, Minas Gerais, from 5-7 March.

The Visitation concluded with a meeting with the Provincial Council and with delegates of the various commissions in which the activities of the Province are organized.

The visit was interrupted from 19-21 March to enable the Regional to take part in the Conference of the Southern Provincials (CISUR), held in the Provincial House of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The meeting was one for the evaluation of shared activities and

of information from the individual provincial chapters.

Returning to Belo Horizonte, Fr Baruffi was with the salesian Brothers from 18 to 24 April for their course of ongoing formation at Cachoeira do Campo; the theme of the course was "the consecrated life of the Salesian Brother".

From 27 to 30 April the Regional presided over a meeting of the Provincial Conference of Brazil (CISBRASIL). In the first two days the Provincials and Delegates dealt with various items such as the appointment of a national delegate for the Cooperators, the evaluation of services provided by the Cisbrasil secretariat in Brasilia, and the ongoing formation courses at national level.

For the second part of the meeting, the Councillor General for Formation (Fr Francesco Cereda) was present for an assessment of the situation and identity of salesian formation in the formation communities and study centres, and for the launching of some combined activities to improve the quality of formation. For this part of the meeting all the provincial delegates for formation were present, together with the national delegate.

On 28 May Fr Baruffi returned to Rome for the summer session of the Council.

### **The Councillor for the Region Interamerican**

Fr Esteban Ortiz left Rome on 24 January for Bogotá to begin the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of St Peter Claver (COB)*.

After a meeting with the Provincial Council he began, on 26 January, the visits to the 20 communities that make up the Province. On 31 January he presided at the Eucharist in the Sanctuary of the *Virgen del Carmen (Colegio León XIII di Bogotá)*, where the members of the Salesian Family had gathered to celebrate the feast of our Father.

29 February. The Regional went to Costa Rica for the retreat preached by the Rector Major to the Provincials of the two American Regions.

7 March. He returned to Bogotá to continue the Visitation.

23 March. He held meetings with the various provincial commissions to get to know the initiatives being used for the animation of the province.

26 March. He presented the report on the Visitation at a meet-

ing of the rectors of the province and some other confreres from the houses of Bogotá, and in the afternoon of the same day held a meeting with the Provincial Council as the official conclusion to the Extraordinary Visitation.

27 March. Fr Esteban Ortiz arrived in Medellín to begin the *Extraordinary Visitation of the San Luis Beltrán Province (COM)*.

29 March. After a meeting with the Provincial Council, he began the visits to the 24 communities of which the Medellín Province is made up.

25 April. The Regional went to Lima (Peru) to launch the consultation for the appointment of the new Provincial, and in the following days held meetings with the confreres of Piura, Cusco and Lima, 113 Salesians in all.

29 April. Fr Esteban Ortiz went to Guayaquil for a brief visit to the communities. In a meeting with all the confreres he presented the pastoral plan given by the Rector Major to all Salesians in this year's Strenna.

1 May. At Quito he had a meeting with the confreres of the Salesian Regional Centre for Ongoing Formation, to revise the programme for this year.

2 May. The Regional returned to Medellín to continue the Visi-

tation of the communities.

24 May. He presided at the Eucharist for the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians with delegations from the different branches of the Salesian Family.

26 May. He had meetings with the various provincial commissions to examine the process for animation of the province.

29 May. Fr Esteban presented his final report on the Visitation to a meeting at which were present the Provincial Council, rectors and confreres of Medellín. In the afternoon of the same day he had a meeting with the Provincial Council for the official closing of the Visitation.

30 May. The Regional Councillor returned to Rome for the summer plenary session of the General Council.

### **The Councillor for the Region Asia Est - Australia**

Once the winter session of the General Council was over, the Regional Councillor Fr Václav Klement left to carry out the *Extraordinary Visitation of the North Philippine - Manila Province*. Ten days later he interrupted the Visitation for the annual meeting of the Provin-

cials of the Region, that was held in Chofu, Tokyo (GIA) – this time devoted to Social Communication (with the attendance of the Councillor for the Department Fr Tarcisio Scaramussa and his team), the animation of the Past Pupils (with the attendance of the Central Delegate), and preparations for the Team Visit in March 2005.

Having returned to the FIN Province, Fr Klement took part – with Fr Cereda – in a meeting of the six Provincials involved in the Manila-Parañaque theological studentate to draft a memorandum for a future Curatorium.

The Extraordinary Visitation of the North Philippine Province – which includes the Papua New Guinea Delegation – was completed on 27 April at Batulao with a Provincial Assembly and the blessing of statues of 8 young saints in the Chapel of Jesus Adolescent as a living expression of the Beatitudes.

From Manila the Regional went to Seoul, Korea, for the 5<sup>th</sup> Regional Congress of Salesian Cooperators (28 April - 3 May), and he contributed to the fruitful work on the subject “Autonomy in Communion”, with the attendance of the Central Delegate, Fr Stjepan Bolkovac.

Afterwards between 4 and 23 May he carried out the Consultation for the next Superior of the East Timor - Indonesia (ITM) Vice Province, visiting all the communities and meeting all the confreres in both countries.

Between 24 and 29 May the Regional Councillor paid a brief visit to the Chinese Province in Hong Kong. On 30 May he returned to Rome.

### **The Councillor for the Region South Asia**

After the winter session of the Council Fr Joaquim D’Souza left for Mumbai on 26 January to launch the consultation for the appointment of the Superior of the new Vice-Province of Konkan. At the same time consultations also began for the appointment of the Superiors of the Vice-Provinces of Myanmar and Sri Lanka, under the responsibility of the Provincials of Kolkata (INC) and Chennai (INM) respectively.

After chairing the consultation in the Province of Mumbai in five meetings with groups of confreres in as many different places, the Regional left for Katpadi in Tamil Nadu, to be present on 12 February at the celebrations for the

golden jubilee of the foundation of the Auxilium College of the FMA, and on 14 February at Bangalore for the silver jubilee of the erection of the INK Province. On the following day Fr D'Souza travelled to New Delhi to begin the *Extraordinary Visitation of that Province (INN)*.

The New Delhi Province, erected in 1997, is geographically the most extensive of all the Indian provinces, covering the territory of ten States in the northern part of the country. The Visitor was able to reach all of the twenty houses and works and meet the 132 confreres before concluding the Visitation on 23 April. By then he had also presided over a meeting of the Provincial Conference at Bangalore from 13-17 March, for the last two days of which Fr Antonio Domenech, Councillor General for Youth Pastoral Work was also present.

After New Delhi, Fr D'Souza moved immediately to Guwahati to begin the *Extraordinary Visitation of the ING Province*. Between 25 April and 22 May he visited the houses in the States of Tripura, Mizoram and the Jaintia Hills, and concluded the first phase of the Visitation at Shillong (Sunny-side), where he received the first professions of 24 novices of the

Guwahati Province. On the following day he left for Mumbai to preside on 24 May at the solemn eucharistic celebration and torchlight procession in honour of Mary Help of Christians at the Marian sanctuary. After a few days rest with his family he returned to Rome on 29 May for the summer session of the Council.

### **The Councillor for the Region Northern Europe**

After the winter session of the Council, Fr Albert Van Hecke went to Belgium to celebrate the Feast of Don Bosco at Eeklo in the house for young people at risk, and to be present at the episcopal ordination of Mgr. Luc Van Looy.

2 February. He went immediately to Manouba, the foundation of the Malta Delegation in Tunisia, where he began the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of Ireland-Malta*. At Manouba he was able to note the great dedication of the confreres and their significant presence in the Moslem world through an elementary school with 700 pupils.

5 February. He continued the Visitation in Malta, where he was impressed by the presence of the confreres among youngsters, the

manner in which the work of promoting vocations is organized, the variety of youth projects, and the enthusiasm of the confreres for the salesian charism.

14 February. He moved to Ireland, a country which has played a decisive part in the evangelization of Europe and has been so generous in its missionary activities, but which is now challenged by an aggressive secularism which is a challenge to the family, the Church, Christian values, consecrated life and our own particular charism. Nonetheless the Province displays a rich variety of work among young people. In particular there is the work among university students, the high quality of educational projects for youngsters at risk, and highly effective pastoral models like chaplaincies to schools.

7 March. The Councillor returned to Rome but left again on the following day for Hungary.

8 March. He was present at a meeting of the Provincial Council for an examination of the process of development of the province, and later to meet the confreres in initial formation. He returned to Rome on 10 March.

14 March. The Councillor left once again for the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Special Eastern*

*Circumscription*. Between this date and 2 May he visited the countries where the confreres are working: Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, Georgia, and both European and Asian Russia. In the face of a thousand and one difficulties and uncertainties, the confreres are working with great dedication and hope. There are some dark areas: the difficult dialogue with the Orthodox Church and the lack of clear legislation, vocational frailty, problems in the consolidation of community life, and shortage of personnel. But there are bright hopes as well: the slow but sure growth of the Catholic Church, the growth in the number of confreres of the Byzantine rite, the significant work at Moscow for street-children, the school of printing and business studies at Gatchina and the birth of the first Federation of Russian Past-pupils (all young orthodox adults), the first Catholic trade school to be recognized in the Ukraine and the whole area of the former Soviet Union, the growth of the parish at Minsk in Belarus, the vitality among young people of the parish at Vilnius in Lithuania, the beginning of a Russian edition of the Salesian Bulletin, the courageous work at Yakutsk and Aldan in the Sakha - Yakutiya



Republic in Siberia, the promising efforts in Georgia, and especially a nucleus of young and well qualified confreres who are proud to be Salesians.

26 April. The Councillor had the joy of opening the fourth provincial chapter.

2 May. He returned to Rome and left again for Belgium on 4 May.

7-10 May. He presided at the annual meeting of the Provincials of the North European Region at Hilversum in Holland. The main theme was the study of '*Vocational frailty*'. The basic texts used were the Documents of the Formation Department and the reasons for losses prepared by all the Provincials. The meeting proved very enriching not only from the point of view of a fraternal gathering and exchange of views but also from its cultural aspect. They were able to admire a wonderful part of the Dutch Polders.

12 May. Fr Van Hecke returned to Rome and left two days later for Poland for the installation of Fr Zbigniew Łepko as the new Provincial of Piła. On this occasion he was also able to visit the studentate of Łódź and was present for the installation of the new rector of this large and important formation community

where there are 47 confreres in initial formation.

16 May. He went on to the Czech Republic to launch the consultation for the appointment of a new Provincial. There were three days of meetings at Brno, Pardubice and Prague with groups of confreres, who participated very seriously in this process of discernment which is so important for the future of the province.

20 May. The Councillor returned to Rome to prepare for the summer session of the General Council.

### **The Councillor for the Region Western European**

The *Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of France* kept Fr Filiberto Rodriguez fully occupied in every available moment between the winter and summer sessions of the General Council. After the unification of the former Provinces of Lyons and Paris in 1998, the new Province of "St Francis de Sales" is very extensive with a large number of communities and a great complexity of works.

The Visitation began on 25 January with the community of Nice, the first salesian house outside Italy founded by Don Bosco, but

was frequently interrupted by other events:

- 13-15 February. The visit of the Rector Major for the inauguration of the "Jean Bosco" Centre at Lyons. This Centre is an important initiative and a great investment by the SDB and FMA Provinces to ensure the formation of SDBs, FMAs and lay people in salesian pedagogy and spirituality.
- 9-14 March. A meeting of the Western European Region, spread between Madrid and Lyons.
- 29 March - 8 April. Participation of the Regional in the intermediate session of the General Council, for the study of this particular Region.
- 12-15 April. Participation in the Provincial Chapter at Ressins.
- 24-26 April. Beatification in Rome of Prince August Czartoryski, Sister Eusebia Palomino and the Portuguese Cooperator Alexandrina da Costa.
- 29 April-10 May. The visit of the Rector Major to the Spanish Provinces of León and Seville.

The frequent interruptions, the geographical extent of the Province after unification, the complexity of the works – often under the management of lay people, councils and associations, all

of which had to be listened to –, messages of encouragement and the suggestion of guidelines for the future, were all factors that prolonged the Visitation as far as 23 May at Coat-an-Doc'h, which was in fact three days after the Regional had made his final report to the Provincial Council and superiors of local communities at Lyons on 18-19 May.

Fr Filiberto celebrated the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians at Madrid. On 28 May he went to Valencia to accompany the Rector Major on his visit of animation to that Province, and returned with him to Rome on 31 May for the summer session of the Council.

### **The Councillor for the Region of Italy and the Middle East**

Fr Pier Fausto Frisoli, immediately after his appointment by the Rector Major on 9 January, presided three days later at a meeting of the Conference of the Provincials of the Region already programmed at the Generalate.

12-24 January. He took part in the Council Meetings and at the same time launched the consultation for a new Provincial of the Roman Province.

27 January. He had a meeting in Florence with the CISI delegate for vocations, Fr Alberto Lorenzelli, and the national delegate Fr Valerio Baresi.

29 January. He presided at a meeting of the Provincial Council of the Adriatic Province.

4 February. Fr Frisoli began the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Middle East Province*, and had successive meetings with the confreres of Lebanon (at El Housoun and Al Fidar), of Syria (at Damascus, Kamishly, Aleppo, and Kafroun), and of Egypt (at Cairo Rod El Farag, Cairo Zeitun, and Alessandria).

11 February. He returned to Rome to take part in two retreats preached by the Rector Major for the rectors of the Region.

14 February. He presided at a meeting of the Salesian Family at Rome-Testaccio.

29 March-7 April. He took part in the intermediate session of the Council, which studied amongst other items the Region of Italy and the Middle East.

8 April. Fr Frisoli began the second part of the Visitation with visits to the communities of Bethlehem, Beit Gemal, Nazareth, and Cremisan.

2-5 May. He went to Upper Egypt to the Dioceses of Assiut

and Sohag at the invitation of the respective Bishops, to study the possibility of opening new foundations.

6-9 May. After returning to Italy he presided at a meeting of the CISI in Turin.

12-21 May. He was once again in the Middle East to visit the communities of Istanbul and Teheran. And after a brief return to Rome to celebrate the Feast of Mary Help of Christians at Frascati - Villa Sora, he concluded the Visitation at a meeting in Bethlehem with the MOR Provincial Council from 27 to 29 May.

30 May. He visited the postnovitiate community at Nave, and on the following day that of the students of theology at Turin-Crocetta.

## The Secretary General

Following up the guidelines of the planning programme of the six year period, during this time, in agreement with the Rector Major and the respective Regional Councillors, the Secretary General arranged two meetings for Provincial Secretaries:

- in Rome - the Generalate, for the Secretaries of the North Europe Region 10-14 May;

- in Madrid, Spain, Don Bosco House, for the Secretaries of the West Europe Region, 17-21 May.

As was indicated in the letter calling the meetings, the intention was that they should provide an opportunity for updating and a sharing of ideas. The items on the agenda were those that particularly concerned the Provincial Secretary and Secretariat with regard to documentation and statistics, to juridical aspects, archives and libraries. Special em-

phasis was given to the archives and to the various juridical procedures.

There was active participation by the Secretaries and a fraternal spirit among them in the meetings which were also valuable for becoming familiar with the various situations. Special thanks are due to the community of the Generalate and to the Madrid Province who hosted the Secretaries, giving them a salesian welcome.

### **5.1 Homily of the Rector Major at the Mass of Thanksgiving in honour of the three new Beati of the Salesian Family.**

*This is the text of the homily of the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, at the solemn Concelebrated Mass on 26 April 2004 in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, as an act of thanksgiving and invocation of the three new Beati of our Salesian Family, Fr August Czarторыski SDB, Sr Eusebia Palomino Yenes FMA and Alexandrina da Costa, Cooperator. The homily is a repeated invitation to follow the path of salesian holiness, following the example of our beatified brothers and sisters.*

As the Salesian Family we have lived through a truly unforgettable weekend. "The Lord has been good and even worked wonders for us and we are happy". With hearts full of gladness and emotion we are gathered in this Basilica of the Sacred Heart in which were present at the time of its consecration both Don Bosco and the then Prince August Czarторыski. We are here to thank God for the gift of salesian holiness, which is once again made strikingly evident through the beatification of August Czarторыski,

Sister Eusebia Palomino and Alexandrina da Costa.

Their beatification is a further confirmation that the Salesian Family is a Family of holiness, and that each of us in our own particular state of life can find models in it that we can imitate. Today the Cooperators have received the official stamp of evangelical authenticity in the recognition of the sanctity of one of the members of their Association. And this has happened very aptly at a time when you, dear Cooperators, are reformulating your Regulations of Apostolic Life, because it reminds you that your life's objective is your sanctification.

The reception of such a gift implies increased responsibility. The interior spiritual pilgrimage of these three new *Beati*, enlightened by God's word, provides us with elements for our response to the Lord. They could in fact be well summed up in St Peter's exhortation "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace".

The saints have great importance for the Church, and for the Congregations, Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life or Associations of the Laity to which they belong, but they are also a valuable resource for the whole of humanity. They

have a significance for the world not only and not so much for the good they have done – great in some cases and more humble in others – but for the values they have displayed and left as a legacy to society.

In an ever more markedly secularized context, in which believers meet with hostility and even conflict, Blessed August Czarторыski, Blessed Eusebia Palomino and Blessed Alexandrina da Costa, teach us how to behave, especially with the peace of mind that stems from the Beatitudes of the Gospel.

Against such a background the spiritual commitment of all of us must be to become more alert and active. The primacy of God must be clear. “This is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith” (1Jn 5,4). This is our trump card, to show that we are true believers, zealous and courageous, aware – as St Francis de Sales says – that “we are not truly human and Christian unless we love God more than ourselves”. There you have the source of our salesian humanism and our salesian sanctity.

To this end we have been given some essential recommendations which form a programme of life for each one of us and for our communities, families or groups:

1. Moderation and austerity in our style of life, that can oppose a culture of consumerism that leads us to become well-practised consumers of products, feelings and experiences. Keeping to the essentials of life and resisting temptations to vanity, pride, self-sufficiency, waste and everything superfluous, especially in a world with a scandalous chasm between the few individuals and countries that amass the greater part of the world’s riches, and the immense majority of the world’s population which can hardly survive at all. To the “*Homo consumiens*” our new Beati oppose the “*Homo serviens*”.

2. A sincere and practical charity, of the kind that makes each one of us a sign of the anticipating and providential love of God, and that makes us good samaritans always available for the service of those in need, and even prompts us to take the initiative in helping the poor, the marginalized and the outcasts; to live a life not centred on ourselves but always alert and ready to serve others, to live pro-actively as Jesus did. To the “*Homo egolatra*” our new Beati oppose the “*Homo solidalis*”.

3. The royal road of humility and service characterizes us as men and women with an evangelical mentality, as authentic disciples of

Jesus who lived among us as one who served, thus showing in what his dominion consisted. A life not seeking to be first and triumphant by worldly criteria, but according to the logic of the Gospel: "Among you it must not be like that: the one who is greatest among you must become the least". To the "*Homo superbus*" our new Beati oppose the "*Homo humilis*".

All this is the contribution made by Blessed August Czarторыski, Blessed Eusebis Palomino and Blessed Alexandrina da Costa to the common effort to build a possible and better world.

Dear brothers, sisters and friends, let us willingly accept the gift made us by these members of our Salesian Family. Their message to us today is: "***Be good stewards of the many forms of God's grace***".

Fr Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA  
Rome, Sacred Heart Basilica  
26 April 2004

## 5.2 Letter of the Rector Major regarding the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin.

*This is a circular letter written by the Rector Major at the beginning of the month of Mary Help of*

*Christians to invite collaboration from the whole Salesian Family for the restoration work that has become necessary and urgent in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin-Valdocco, which Don Bosco wanted to build as a sign of the gratitude of the Congregation and the Salesian Family to the Mother of God.*

04.0456

Rome, 24 April 2004

*Beginning of the Month of Mary Help of Christians*

Dear Provincials,  
Dear Rectors  
of Salesian Communities,  
Dear Sisters and Brothers  
of the Salesian Family,  
Dear Friends and Benefactors  
of the Work of the Salesians,

An affectionate greeting to you all. I wish you the gifts of Peace and Joy that flow from the Risen Lord Jesus Christ at Easter, and I implore the blessing and the gift of the Spirit for each one of you, your Provinces, your Communities, and for all your families.

As you see from the date of this letter, I am writing to you at the beginning of the salesian month of Mary, the month of Mary Help of Christians, which we traditionally

begin on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April and conclude with the solemn Feast of Mary Help of Christians on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May.

Don Bosco used to say about his mission and about his Congregation: **"The Madonna has done everything"**. In his life he always cultivated a deep love for Our Lady, a love that profoundly shaped his life according to Mary's virtues, especially abandonment to the will of God.

**As a sign of gratitude to Mary, Don Bosco wanted to build a Sanctuary** that would be an expression of the love of the whole Salesian Family for the Mother of God.. In this way the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians was built and solemnly consecrated on 9 June 1868. In those years (1872) also in honour of Mary, Don Bosco with St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, began the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians which in his mind would be a living Monument to the Virgin Help of Christians.

When Don Bosco set about building the Basilica, there were, as always, serious financial problems. To Fr Angelo Savio, who said to him: "Don Bosco, the safe is empty, we can't begin the building of the Basilica...", He replied: "You just begin with the foundations. We

have to leave something to Divine Providence..."

On 9 June 1868 when, at the end of the solemn consecration of the Basilica, many Bishops and distinguished persons congratulated him on the achievement, Don Bosco replied with a simple comment but one full of faith: "Of my own I put in nothing. *Aedificavit sibi domum Maria*". Mary built her own house. **"Every brick, every decoration is a sign of a grace from her"** (BM IX, 247).

My dear friends, I wanted to recall Don Bosco's way of acting and of seeing things in order to **invite you to contribute through your generosity** to an enterprise that will certainly be very demanding nowadays, that of **a substantial restoration of the Basilica**. I am sure that Don Bosco would do the same thing, inviting you to honour Mary and to ensure her protection for our communities, our families, ourselves.

The most pressing work is in regard to the **major cupola of the Basilica**, both in connection with the outer covering and the restoration of the interior. This will also involve the **Chapel of Don Bosco**, that of **St Joseph** and the whole **Sanctuary area**, including the small cupola. Other work will



also be done in the **side chapels** of the Sacred Heart, St Francis of Sales and St Mary Domenica Mazzarello.

As you can imagine the work will be very expensive. This is why **we are asking for your help**. It would be wonderful if each Salesian Province, each local community, each group of the Salesian Family, in the first place the Salesian Co-operators and ADMA, were to show their involvement in giving fresh splendour to the **“House that Mary built for herself”**. As the Successor of Don Bosco, **I invite you to make of this act of generosity a really spiritual experience, once again entrusting your life to Mary Help of Christians confiding to Her the requests closest to your heart**. She will certainly show you how close she is and give you her help in answer to your prayers.

Thank you my dear Brothers and Sisters. May the Lord Jesus obtain for you the grace to contemplate the face of Mary, in this month of hers, and to learn from her, Our Mother and the Help of Christians, the best way to accept and to live the Word of God

My affectionate blessing on you all.

Fr Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA  
*Rector Major*

### 5.3 Decree for the canonical erection of the Salesian Vice Province of «Mary Help of Christians» of Myanmar.

Prot. n° 135/2004

#### DECREE FOR THE CANONICAL ERECTION OF THE SALESIAN VICE PROVINCE “MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS” OF MYANMAR

The undersigned,  
Fr. **Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA**,  
*Rector Major of the Salesian Society  
of St John Bosco*,

- considering the development of the salesian mission and the territorial extension of the Salesian Province “St John Bosco” of Calcutta (India);
- bearing in mind that for a more effective animation, in September 1991 the Provincial Delegation “Myanmar-Burma”, with headquarters in Yangon (Myanmar) was set up;
- having seen the results of the consultation carried out in the Province;
- given the favourable opinion of the Provincial with his Council;
- having obtained the consent of the General Council in a meeting on **5 December 2003**, in accordance with articles 132 §1,1 and 156 of the Constitutions:

**DETACHES from the Salesian Province "St John Bosco" of Calcutta the following Houses:**

1. ANISAKAN - Nazareth, "St Dominic Savio"
2. ANISAKAN - Novitiate, "St Joseph"
3. THIBAW, "St John Bosco"
4. YANGON, "St John Bosco"

and in addition the **salesian foundations**, not yet canonically erected, in:

- KUNLONG
- NAMTU

and by means of the present Decree,

**CANONICALLY ERECTS**

the new **SALESIAN VICE PROVINCE of MYANMAR, with the title "MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS", with headquarters in YANGON (Myanmar)**, in the house of "**St John Bosco**", with the Houses and salesian foundations mentioned above.

The following decisions have been made:

1. Members of the Vice Province are the confreres who, at the date of the canonical erection, are living and working in the salesian houses and foundations listed above.

2. Also members of the Province are the confreres in formation coming from Myanmar, even though they may be in formation communities outside the Vice Province.

3. The relationships of the Vice Province with the Province of origin will be regulated by an appropriate Agreement, approved by the Rector Major.

The present Decree will come into force on **6 August 2004**.

Rome, 13 June 2004  
*Solemnity of Corpus Christi*

Fr. Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA  
*Rector Major*

Fr. Marian STEMPEL  
*Secretary General*

**5.4 Decree for the canonical erection of the Salesian Vice Province of "St Joseph" of Sri Lanka.**

Prot. n° 136/2004

**DECREE  
FOR THE CANONICAL ERECTION  
OF THE SALESIAN VICE PROVINCE  
"ST JOSEPH"  
OF SRI LANKA**

The undersigned,  
Fr. **Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA**,  
*Rector Major of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco*,

- considering the development of the salesian mission and the territorial extension of the Salesian Province "St Thomas the Apostle" of Madras (India);

- bearing in mind that for a more effective animation, in June 1993 the Provincial Delegation "Sri Lanka", with headquarters in Kandy (Sri Lanka) was set up;
- having seen the results of the consultation carried out in the Province;
- given the favourable opinion of the Provincial with his Council;
- having obtained the consent of the General Council in a meeting on **5 December 2003**, in accordance with articles 132 §1,1 and 156 of the Constitutions::

**DETACHES from the Salesian Province "St Thomas the Apostle" of Madras the following Houses::**

1. ARABEGAMA, "Mary Help of Christians"
  2. DANKOTUWA, "St Dominic Savio"
  3. DUNGALPITIYA, "St Joseph"
  4. KANDY, "St John Bosco"
  5. KOTADENIYAWA, "St John Bosco"
  6. NEGOMBO, "St John Bosco"
  7. NOCHICHAGAMA, "St Sebastian"
  8. PALLIYAWATTA, "Our Lady of Mount Carmel"
  9. USWETAKEIYAWA, "St Joseph"
- and in addition the **salesian foundation** not yet canonically erected, in ELPITIYA, "Sacred Heart", and by means of the present Decree,

**CANONICALLY ERECTS**

the new **SALESIAN VICE PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA, with the title "ST JOSEPH", with headquarters in DUNGALPITIYA (Sri Lanka)**, in the house of "**St Joseph**", with the Houses and the salesian foundation mentioned above.

The following decisions have been made:

1. Members of the Vice Province are the confreres who at the date of the canonical erection, are living and working in the salesian houses and foundation listed above or according to a choice made previously.

2. Also members of the Province are the confreres in formation coming from Sri Lanka, even though they may be in formation communities outside the Vice Province.

3. The relationships of the Vice Province with the Province of origin will be regulated by an appropriate Agreement, approved by the Rector Major.

The present Decree will come into force on **15 August 2004**.

Rome, 13 June 2004  
*Solemnity of Corpus Christi*

Fr. Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA  
*Rector Major*

Fr. Marian STEMPER  
*Secretary General*

**5.5 Decree for the canonical erection of the Salesian Vice Province of «Blessed José Vaz» of Panjim, India.**

Prot. nº 137/2004

**DECREE  
FOR THE CANONICAL ERECTION  
OF THE SALESIAN VICE PROVINCE  
“BLESSED JOSÉ VAZ”  
OF PANJIM, INDIA**

The undersigned,  
Fr. **Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA**,  
*Rector Major of the Salesian Society  
of St John Bosco*,

- considering the development of the salesian mission and the territorial extension of the Salesian Province “St Francis Xavier” of Bombay (India);
- bearing in mind that, for a more effective animation, in July 1999 the Provincial Delegation “Konkan”, with headquarters at Odxel (Goa) was set up;
- having seen the results of the consultation carried out in the Province;
- given the favourable opinion of the Provincial with his Council;
- having obtained the consent of the General Council in a meeting on **5 December 2003**, in accordance with articles 132 §1,1 and 156 of the Constitutions:

**DETACHES from the Province “St Francis Xavier” of Bombay the following Houses:**

1. BENAULIN, “Blessed José Vaz”
2. FATORDA MARGÃO, “St John Bosco”
3. ODXEL, “St John Bosco”
4. PANJIM, “St John Bosco”
5. PINGULI, “St John Bosco”
6. QUEPEM, “St John Bosco”
7. SIRSI, “Blessed José Vaz”
8. SULCORNIA, “St John Bosco”
9. SUTTGATTI - Hubli, “St John Bosco”
10. TUEM, “St Francis Xavier”

and in addition the **salesian foundations**, not yet canonically erected, in:

- KAKATI
- KUDAL
- LOUTOLIM
- PARRA
- TRASI

and by means of the present Decree,

**CANONICALLY ERECTS**

the new **SALESIAN VICE PROVINCE of PANJIM**, with the title **“BLESSED JOSÉ VAZ”**, with headquarters in **ODXEL (Goa)**, in the house of **“St John Bosco”**, with the Houses and salesian foundations mentioned above.

The following decisions have been made:

1. Members of the Vice Province are the confreres assigned to the Houses and salesian foundations named above, on the basis of the choice previously made.

2. Also members of the Vice Province are confreres in formation according to the choice previously made.

3. The relationships of the Vice Province with the Province of origin will be regulated by an appropriate Agreement, approved by the Rector Major.

The present Decree will come into force on **31 August 2004**.

Rome, 13 June 2004

*Solemnity of Corpus Christi*

Fr. Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA  
*Rector Major*

Fr. Marian STEMPEL  
*Secretary General*

## **5.6 Transfer of the House “San Francesco di Sales” in the Vatican to the Circumscription of the Generalate**

*This is the Decree of the Rector Major by which the transfer of the House “San Francesco di Sales” situated in Vatican City from the*

*Roman Province (IRO) to the Circumscription of the Generalate (RMG) is arranged.*

Prot. n° 138/2004

### **THE RECTOR MAJOR of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco**

**Fr. Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA**

- having considered the particular mission of the salesian community “**San Francesco di Sales**” situated in **Vatican City** – canonically erected 12 April 1946 – involved at the service of the Apostolic See (in particular with the direction and management of the Press and the Libreria Editrice Vaticana), having special links with the Rector Major and his Council;
- bearing in mind art. 156 of the Constitutions and after hearing the opinion of the Provincial of the Roman Province and his Council;
- having obtained the consent of the General Council in a meeting on 5 December 2003, in accordance with article 132 §1 of the Constitutions:

## **D E C R E E S**

1. **The salesian House “San Francesco di Sales” located in Vatican City be transferred**

**from the “San Pietro” Province of Rome to the Circumscription of the Generalate “Beato Michele Rua”, a House directly dependent on the Rector Major.**

2. As with the Generalate, the major Superior of the House “San Francesco di Sales” in the Vatican is the Rector Major, who for the ordinary exercise of tasks, rights and necessary faculties gives a special mandate to his Vicar.

3. The House “San Francesco di Sales” is guided by a Rector with his Council, according to the Constitutions. The Rector is appointed by the Rector Major with his Council, who will bear in mind the particular mission of the community and may consult in an appropriate manner the confreres of the community.

4. The confreres juridically attached to the House “San Francesco di Sales” cease to belong to their Province of origin for the whole period of their work in this House, but juridically retain their radical attachment to the Province from which they come.

5. For the General Chapter the Rector of the community and a Delegate elected by the assembly of the confreres of the community take part in the special Assembly set up in the Generalate in preparation for

the General Chapter, according to the Statutes of the Generalate.

The present Decree will come into force on **16 August 2004**.

Rome, 13 June 2004  
*Solemnity of Corpus Christi*

Fr. Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA  
*Rector Major*

Fr. Marian STEMPEL  
*Secretary General*

## **5.7 New Salesian Bishop**

*RUWEZI KASHALA GASTON,  
Bishop of Sakania-Kipushi (D.R.C.)*

The Osservatore Romano of 15 May 2004 published the news of the appointment by the Holy Father of the Salesian priest *GASTON KASHALA RUWEZI* as Bishop of the Diocese of *SAKANIA-KIPUSHI*, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Born 14 April 1961 at Kolwezi, Dilala (Dem. Rep. of the Congo), Gaston Ruwezi became a Salesian on 8 September 1982, when he made his first religious profession in the Novitiate at Kansebula, Central African Province. Having completed his postnovitiate studies and practical training in the Province he was sent to Turin-Crocetta for theological studies. Perpetually professed 8/09/1988 (Turin), he was ordained

priest at Lubumbashi (D.R.C.) 14 July 1990. After priestly ordination, he spent two further years in Rome, in the Testaccio community to continue his studies, obtaining a Licence in Biblical Theology at the Pontifical Biblical Institute. Having returned to the Province, between 1993 and 1999 he was a teacher and member of the formation personnel in the theological studentate in Lubumbashi. Provincial Councillor since 1996, in 1999 he was appointed Vice Provincial, the office he still held. Recently he was entrusted with various responsibilities in the province (for formation, for youth and vocational ministry, for the Salesian Family). The Diocese he is now called to guide as Bishop is 40,000 sq. km and con-

tains about 110,000 Catholics (half the population).

### *TRASFER OF BISHOPS*

The Osservatore Romano of 15 May also reported the following information about two Salesian Bishops:

1. Mgr. *Leo M. DRONA*, Bishop of San Jose City (Philippines) since 1987 [cf. AGC 322, 69], is transferred to the episcopal see of *SAN PABLO*, in the Philippines (suffragan see of Manila).

2. Mgr. *Francis Xavier Osamu MIZOBE*, Bishop of Sendai (Japan) since 2000 [cf. AGC 372, 101], is transferred to the episcopal see of *TAKAMATSU*, Japan (suffragan see of Osaka).

## 5.8 Our dead confreres (2<sup>nd</sup> list 2004)

"Faith in the risen Christ sustains our hope and keeps alive our communion with our brothers who rest in Christ's peace. They have spent their lives in the Congregation, and not a few have suffered even to the point of martyrdom for the love of the Lord... Their remembrance is an incentive to continue faithfully in our mission." (*Cost. 94*).

SURNAME AND NAME	PLACE of death	DATE	AGE	PROV
<b>P ACOSTA YARAURE</b> Urbano José	Puerto Cumarebo (Venezuela)	09-05-2004	43	VEN
<b>L AIMAR</b> Giuseppe	Torino	13-03-2004	89	ICP
<b>L ALBORNOZ FLORES</b> José Aureliano	Carrasquero (Venezuela)	05-05-2004	90	VEN
<b>L BALCONI</b> Remo	Torino	30-03-2004	80	ICP
<b>P BARALE</b> Armando	Taranto	26-05-2004	87	IME
<b>P BASSI</b> Giuseppe	Arese (MI)	19-03-2004	62	AFC
<b>P BERDYCHOWSKI</b> Marek	Częstochowa (Polonia)	01-04-2004	44	PLO
<b>P BERTANI</b> Luigi	Ferrara	09-06-2004	84	ILE
<b>P BRUNKA</b> Henryk	Lichtenfels (Germania)	23-03-2004	71	PLE
<b>L CAMPOS</b> Donário	Cruzeiro (São Paulo)	21-03-2004	93	BSP
<b>P CINQUETTI</b> Rinaldo	Negrar (Verona)	05-04-2004	84	INE
<b>P COGLIATI</b> Rodolfo	Castel de' Britti (BO)	24-03-2004	93	ILE
<b>P COLOMBO</b> Domenico	Forlì	08-04-2004	69	ILE
<b>P CURIEL FORTOUL</b> José Antonio	Tehuacán, Puebla, Messico	31-05-2004	51	MEM
<b>E D'AVERSA</b> Michele	Manicoré (Brasile)	20-03-2004	88	--
<i>Fu Ispettore per 7 anni. Eletto Vescovo titolare di Macri nel 1962, fu per 17 anni Prelato Territoriale e per 12 anni Vescovo di Humaitá (Brasile)</i>				
<b>P DŁUGOŁĘCKI</b> Józef	Kraków (Polonia)	10-06-2004	84	PLS
<b>P FIDURSKI</b> Władysław	Rumia	09-05-2003	80	PLN
<b>P GARZONI</b> Antonio	Codigoro (Ferrara)	05-04-2004	94	ILE
<b>P GASIĆ</b> Jerzy Wawrzyniec	Płock (Polonia)	27-04-2004	73	PLE
<b>P GIARRATANO</b> Vincenzo	Alcamo (TP)	04-03-2004	90	ISI
<b>P GLAUER</b> Stanisław	Quito (Ecuador)	29-05-2004	86	ECU
<b>P GOUÉE</b> René	Caen (Francia)	13-03-2004	91	FRA
<b>P GRANERO</b> Octavio Victorio	Vignaud (Argentina)	08-06-2004	81	ARO
<b>P GROBELAK</b> Jerzy	Oświęcim	05-05-2004	71	PLS
<b>P HERNÁNDEZ PÉREZ</b> Fausto	Pozoblanco (Spagna)	13-04-2004	89	SCO
<b>P ISHIKAWA</b> Kosuke Joseph	Tokyo	14-04-2004	65	GIA
<b>P KASIK</b> Manuel	Arequipa (Perù)	27-04-2004	91	PER
<b>L KOK</b> James Tak-cheung	Hong Kong	02-06-2004	69	CIN
<b>P LA PORTA</b> Domenico	Pedara (CT)	14-03-2004	90	ISI
<b>P LAMONTANO</b> Caetano	Campinas (Brasile)	13-06-2004	85	BSP
<b>L MADLENER</b> Helmut	München, Baviera (Germania)	19-04-2004	67	GEM
<b>P MARŠIĆ</b> Janez	Trstenik (Slovenia)	05-04-2004	67	SLO
<b>P MASIAS ABADIA</b> Eugenio Benjamín	Lima	09-05-2004	73	PER
<b>P MASSARINO</b> GABRIELLI Victorio	Montevideo	27-04-2004	82	URU
<b>P MATÍAS</b> Hugo Lorenzo	Córdoba (Argentina)	30-04-2004	73	ACO
<b>P McALEER</b> Paul	Frimley Park (Gran Bretagna)	22-03-2004	83	GBR
<b>P MOGNONI</b> Santo	Torino	30-04-2004	80	ICP
<b>P MOLENDOWSKI</b> Tadeusz	Poznań (Polonia)	16-03-2004	72	PLO
<b>P MONCHIETTI</b> Renato	Torino	31-03-2004	66	ICP



SURNAME AND NAME	PLACE of death	DATE	AGE	PROV
P MORGANTI Enrico	Lugano (Svizzera)	14-05-2004	94	ILE
P MOSSER Victor	Haguenau (Francia)	14-05-2004	84	FRA
P MROCZKOWSKI Zbigniew	Aleksandrów Kujawski	04-06-2004	76	PLN
P PAZ Ricardo	Tucumán (Argentina)	17-03-2004	73	ACO
P PETIT Lambert	Roma	13-05-2004	78	RMG
P REIG PÉREZ José	El Campello (Alicante)	13-06-2004	70	SPA
P REY Edoardo	Cumiana (Torino)	30-04-2004	88	ICP
L RITZL Josef	Amberg, Baviera (Germania)	23-04-2004	81	GEM
P ROCCO Aristides	São Paulo (Brasile)	11-06-2004	90	BSP
P RODRÍGUEZ REGALADO Emilio	Caracas	14-05-2004	82	VEN
L ROSSI Felice	Roma	13-06-2004	72	IRO
P ROTSAERT René	Bonheiden (Belgio)	24-03-2004	73	BEN
P RUKSYS Petras	São Paulo	16-03-2004	65	BSP
P SALAMONOWICZ Eugeniusz	Czerwińsk (Polonia)	04-06-2004	79	PLE
L SARTORI Ildebrando	Chioggia (VE)	09-06-2004	81	INE
E SAVIO Vincenzo	Belluno	31-03-2004	60	--
<i>Eletto Vescovo titolare di Garbiana nel 1993, fu per 7 anni Ausiliare di Livorno e per 3 anni e mezzo Vescovo di Belluno-Feltre</i>				
L SCIPIONI Fausto	Roma	15-04-2004	93	IRO
P SEGARRA Isidro	Barcelona	21-04-2004	90	SBA
<i>Fu per 6 anni Ispettore e per 6 anni Consigliere Generale</i>				
P SESTERO Dario	Avigliana (TO)	25-05-2004	90	ICP
P SIMON René	Caen (Francia)	03-05-2004	91	FRA
P SINGLIS Jean-Marie	Lyon (Francia)	12-06-2004	74	FRA
P STORZ Alfred	Buxheim, Baviera (Germania)	29-05-2004	87	GEM
P TIBERI Ercole	Roma	04-04-2004	97	IRO
P TKACZYK Henryk	Łódź (Polonia)	27-04-2004	70	PLE
P TUNA Paolo	Roma	31-05-2004	77	IRO
L VANDEN BERK Josef	Roma	08-05-2004	83	IRO
L VERSAGGI John	Tampa, Florida	24-03-2004	91	SUE









