



acts

of the general council

year LXXXV october-december 2004

N. 387

official organ
of animation
and communication
for the
salesian congregation

Direzione Generale
Opere don Bosco
Roma

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

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR	1.1 Fr Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA "I GIVE THANKS TO GOD EACH TIME I REMEMBER YOU" (Phil 1,3) <i>Presentation of the Western European Region</i>	3
2. GUIDELINES AND POLICIES	2.1 Fr Giovanni MAZZALI GUIDELINES FOR CORRECT ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT IN THE PROVINCES	47
3. RULINGS AND DIRECTIVES	(none in this issue)	
4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL	4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major 4.2 Chronicle of the General Council	53 58
5. DOCUMENTS	5.1 Message of the Rector Major to the World Advisory Body for Social Communications 5.2 New Provincials 5.3 Decree by which the "San Francesco di Sales" salesian house in the Vatican becomes directly dependent upon the Rector Major 5.4 Our dead confreres	65 72 76 78

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**"I GIVE THANKS TO GOD
EACH TIME I REMEMBER YOU" (Phil 1,3)**

Presentation of the Western European Region

Don Bosco in France, Spain, Portugal and Southern Belgium. – The beginnings, a successful planting of the charism. – Spectacular development. – Today's cultural, social and religious situation. – Salesian situation in the Region. – A word about the different Works. – Youth ministry. – Social communication. – Missionary dimension. – The Salesian Family. – Initial and subsequent formation. – Ongoing formation. – Challenges facing the Region. – Lines of action. – 1. Develop a specific kind of vocational animation that bears witness to community life and the fruitfulness of the mission. – 1.1. *Ensure the conditions for each community to live a true spiritual experience and be a witness to the faith that can be perceived by the young.* – 1.2. *Create a new kind of truly meaningful salesian presence, attractive and inviting for young people with evangelisation as its first objective.* – 2. Implement the consequent changes needed in the life and organisation of the Provinces and of the Region.

Rome, 8 September 2004
Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary

My dear confreres,

As I write this letter I greet you all affectionately, and *I give thanks to God each time I remember you* (Phil 1,3). This is the heading I decided to give to this letter about the Western European Region. Even though it is true of all Regions, as expressing the deep communion there is between us, and gratitude for the work done for the expansion of the Congregation and the spreading of Don Bosco's charism, it certainly applies in a special way to this Region. Spain has witnessed a remarkable growth, the greatest and most consistent after that of Italy and prior to that of India. France has been outstanding in its love for Don Bosco, his spirituality and pedagogy. Portugal has had a wonderful missionary outreach in all the old Portuguese-speaking countries. Southern Belgium has always collaborated in missionary work with great generosity.

In the three months that have passed since my letter on the Word of God and Salesian Life, I have spent most of the time at the Generalate in a busy session of the General Council, during which we have examined and approved at least two thirds of all the documents drawn up by the Provincial Chapters. There are however some news items that deserve particular mention.

In the first place there was the *Retreat* we made together with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Santa Fosca di Cadore at the beginning of July. Besides this being the first time such an event had taken place in the history of our Institutes, with all that means for our charism, we wanted to explore together what the Spirit seems to be saying to the Church and the world at this time, so that we might gain a better knowledge of what God is asking of us, what are his expectations in our regard, what is his will. From this standpoint all the different elements, the spectacular natural scenery, the pleasant climate, the experience of living as a family, the spiritual sharing and the reflections offered and celebrated, were both enlightening and productive. Unfortunately Mother Antonia Colombo and two Councillors were unable to take part because of illness.

Special features of the month of August were “*Campobosco*” for the young people of Spain and the *European “Confronto”*, which brought together hundreds of youngsters on the occasion of the jubilee of the canonisation of St Dominic Savio and the centenary of the death of Laura Vicuña. Both meetings had been carefully prepared and were held with great commitment from everyone, beginning with the young people themselves who were the true leaders in both events. Such gatherings are naturally more productive when they are seen as a goal and a new starting point within a process of human and Christian maturing, and of salesian spirituality.

In this context of fraternal communication I cannot fail to say a word about the recent campaign mounted against us by some elements of the American mass media, and aimed particu-

larly at the Province of Australia, accusing the Congregation of operating a policy of transferring from one country to another confreres accused of abuse against juveniles. The Provincials of the United States in the first place, followed by the Provincial of Australia, issued press releases denying that such a policy existed, asking forgiveness for any possible misdeeds and for reactions that may not always have been adequate; they expressed solidarity with the victims, emphasised the guidelines given by the Rector Major and his Council, and made it clear that each Province is responsible for the handling of these cases. While accepting this trial as a moment of purification for what may in the past have fallen short of the high ideals expected of us, we renew our commitment to make young people the objective of our vocation and mission, and to be for them “signs and bearers of the love of God”.

Don Bosco in France, Spain, Portugal and Southern Belgium

With the letter **“You will be my witnesses, even to the ends of the earth”** (AGC 385) I began a presentation of the situation of the Congregation in each of its geographical Regions and I said that the next Region would be that of Western Europe. With this present letter, **“I give thanks to God each time I remember you”**, I shall try to make you better acquainted with the history of this Region which is a glorious one, with the rich qualities of its present situation, and at the same time enable you to share in the efforts that are being made to respond creatively to the great and urgent challenges being faced by the salesian charism in the West.

The Western European Region was set up by the GC24. Geographically it is the smallest in the Congregation. It is made up of Belgium, France, Spain and Portugal, with some works in other countries which for historical or political reasons or through apostolic generosity, have remained united to one or

other of these countries. Portugal maintains its presence in the Cape Verde Islands, France has a community in Morocco and another in Switzerland, the Province of Barcelona runs a school in the Republic of Andorra. The Delegation of Mozambique, though dependent on the Province of Portugal, has been part of the African Region since the GC24. Following the unification of the French Provinces in 1999, the Region now has 10 Provinces, and in all these Provinces some houses have already celebrated the centenary of their foundation.

Without any doubt salesian work in the Region has felt the impact of the deep and rapid process of European transformation, beginning with the unification of the currency. In the last decades, in fact, there has been a decisive advance in the definition of the face of Europe in the various aspects of its life. As elsewhere, so here too, economic aspects have prevailed while in other fields there are difficulties. Deplorable have been the experiences of the wars in the Balkans, the war in Iraq and its aftermath of reconstruction, and the present discussions for the adoption of a European Constitution are painful and laborious. All this reveals the many different interests and sensitivities that exist. Europe is far from uniform in its culture, its history, its theology and the expression of its religious beliefs and practices. And the same is also true of the salesian situation always linked so closely with the local context in this Region of the Congregation. In recent years the Region set out to make itself a place of openness and discussion, of mutual dialogue and the sharing of ideas. Some progress has certainly been made, but the vicissitudes of history and culture in each of these countries through the centuries have also left their mark on the various expressions of salesian life. The process of unification is strong and irresistible and there are factors in the Region leading in the same direction, but history has its own weight and this explains the diversity even in the salesian context.

The beginnings, a successful planting of the charism

In December 1874, almost a year before the launch of his American enterprise, Don Bosco was received at **Nice (France)** "as though he were a god".¹ A year later, on 20 November 1875, he returned to take over a small "*patronage*". He was accompanied by Don Ronchail (a French surname), who was to be its director, Brother Philip Cappellaro and the novice Jean-Baptiste Perret. Don Bosco wanted to repeat in Nice the experience of thirty years earlier in the Pinardi House. The new house "has all the basic elements of that of Turin", he wrote to Don Rua.² In the year 1876-1877 the first workshops were set up for shoe-making, tailoring and carpentry. On 12 March 1877 the new site of the work was solemnly inaugurated. "In memory of the event, Don Bosco had a pamphlet printed in two languages in which for the first time his short treatise of the preventive system appeared".³ Foundations soon multiplied in France: the Oratory of San León at Marseilles, others at Cannes and Challonges which did not last very long; one at La Navarre, the house Don Bosco dreamed about, where for the first time the Salesians took charge of an agricultural school where young orphans were trained for work in the fields. During this period Don Bosco made several visits to the south of France. In 1883 he went as far as Paris, and from then on between Don Bosco and France relationships were established of admiration, appreciation and friendship on the one hand, and of generous help on the other, which to someone looking back a hundred years later seem truly remarkable. In 1884 the Salesians arrived in Paris, led by Fr Charles Bellamy, a diocesan priest who had become a Salesian a year earlier.

Shortly after the launching of the work in France, on 24 January 1880 a picturesque train journey, wonderfully described in

¹ FRANCIS DESRAMAUT. "Don Bosco en son temps", 943.

² Epistolario IV, lett. 2225, 24.11.1875.

³ MORAND WIRTH. "Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni" p. 175, nota 14.

a letter to Don Rua, brought Don Cagliero and Brother Joseph Rossi to Seville (**Spain**) on a fact-finding mission: Cagliero was wearing the official ecclesiastical headgear of Spain and Rossi wore a top hat. Two days later the Archbishop of Seville, very well impressed by the two illustrious visitors, wrote to Don Bosco: "I think that this Congregation is destined to spread and do a great deal of good in Spain... My best wishes to the new workers".⁴ The prophecy would soon be realised, and to an eminent degree.

Cagliero and Rossi left behind them in Spain a glowing interest and enthusiasm for the works of Don Bosco. John Cagliero "had won over the vivacious Andalusians by his great simplicity, his constant good humour and way of dealing with others, his frankness and cordiality".⁵ Despite the gratifying nature of the journey, the promise of a salesian community for Spain could not be fulfilled until 16 February of the following year 1881, when Utrera saw the arrival of the first six Salesians sent by Don Bosco for the foundation in Spain.

If the fact-finding mission made by train by Cagliero and Rossi had been picturesque, that of the members of the first community – made by sea – was accompanied by storms and gales, high seas, fog and sea-sickness, the lot. At Gibraltar they said good-bye to the confreres continuing their journey to America, while the new community finally disembarked at Cadiz. Now on dry land, from Cadiz they went by train to Utrera. At half past six in the evening the pilgrims came in sight of the towering spires of the city, and Don Cagliero cried out with emotion: "Look! It's Utrera!" "And all the Salesians joined their hands and said a Hail Mary to Mary Help of Christians. Thus began Don Bosco's work in the Iberian Peninsula".⁶

⁴ A. MARTIN GONZALEZ. "Los salesianos de Utrera en España, 87.

⁵ Ibidem, 100.

⁶ Ibidem, 165.

If you visit the salesian houses of Andalusia you get the impression that the Salesians have never stopped reciting and singing that Ave Maria among the people. When Don Bosco sent the first Salesians to America in 1875 he bade them farewell in the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians and gave them in writing twenty recommendations which form a true breviary of pastoral practice and retain all their validity at the present day:

Seek souls, not money, honours or dignities...

Love one another, advise one another, correct one another...

Promote devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians...

Let the good of one become the good of all...

In time of fatigue and suffering, do not forget that a great reward is prepared for us in heaven (MB XI, 389-390).

Those first Salesians set out from Italy and put the advice of their Father into practice in the Iberian Peninsula too. "The people welcome them and venerate them because they are men of God; they help young people in their needs, seek remedies in the struggle against misfortune and try to avoid it; they are tireless and unselfish workers".⁷ The salesian spirit, demonstrated in their concern for the education of poor and abandoned youngsters with the simplicity and popular style of the festive oratory, and especially in the spreading of devotion to Mary Help of Christians, enabled them immediately to win over the hearts of the Andalusian people and opened all doors to them, including some of the Spanish nobility and "conservative" middle classes, who were worried on account of the disastrous consequences that followed from the lack of instruction and Christian education among the children of the poor and the working classes.

Thanks to the effective intervention of Doña Dorotea de Chopitea, who was anxious to be able to do something for the poor youngsters of Barcelona, in 1884 the Salesians arrived at

⁷ A. MARTIN GONZALEZ. "Los salesianos de Utrera en España, 103.

Sarriá, where the development of workshops and her influence on salesian Spain have been described as “bordering on the miraculous”. Don Bosco’s visit to Barcelona in 1886 gave rise to a great outpouring of enthusiasm and generosity on all sides, climaxing in the presentation to him of the hill of Tibidabo for the building of a temple to the Sacred Heart.

The earliest requests for salesian work in **Portugal** go back to 1877,⁸ but the first formal negotiations for a foundation in the country began in 1882 through the efforts of Don Sebastião Vasconcelos, who approached Don Bosco directly and in 1883 inspired by the spirit of the Saint, founded the “Oficinas são José do Porto” (Workshops of St Joseph of Porto), for the education and vocational training “dos rapazes da rua” (of street-children), giving to the workshops the typical characteristics of a salesian house.⁹ But the Salesians arrived formally in Portugal only in 1894, when Don Rua was Superior General. Although the city of Braga had not been the first to ask for the sons of Don Bosco, it was in fact the first to receive them. The first community – two priests and a student – took over the “Colégio dos Órfãos de São Caetano” (School of the Orphans of St Cajetan). This was followed by further foundations in Lisbon (1896), Angra do Heroísmo (1903), Viana do Castelo (1904), and Porto (1909). The Portuguese are well known for their great sea-faring enterprises, and it is not surprising therefore to find the Salesians soon afterwards going from Lisbon to Macao (1906), to Tanjor (1906) and Maliapor (1909) in India, and in 1907 they set up a trade school in Mozambique. The salesian charism in Portugal developed to such an extent that in 1899 the works were erected as an autonomous Province, separated from Barcelona as the first Province in the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁰

⁸ In 1877 Mgr. Lacerda wrote to Don Bosco in the hope that he would send his sons to Portugal (*Annali* II, 345). In 1880 there was a lengthy correspondence between Don Bosco and Portugal (*ibid.*). In 1881 Don Bosco sent Don Cagliero from Utrera to Oporto on a fact-finding visit (*Annali* I, 453. 612).

⁹ Cfr. AMADOR ANJOS: “Centenário da obra salesiana em Portugal”, 27.

¹⁰ Cfr. AMADOR ANJOS: “Centenário da obra salesiana em Portugal”, 27.

We can also consider as miraculous the beginnings of salesian work in **Belgium**. On 7 December 1887 the Bishop of Liège, Mgr. Doutreloux, went to Rome to try to persuade Don Bosco to open a trade school in his city. The Superiors, in agreement with Don Bosco, thought it best to wait a while before accepting. But the following morning, "to the great surprise of Don Celestino Durando, (who was in charge of the negotiations for new foundations), Don Bosco said 'yes' to the Bishop as though the difficulties raised the previous day no longer existed".¹¹

What had happened? In the morning of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception Don Carlo Viglietti went into Don Bosco's room and was told: "Get some paper, pen and ink, and write down what I tell you. Words literally spoken by the Immaculate Virgin who appeared to me during the night and said: 'Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary want a house opened at Liège in honour of the Blessed Sacrament' ".¹² Soon afterwards Mgr. Cagliero came in and Don Viglietti read to him what he had written. The Bishop was astonished and said: "Yesterday I too was opposed to the plan, but now we have the decree. There is nothing more to be said!".¹³ It was on this occasion that Don Bosco made the famous statement: "So far we have always gone ahead with complete certainty; we could not go wrong because Mary is guiding us."¹⁴ The way in which the land was acquired and the work at Liège established soon showed that Mary indeed wanted that house in the city of "Corpus Christi". The foundation at Liège was followed by one at Tournai, a novitiate house at Hechtel and other works, leading to the erection of the Belgian houses into an autonomous Province in 1902.

¹¹ Cfr. MB. XVIII, p. 437.

¹² Cfr. MB. XVIII, p. 438.

¹³ Cfr. MB. XVIII, p. 439.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

Spectacular development

Spectacular is the right word to describe the development of the Congregation in the various countries of the Region. When Don Albera, the first Provincial in France, returned to Italy in 1892 to be appointed Catechist General, he left behind thirteen flourishing foundations. Even opponents in their own way bore witness to the vitality of the Sons of Don Bosco who, according to the spokesman of a committee of the French Senate, formed “a recently created group, but one which is today irradiating the whole world”.¹⁵ In 1896 France already had two Provinces and “on the occasion of the World Exhibition of Paris in 1900 the Salesians were awarded two medals for their successful social work”.¹⁶

In **Spain** too “the work of the Salesians was much appreciated by the government. A decree of 1893 gave them high praise and highlighted the contribution they had made to solving the labour problem. Similar praise was heard in the following year at the Fourth Catholic International Congress of Tarragona”.¹⁷

As in Argentina so also in Spain Don Cagliero was the founder of the salesian work. Nevertheless, Fr Philip Rinaldi, Fr Peter Ricaldone, Fr Juan Branda and Fr Ernest Oberti were the ones who firmly planted the salesian charism in Spain and Portugal.

In 1889 Fr Philip Rinaldi arrived in Spain as Rector of the house of Sarriá. His amiable disposition, greatness of heart and psychological intuition immediately gained for him the affection and good will of all. Three years later he was appointed the “first Provincial of Spain and Portugal”, with headquarters in Barcelona. After a further nine years he returned to Italy as a member of what was then known as the Superior Chapter. He

¹⁵ MORAND WIRTH. “Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni”, 275 – Citato: *Annali* III, 135.

¹⁶ MORAND WIRTH. “Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni”, 283.

¹⁷ MORAND WIRTH. “Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni”, 282.

left behind him twenty salesian communities in Spain and three in Portugal. It was at this moment that Fr Peter Ricaldone took the stage, a man of great dynamism and charisma.

He too had had the opportunity to know and greet Don Bosco. He made his novitiate at Valsalice, "where he had as companions Augustus Czartoryski and Andrew Beltrami".¹⁸ He was 19 when he first went to Spain. From Utrera he successfully founded the festive oratory in the difficult suburb of Seville-Trinidad. In 1889 he was ordained priest and a year later was appointed Rector of the same house of Seville-Blessed Trinity. He was then only 24 but, as Don Rinaldi said to Don Rua, "he is indeed a man, and very much loved".¹⁹ In Seville he made himself both Spanish and Andalusian, and in 1901 was appointed "first Provincial of the Betica Province". At this point, and only twenty years after the arrival of the first Salesians, four provinces were created in the Iberian Peninsula: three in Spain and one in Portugal.

The beginnings of the twentieth century did not bode well for religious congregations in Europe. They faced a violent storm of laws passed by liberal and openly anticlerical governments. The revolution of 1910 put a sudden stop to salesian development in **Portugal**, and the northern Province of **France** was suppressed.

Another severe trial for the Congregation was the first world war. Almost half the Salesians were conscripted and had to bear arms. Many colleges were requisitioned to be transformed into barracks or hospitals. But it was precisely in France and Belgium that, when the war was over, salesian work was to be reborn with extraordinary strength, to such an extent that in 1959 Belgian salesian activity was organised into three Provinces: North Belgium, South Belgium and Central Africa, and the two

¹⁸ "Don Bosco, cien años en España...", 40.

¹⁹ J.M. ESPINOSA. "Cara e Cruz de Don Pedro Ricaldone", 103.

French Provinces (two once more from 1925) began working in Africa (Congo, 1959).

Spain, for its part – and in it the Salesian Family – experienced a bloody civil war (1936-1939). It was a period of trial and purification to which the martyrs of the Salesian Family, 95 in all, bear clear witness. But as Tertullian says: “the blood of the martyrs is always the seed of new Christians”, and in this case too, many vocations followed. At the end of the ‘50s and the beginning of the ‘60s the growth in vocations was such that the Provinces in Spain increased to seven, and Spanish missionaries spread the salesian charism to the most remote parts of the world. In the same period Portugal became responsible for the houses of Macau, Cape Verde and Mozambique.

Today's cultural, social and religious situation

The Region covers an area which at the present day has about 120 million inhabitants with a density of population that varies from 80 persons per sq. km. in Spain to 334 in Belgium. Infant mortality is never greater than 0.9%, and life expectancy reaches 74 years for men and 80 for women. Illiteracy has practically disappeared, apart from a small minority of ethnic groups. In all the countries of the European Union the trend of family units being now headed by a single individual is increasing and has reached more than 28%.

At a sociological level one cannot overlook the massive presence of **immigrants** as an important social factor – of concern to both Church and State – and one which presents problems of no little importance also to us. On the one hand Europe needs immigrants, but on the other the illegal circumstances in which so many immigrants arrive and remain is a cause of great anxiety. The result is exploitation, the development of mafia-like groups, marginalisation, inhuman living conditions and/or recourse to

delinquency for survival. Belgium is the country of the Region with the greatest proportion of immigrants – more than 10%.

Through schools, colleges, youth centres, other social works and “reception centres”, the Salesian Congregation in the Region is trying to collaborate by offering rapid and creative responses to this besetting problem.

Particularly striking is the increase of **Moslems** in the Region; they now number about 7.5 million (and Islam is the religion with the second highest number of followers). This leads naturally to a demand for their rights and for political and social recognition, but also to clashes between their culture and that of Europe, and even in the matter of human rights (especially in what concerns women). Another serious phenomenon is the spreading of **sects**, which challenge our ability to evangelise.

The phenomenon of **globalisation** has – in common with all historical realities – some positive aspects, especially if it manages to acquire a human face and make the interests of the person prevail over other concerns. But we are well aware that this world is not always ruled by evangelical values. We need only notice what little recognition is given to Christian roots in the European Constitution.

Secularisation, which has its own value, has been changed into **secularism**, which rejects any reference to God in the organisation of personal and social life. At the same time, the quality of being lay has been changed into **laicism**, on the pretext that civil affairs should be accorded absolute autonomy; this has led some countries to declare themselves “lay and non-confessional”, but without any guarantee of what the lay character should imply, i.e. “a space for communication between a nation and its various spiritual traditions”.²⁰ It is true that at this level

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 12 January 2004 (*Oss Rom*, 12-13 Jan. 2004, pp. 6-7).

freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Constitutions of the different European countries, ensuring the equality of all citizens “without distinction of origin, race or religion”, but unfortunately it does not work out like that in practice. Here and there one comes across attitudes that are clearly anticlerical and an aggressive laicism that has its roots in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution; it does not remain a simple cultural attitude but pervades and shapes the civil institutions themselves.

The **consumer society** attempts to satisfy the needs of the human being by reducing them to those of a material nature and transforming the person himself into a mere consumer of products, of feelings and of experiences, while **professionalism** – even though positive and necessary – often imposes limits on the opportunity for mission for many charisms. Obviously self-sufficiency and the maturity of the affluent society are good in themselves to the extent that society is capable of satisfying the main needs of the population: education, health, employment, housing, concern about marginalisation – all of this undertaken in centres managed in a truly professional manner by public institutions. But the fact cannot be denied that this kind of organisation is ever more restrictive of the space left for free self-donation, which is a characteristic element of the religious life. On the other hand, social fragmentation confines the religious and transcendent dimension to the purely private sphere.

The **drastic fall in the birthrate** in this social model must not be seen only as a matter of statistics but also as a trait illustrating the mentality of the affluent society. There is hedonism and selfishness which see pleasure as one of life’s primordial objectives without ensuring respect for other people or for the moral law. This leads to serious repercussions on the family: divorce, the delegation of the education of children to others, and difficulties or exploitation in interpersonal relationships.

The result of these phenomena is the spreading of a culture marked by a certain sceptical relativism and disenchantment which presents a strong challenge to the Church, to religious life and to the salesian charism.

To speak of the **religion** or religions of Western Europe is a truly complicated matter. Official figures for adherents have to be set against personal and social practice (baptisms, marriages, attendance at Sunday Mass, funerals), deeply held beliefs, a whole range of different kinds of religious experience extending from the convinced and coherent believer to the practical atheist and most radical agnostic, all of which contributes to the growing disaffection for the Church, especially on the part of the young.

Many articles and studies have been published in recent years on the religious issue. In general they are pessimistic in tone. It is enough to read some of the titles: "Must we believe in the future of Christianity?",²¹ "Has Christianity any future?",²² "Has Christianity run its course?",²³ "The last of the Mohicans?",²⁴ "Catholicism, the end of a world?".²⁵

This social phenomenon is of concern to us Salesians, especially because of the effect it has on young people. "They are a section of the population more sensitive to cultural fashion, and certainly more affected by the secularisation of the environment".²⁶ Evangelisation becomes progressively more difficult because of such secularisation. I think it can be truly said that there is a real divorce between the new generations of youngsters and the Church. Religious ignorance and the prejudice fostered by

²¹ OUEST-FRANCE, 26 novembre 1999.

²² PHILIPPE BAUD. Livre collectif.

²³ BRUNO CHENU, *La Croix*, 20 octobre 2000.

²⁴ CHARLES DELHEZ, *Sur le catholiques en Belgique*. 1998.

²⁵ HERVIEU-LEGER (Bayar), 2003.

²⁶ LLUIS OVIEDO TORRÓ. "La religiosidad de los jóvenes". *Razón y fe*. Giugno 2004, p. 447.

certain sections of the mass media have formed in them the image of an institutional Church which is conservative and opposed to modern culture, especially in the field of sexual morality.

The religious transformation in Spain has been so rapid that the cultural horizons of our young people can be quite unknown to us. "In particular we note the increase in the number of factors dealing with secularisation in this section of the population and especially their drifting away from the Church as an institution which in the eyes of the young is losing both esteem and value".²⁷ The studies made by the "Fundación Santa María" reach the conclusion that the Church in Spain has lost its monopoly of religion. This means that it is no longer a question of choosing between different absolutes, but that all religious propositions become automatically devalued and made relative. Each person is free to choose between the different things on offer, all on the same level, and live his religion as he chooses for himself.

The breaking of the links in the chain of transmission of the faith has been dramatic. The natural and traditional settings (family, school, parish) are sometimes found to be ineffective in passing on the faith. Consequently there is a growing religious ignorance among the new generations.

One analyst of Spanish religious sociology declares that among young people "a silent departure from the Church is taking place". In his article "Una Iglesia irrelevante para la juventud actual?" (Is the Church irrelevant for today's youth?) he maintains that "the young continue to believe in God, continue to claim that they are practising Catholics, but go to church less and less frequently".²⁸ With all the reservations needed in approaching surveys, it is nevertheless right to recognise that in our western society everything points to an increase in the number of those who

²⁷ Ibidem, 449.

²⁸ GONZALEZ ANLEO: Una iglesia irrelevante para le juventud actual?, *Sal Terrae*. Settembre 1999, p. 310.

say they are believers in some way but without belonging to any specific religion. "Religious beliefs multiply and are less and less bound by ecclesial rules; hence there is a slow decline in the levels of religious practice; prayer and the sacraments".²⁹

If we delve a little deeper, we note the absence of a sense of sin. Also according to the statistics, more than 50% of the young people in this Region say that they do not feel any sense of sin, and one can note in them a marked tendency to greater permissiveness and relativism in regard to morals.

But if religion and politics are the values least appreciated by today's young people, it is equally true that the religious phenomenon is strongly present in European society. There are so many positive aspects in the social and cultural context that we may rightly speak of a period of intense **work of the Spirit**. The young continue to surprise us by their generosity, by their ability to respond with admiration to certain ecclesiastical figures (the Pope, for example), and by their reaction to noble causes. The picture we have given might be considered negative and lead us to pessimism. But that is not the case at all! We need to be forthright in saying that although these new situations and ideas may leave us perplexed, deep changes are never the consequence of the caprice of a few but a response to the needs of the times. This means that behind them there is the activity of the Spirit and the energy of the Risen Christ, carrying out in history a work of purification and renewal, shattering the inertia of society and rejuvenating the Church, making room for a social organisation more in keeping with the saving design of the Father. It means that the present situation is full of new opportunities, that forces of salvation are at work that are leading to change. The future of Christianity and the religious life depends primarily not on man but on God, who can give the lie to all statistics and the most fatal prognoses. I venture to say that Eu-

²⁹ LLUIS OVIEDO TORRÓ "La religiosidad de los jóvenes". *Razón y Fe*. Giugno 2004, p. 449.

rope's present hour is a distinctly salesian one, because today's youngsters have a greater need than ever before of the salesian charism. The new social and cultural situation is a challenge but at the same time an opportunity.

For us statistics and surveys are never the last word. It is important however to know about these studies because they reveal the situation in which we have to live and fulfil the mission entrusted to us; they help us to interpret and understand it, and above all they can serve as a basis for our educative and evangelising endeavours. I invite you therefore to examine these studies on the current situation of our young people more deeply. It is a first expression of our love for them.

The comment of Hölderling comes to mind: "Where danger increases, there too grow the possibilities of salvation". Our hope and our strength are in the Spirit of the Risen Christ. No doors are closed to his transforming energy, His words are reassuring and encouraging: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16,33b). All we need is docility to his Spirit who takes care of us and revitalises us. Who knows whether now is in fact the time that the Spirit is urging us towards the desert, towards purification and expectation. Perhaps this is the time to break the bonds which bind us to past ways of seeing and living. Perhaps even now the Spirit is raising up powerful forces for the transformation of history which will require us to be ready and prepared. One thing is certain: we are not alone. He is with us and is faithful.

Salesian situation in the Region

We find ourselves in the paradoxical and challenging situation that while the youth situation (religious ignorance, mistaken beliefs, new forms of social poverty, family problems, emigration and the exploitation or abandonment of juveniles, night cul-

ture – a present-day theme which is causing concern to the authorities) calls for real and enterprising apostles, vocations to the religious life and priestly ministry in general, and to salesian life in particular, are in a state of steep numerical decline.

Before offering you some figures, I want to remind you about the facts themselves and their purpose. As I said earlier they illustrate the real situation, and in consequence prompt us to reflect on our works and style of activity; they enable us to make sound plans for the future by boldly facing the challenges of today. That is my line of approach.

There are 1,795 Salesians in the Region. It should be noted that in the last twenty-five years this number has decreased by about 2,000 confreres. Some of them have chosen to remain in the new Circumscriptions of salesian Africa, some have gone to various missionary countries, some have left the Congregation and others have died. To these must be added on the one hand the drastic fall in vocations in all these countries, France, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, and on the other the ageing of active confreres and the increasing complexities of our works. The overall result of all these factors is that our best energies are being spent in the management of structures and in organisation, and the quality of interpersonal relationships and pastoral animation are put at risk. It is true that the educative competence and salesian identity of lay people as well as the efforts of the confreres preserve the salesian character of our various works and activities, but nevertheless the salesian community loses visibility and significance.

A word about the different Works

It must be said that **the school** is the most consistent salesian work of the Region. There are 217 of them with a total of 105,800 pupils. In general the schools are subsidised by the

State or local authority. From a professional standpoint they are well organised and often managed by lay people or at least with a strong lay presence and collaboration. Here I would like to emphasise the effort made by the French Province through the "Maisons Don Bosco" Association, the "Tutelle" and their various organisations, in trying to guarantee the salesian identity of the projects in the different works managed wholly by lay people. The same can be said of the "Réseau Don Bosco" in Belgium and of the various non-profit organisations.

The Schools have all drawn up their Educative and Pastoral Projects, in which they are defined as Catholic and Salesian. In general freedom is ensured for the organisation of their academic activities in accordance with this particular feature. But there is not always the same freedom in the selection of teachers, and there is still a certain struggle between public and private schools. Parents' Associations exist and there are various interesting initiatives for the formation of their members.

The professional, Christian and salesian formation of the teachers, and especially of management teams, is fostered in a variety of ways in a generous and responsible manner.

The Region's schools for **technical and vocational training** deserve special mention. Of these there are 78 in all, with about 30,000 pupils.

From the simple workshops of Nice to the modern technical and agricultural schools of France, from the school of arts and trades in Sarria to the Universities and schools of engineering in Spain, the Salesian Congregation has written glorious pages in the story of the advancement of young workers. The Past-pupils have filled the factories and businesses of Europe as fully trained workers, competent technicians and professionals, as upright and responsible citizens.

The technical and vocational high-schools of agriculture and horticulture in **France** (13 centres with some 8,000 students)

provide the population with a social service of the highest quality, and the same can be said of those in **Belgium**. The image of the Congregation in this Region is strongly marked by traits of social advancement, vocational training, and involvement in the world of work. The good relationships with industry often ensure immediate employment for many of the pupils who complete their vocational training in salesian schools.

If Doña Dorotea de Chopitea was the foundress of salesian workshops in **Spain**,³⁰ Don Rinaldi and Don Ricaldone were without any doubt the promoters of their slow but progressive growth. The enterprise of the Salesians was matched by the generosity of Cooperators and benefactors. Fidelity to their vocation and the readiness and initiative of Don Bosco's spirit created a truly salesian model of the "vocational school".

Worthy of considerable praise was the social work carried out by the vocational schools of **Portugal** until 1974. The "Oficinas de são José" at Lisbon, the technical school of Estoril, the "Colégio dos Orfãos" of Porto, the school of "Artes e Ofícios" of Funchal, the vocational school of Iseda, Santa Clara di Vila do Conde, provided society with good and responsible professionals at a time when Portugal was beginning its industrial revolution. Unfortunately with the political changes of 25 April 1974, all industrial, commercial and vocational training completely disappeared.

As part of its work of education the Region has 38 boarding establishments, some of them with many students such as those of France with 600 pupils. It is worth recalling the importance of boarding schools in salesian history. Nowadays it is desirable that they have a good Educational and Pastoral Project, coordinated with and complementing the overall objective of the work, while at the same time profiting by the unique educative possibilities offered by boarding schools and hostels. We must keep in

³⁰ Cfr. RAMÓN ALBERDI. "Don Bosco: cien años en España", p. 114.

mind the responsibility we have with regard to these youngsters for whom, unfortunately, problems are on the increase, even in their own families.

Altogether there are 111 **parishes** in the Region under the pastoral responsibility of the Salesians. In addition in France and Belgium various confreres are working in diocesan parishes. Everywhere we look after many chaplaincies. The Iberian Conference has had for years its "Educative and pastoral programme for the salesian parish", which serves as a model for the drawing up of the pastoral project for each parish. Usually there is a committee for the animation of this sector within the overall youth ministry project. It is important that the desire to guarantee the specific identity of our parishes is continually renewed by ensuring the characteristics that make them truly salesian, i.e. working class, youthful aspect, educative and with a missionary and community outlook. In our present cultural situation parishes need to make a special effort to be centres for formation, evangelisation and transmission of the faith.

The statistics show that the Region has 81 **oratories** and 110 **youth centres**, with some 15,000 oratorians and about 30,000 teenagers and youngsters members of the youth centres. The programmes and activities are aimed at catering for some 75,000 young people.

Spain has a Confederation that brings together most of the youth centres in the salesian provinces and those of the FMA (about 200), and **gives support to the SYM**. At present it is made up of 10 Provincial Federations, corresponding to Spain's ten "autonomous regions".

One of the more evident results of youth pastoral work in Spain and Portugal is the number and quality of youth leaders. Their salesian identity and professional competence is on a par with their self-giving and generosity. The challenge for the Salesians is to ensure that they receive adequate personal guidance.

Social concern and a sensitivity for poor youngsters have always been characteristic traits of the Salesian Congregation. The fact that the countries of the Region fall within the so-called “affluent” society of the west does not mean that we can close our eyes to the “new forms of poverty and marginalisation” to which this society gives rise. The Salesians of this Region are a living proof of great sensitivity and social commitment. Immigration, scholastic failure and all the problems associated with the family (divorce, separation, etc.) are a challenge to the creativity and the heart of the Salesians who are doing everything they can to find new solutions to new problems. In the Region there are 65 foundations working to assist youngsters with particular problems.

Excellent work is done in the social field by the schools and in particular by the vocational training centres, with their programmes aimed at finding employment for less gifted youngsters. There are also other initiatives in operation which make the social orientation of the Congregation significant: houses for boys from broken homes, workshops for remedial work or occupational therapy, “day centres”, units for out-of-school remedial teaching, educative programmes for the suburbs, hostels for problem children or those with court orders, initiatives for the follow-up of minority or ethnic groups and their social advancement. Social awareness has increased in all the Provinces, particularly with a sense of coordination and organisation, and of working in accordance with overall projects. In this way the salesian network of “établissements d’action sociale” has been set up in France and similar foundations in other Provinces.

On 30 January 2002, the Spanish Government conferred its Silver Medal of Solidarity on the National Confederation of Salesian Youth Centres – a well deserved recognition of the social work that had been carried out.

The option for the poorest of the poor is one that must characterise the life and pastoral activity of all our communities and

works, because it is one of the preferential criteria for our significance. Hence the validity of the observation made during the last Team Visit at Santiago de Compostela: "Promote in all salesian communities, and pastoral and educative communities, a more systematic and committed option for young people who are poor".³¹ In this sector too it is evident that our work must have an educative and evangelising slant; in this connection I quote another conclusion of the same Visit: "Develop among the poor youngsters the process of education to the faith proposed by the GC23".³² by fostering in particular a presence that is an explicit evangelical witness that can be a point of reference for the young and a stimulus helping them to open up to the faith. For this purpose the motivations of the vocation and the faith of the educators themselves must also be developed and deepened.

Youth pastoral work

"Evangelise by educating and educate by evangelising" was one of the pithy classical statements of Fr Egidio Viganò for summing up the whole of our mission. It states clearly and convincingly that all salesian activity must be at one and the same time both educative and evangelising, and that every kind of work or activity must be a means for education and evangelisation. With this in mind, I think that everything we have said so far falls within the field of youth ministry, which embraces all dimensions of the person and every sector of the salesian mission (schools, parishes, oratories, youth centres, marginalisation problems, sport and free time).

In the Region every Province has a full-time Delegate for Youth Ministry. The new educative and pastoral model of shared

³¹ Conclusioni - Significatività 1-1. Visita d'insieme Europa Ovest. Santiago de Compostela 1999.

³² Ibidem, Significatività 1-2.

responsibility between Salesians and the laity has been accepted and put into practice. For some time now each work prepares its own Educative and Pastoral Project and updates it with regard to formation and the application of the preventive system, so that it can be a point of reference for all members of the educative and pastoral community. Systematic and structured programmes are in use for educators and animators to enable them to fulfil their educative and pastoral vocation, recover the joy and originality of the salesian presence among young people, the zeal and freshness of pastoral and missionary work, and guarantee the salesian identity of our works.

Group activity is one of the columns of youth pastoral work in the Region, especially within the Iberian Conference. It is considered the ideal platform for the guidance of young people in their process of deepening and maturing in the faith, as a means for transmitting salesian spirituality, and as a context for the proposing and growth of vocational choices. It would be well to intensify the opening up of associations, structures and youthful formation processes, to the entire Salesian Family, by finding suitable occasions for an appropriate presentation of the salesian charism as a vocational option to each of the different groups.

The education of children today cannot be contemplated without an effort to become acquainted with all the contexts in which they live. The main one is – or should be – the family. We are tackling work in connection with parents' associations through ad hoc schools for parents, but we must do so more decisively.

The Delegation of the Iberian Conference and the **National Centre for Youth Ministry in Madrid** have carried out a serious work of reflection, recommendations and follow up in the entire field of Youth Ministry; they have made a notable contribution to putting into practice the suggestions of the last General Chapters. So too the committee for schools, the technical

secretariat for vocational formation, the “coordinadora de las plataformas sociales”, the committee for marginalisation, the committee for youth centres with the confederation and committee for sport carry out their work of coordination and support for the Iberian Conference. One result has been the drawing up of the educative and pastoral plan for each sector (school, parish, oratory, youth centre, sport and free time, social activities) and, especially, the “process of education in the faith”, the plan for the human and Christian formation for children, adolescents and young adults, which allows for personal guidance until the time of making a vocational choice in the Church and in society.

In every Province or at the level of the Iberian Conference some interesting activities are organised, such as Easter celebrations, the “Campobosco”, a spiritual retreat in Turin for leaders etc. These achieve their full effect to the extent that they are integrated into the general plan of formation, a process which includes daily items like the ‘Good Morning’ talk, weekly items (e.g. catechism class, group meetings), monthly (the 24th of the month, commemoration of Don Bosco), quarterly (days of retreat, campaigns and celebrations of various kinds), or annual (e.g. camping expeditions and other meetings in addition to those already mentioned).

It would be true to say that there was a period when the Iberian Conference served as a kind of experimental workshop for trying out new projects in the Congregation’s pastoral activity. The broad lines were defined and were successfully put into practice in the main areas of activity through sound organisation, and especially through group activity in which the emphasis was on processes of individual personal contact.

Perhaps the success of the youth pastoral work can be described as follows: on the one hand it centred on the individual youngster who needed to be accompanied in his growth in all aspects, intellectual, social, spiritual and vocational; and on the

other hand, there was a sense of unity and totality and therefore coordination of the various projects. The central position of the youngster requires team work and the fostering of cooperation between the different sectors of activity: school, parish, youth centre etc. They are different contexts which mutually reinforce each other and have the same fundamental objectives.

But this is a field in which there are always possibilities for further improvement. Communication channels constantly change, and so we must always be creative in seeking new ways of reaching the young; this will make of all our works settings for evangelisation and will enable us to ensure a better follow up of individuals in their process of growth and vocational discernment, with clear reference to salesian youth spirituality.

Social Communication

The Region has 29 houses with **social communication** activity of various kinds, including 17 bookshops and 6 publishing houses.

Each Province has a Delegate for social communication. In Spain there is also a National Delegate who is also the director of the Salesian Bulletin and the ANS correspondent.

At Marseilles there is a multimedia centre for reflection and production.

The Salesian Bulletin is published in three languages: in Portuguese bimonthly with 10,000 copies printed, in French bimonthly with 36.000 copies for France and Belgium, and in Spanish each month with 75,000 copies.

Outstanding is the interesting work of the publishing houses: "Editions Don Bosco" at Paris, which specialises in history, pedagogy and salesian spirituality; "Edições Salesianas" at Porto, with specialisation in salesianity, youth ministry and cate-

chetics; the “Central Catequística Salesiana” in Madrid (CCS), founded by Don Ricaldone and specialising in salesianity, catechetics, education and the formation of workers for the educational and pastoral sectors; and the EDEBE of the Barcelona Province which publishes scholastic texts in the different languages spoken in Spain, and has business agreements with our publishing houses in Argentina, Chile and Mexico.

The missionary dimension

All the Provinces of the Region have been animated by a **strong missionary spirit**. In 1959 the first African Province was erected with works that previously belonged to Belgium. In the same year Salesians from France began working in the Congo. To highlight the apostolic zeal of Portugal one need mention only Macau, Timor, Mozambique and Cape Verde. And Spanish missionaries are scattered the whole world over, being second only to the Italians. At the time the two new African Vice-provinces AFO and ATE were set up, 101 confreres who had formerly belonged to the Region stayed behind in the new circumscriptions, while at present more than six hundred missionaries in different parts of the world remain members of the Region.

Worthy of mention is also the **Missions Office of Madrid**, which has a function much wider than that of just collecting money for the Missions. It is organised in four sections, according to the services it offers: missionary animation in Spain by means of missionary exhibitions and the Magazine “Juventud Misionera”; accommodation and practical support for missionaries passing through Madrid; the collection of funds that every six months are placed at the disposal of the Rector Major; and the NGO “Young people for the Third World”, which has the double dimension of presenting and supporting projects and following them up, and that of promoting and fostering the formation of volunteers and providing them with experience.

I take this opportunity of expressing my personal gratitude and that of all the Congregation for the valuable service given by this Missions Office together with the generosity of so many benefactors.

The Salesian Family

The Salesian Family is one of the Region's consoling features. The *Cooperators* have carried out a notable work of updating and made a great effort to rediscover their true identity. The number of Cooperators in the Region who have made the Promise has reached about 1,940 with a further 600 aspirants. There are 140 centres of *Past-pupils*, organised in provincial federations. The vocation to the Salesian Family in the process of the maturing in the faith is included in the programme of youth pastoral work, and there is a praiseworthy involvement in the salesian mission on the part of the Cooperators, Past-pupils and the 'Friends of Don Bosco'. Because of their enthusiasm and the progress they have made the *Associations of Mary Help of Christians*, which in Spain alone have some 100,000 members, should be mentioned. The groups do not limit themselves to devotional practices but become involved in their own formation and also in catechetical work in youth centres, in visiting and caring for the sick, and collaboration with 'Caritas' and the whole Salesian Family in social activities on behalf of the poor and marginalised; but their main efforts are directed to spreading devotion to Mary Help of Christians.

There are also various groups of the *Don Bosco Volunteers*, and four centres of the "*Damas Salesianas*". A movement originating in Spain and linked with the Cooperators is the "*Hogares Don Bosco*", small groups of couples who want to live the preventive system and salesian spirituality within their own families. They are numerous and lively, especially in the southern provinces. Membership has reached 1,150 couples.

It may also be opportune to emphasise the fact that in addition to the *martyrs* of the Spanish civil war already beatified (and we are awaiting the reading of the decree of martyrdom of another 63 of them), the Region's Salesian Family has produced other wonderful *fruits of sanctity*: Sister Eusebia Palomino (FMA), Alexandrina Maria da Costa (Cooperator), Prince Augustus Czartoryski of Western European birth and blood, and others whose cause for beatification is in progress: Doña Dorotea de Chopitea (Spain), Fr Auguste Arribat (France).

At this point the role of the Congregation within the Salesian Family should be recalled. It has the duty of ensuring animation and formation, especially through the various delegates or assistants.

Though not all of them belong to the Salesian Family, the **lay people** who collaborate in our works are very close to us in so far as they share with us the same mission and spirit. In the Region 95% of those engaged in education or pastoral work are laymen and lay women, who in general carry out their roles with skill and responsibility in the various fields of education, pastoral work and administration.

The Provinces have drawn up the "**Lay Project**" which deals with relations with our collaborators, their responsibilities and their formation. For many years teachers, youth leaders and catechists have been engaged in formation activities in their own professional field and in that of Christian and salesian pedagogy, as well as in programmes undertaken either in the various centres or in activities organised by the Provinces or at other levels. Some interesting initiatives are in progress and the consequent formation is being shared to an increasing extent in various ways by Salesians and laity together. Special mention must be made of the "Jean Bosco" Centre in Lyons, inaugurated by Mother Antonia Colombo and myself on 13 February this year as an example of the desire to harness the combined efforts of Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the formation of reli-

gious and lay people in history, pedagogy and salesian spirituality. The same idea is behind the setting up the salesian network "Réseau Don Bosco" in Belgium.

Unfortunately there are still some places where traces remain among the Salesians of an old proprietary mentality which is slow to accept the great options of the GC24 which asked us to move on to a new model of relationships between SDBs and lay people, not only as regards working together but in a true sharing of responsibility in directive roles. Neither is there always ensured the personal salesian guidance of those laity called to a greater identification with Don Bosco and his charism, pedagogy and spirituality, precisely in view of their greater involvement in the mission.

Initial and subsequent formation

Such a considerable and robust salesian presence presupposes pastoral work for vocations and an initial and ongoing formation of high quality. Well remembered are the days when every Province of the Region had its own well filled houses of formation. The names of Lyons, Salamanca, Barcelona, Sanlúcar, to name only the theologates, still live in the hearts and minds of many confreres of the Region and from other parts of the Congregation, who learned there how to model their own lives on that of Don Bosco so as to become like him "priests for the young". Naturally, after all we have been saying, today's situation is very different. The crisis in vocations experienced in the Region is without parallel in any other part of the Congregation. We need only recall that on 16 August this year in the whole of the Region only three novices made their first profession. The reasons are to be found precisely in the factors that together make up today's culture in this part of the world.

Here, more than in any other aspect of the life of the Church and the Congregation, there is need for faith in the Lord of his-

tory who has his own times and rhythms, but this does not mean that we become resigned to it. It is up to us to continue working with a pastoral ministry to youth of a high quality, challenging in its aims and skilled in spiritual guidance, so as to help in the maturing process of life choices. We must also beg the Lord to send workers to this part of his harvest too. I invite you to read again the letter of Fr Vecchi: "*Now is the acceptable time*" (AGC 373). It should make each of us and everyone of our communities become promoters of vocations.

Formation has the wonderful task of transmitting the salesian charismatic identity to new generations, together with a store of knowledge and an intellectual and cultural preparation that enables them to live as consecrated apostles and to develop the mission. It must ensure charismatic identity, but also professional qualification as educators and shepherds of the young. All this requires time, a calm approach, structures, means, and above all competent formation guides, suitable programmes and a sufficient number of candidates to make the application of the means and programmes possible.

In the Region every Province has its own Delegate for Formation, and these are coordinated to form the Delegation for Formation of each Provincial Conference. It is gratifying to note that at every stage of initial formation the Region tries to promote the greatest possible "inter-provincial collaboration".

In the matter of formation we have only one road to follow: avoiding emergency solutions. We must seek **quality**. This implies certain demands imposed on us by our religious state and by the mission which must be implemented in a very concrete historical and cultural context.

- *A team of formation guides* that is sufficient and adequate both in number and in quality: men prepared in doctrine and by study for this task; men who understand modern youth culture and its problems; men who are skilled in spir-

itual direction and guidance, with the ability also to infuse enthusiasm for the religious and salesian life.

- *Adequate programmes*: Four years ago the Congregation published the new edition of the *Ratio*. It now needs to become known by all, especially by Provincials and their councils, by Rectors and formation guides, and to be put into practice. It is a question of programmes, content and processes to guarantee quality and identity in the maturing of the salesian vocation. If the mission is not merely generic in character, neither can formation be so.

The Region has always been outstanding for the attention it has given to the houses of formation, sparing neither personnel nor investment in their regard. Heartfelt thanks are due for the determined efforts being made at the present time despite the reduced number of candidates.

The Congregation must invest with generosity and responsibility in the people, time and means necessary to provide for the charismatic identity and the professional competence of every confrere, so as to ensure that the mission flourishes in the future. Time taken from reflection, from study, from prayer during the formation period is time completely lost, to the detriment of the quality of vocation and of the future mission; it will show itself later in superficiality and lack of enthusiasm and pastoral zeal. The educational zeal of *Da mihi animas* is the result of a life totally consecrated to God and given entirely to the young; it needs to be cultivated systematically with dedicated generosity at the school of Don Bosco. This is why it is so important to give due importance to the carrying out, accompaniment and evaluation of the pastoral procedures at every stage of formation.

I would also like to say a word about the vocation and formation of the **Brothers**. In the Region we are faced with widely differing situations, from Provinces with just 4 Brothers to the Province of Madrid which in the whole salesian world is sec-

ond only to the ICP for the number of lay confreres, or that of León which is the Province with the highest percentage of Brothers. The lay salesian has always been given special importance in the salesian life of the Region. We must do justice to history and prepare an adequate plan to encourage the vocation of the Brother at the present day, making sure at the same time that he receives the proper formation. To this end we shall have to have recourse to interprovincial collaboration, as has been done at other times with satisfactory results. Think for instance of the experience of La Almunia or of Urnieta.

Ongoing formation

In every community ongoing formation is generally structured around a weekly community meeting. The “community day” has its place in most programmes with gratifying results. In these meetings the Rectors make use of material offered them by the Provincial Office, or in the case of Spain by the Iberian Conference (Notebooks for Ongoing Formation – Ventall). I have noticed that the Rector Major’s letters are printed separately and a copy given to every confrere, and also that the Congregation’s documents are duly studied.

The Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians of France and Belgium have coordinated the organisation of various formation activities for their younger members in the course of the year. The Iberian Conference organises meetings of formation guides for different stages through the National Delegation for Formation. Other initiatives in ongoing formation are: an annual course in September, courses in preparation for perpetual profession, courses for recently ordained priests and young Brothers, courses for the elderly, trips to the Holy Land and Turin, courses of ongoing formation at Campello for the 40 to 55 age group, in which confreres from Latin America often participate.

For new Rectors of communities the Iberian Conference organises a week's course, every two years, in which various General Councillors take part.

The Western European Region has well understood that ongoing formation is a priority requirement for our vocation and mission, and has tried to take action accordingly. The cultural context changes very rapidly, especially among young people, and our mission as **educators** and **pastors** obliges us to keep ourselves updated. The great challenges of today's culture and of the consumer society must be faced with courage and competence through the quality of our education and evangelisation of the new generations of young people, and through the animation and formation of the laity, youth leaders, teachers, and those responsible for the communities and groups of the Salesian Family.

The fact remains however that the best contexts for ongoing formation are the community and daily life, for which a rhythm must be found that fosters the quality of prayer, of communal life, of work, study and reflection, of programming and subsequent evaluation. We must consider daily life as the best platform from which our formation takes off. It is a question of "keeping ourselves in form" professionally, pedagogically and spiritually; so it is not enough to know about the latest pedagogical principles or technical advances; it is also necessary to ensure a positive attitude of the heart in the face of today's youth culture and the educative and pastoral challenges it presents to us. It is fine to think of the whole of life as a vocation and mission, but it is equally exciting to be always willing and equipped to cope with it.

The great challenges of the Region

The presentation of the Western European Region brings before our eyes an area well identified and organised from a sale-

sian point of view with sound works and activities: highly esteemed academic centres under professional management; a strong social organisation and outreach; a growing attention to the world of marginalisation with a generous and creative approach; a strong and committed salesian youth movement organised (at least in the case of Spain) through a confederation of youth centres; a clear and demanding formation plan ("Processes of education in the faith") for the follow-up of youngsters from first communion until they decide on their vocation; well drawn up and shared programmes for schools, parishes, youth centres, free time and the social sector; animation with a missionary spirit, well expressed, among other ways, in volunteer work; a Salesian Family alive with vitality; professionally competent lay people conscious of their salesian identity and sharing responsibility for the salesian mission; a high level of study, knowledge and assimilation of salesian documents (General Chapters, letters of the Rector Major, Strennas, etc.); a considerable investment in the formation of lay people (teachers, leaders, catechists, Salesian Family); important business enterprises and activities in the field of Social Communication.

It is surprising that after all this the pastoral and vocational results do not correspond to the efforts that have been made. But in an affluent society that is ever more pluralist and secularised may be this is normal. Our task is to sow the seed; it is up to the Lord to make it bear fruit spiritually, pastorally and in vocations. I have already referred to the fact that here the State is able to satisfy the main needs of society. From this point of view the West has no need for the religious life considered as an economic factor in the fields of education, health and social development, and not even for caring for those most in need and the marginalised, like immigrants. What then is our mission in such a context? What place is there in it for the religious life? As Salesians what can we offer to young people? Or again, is the salesian charism of any use; is it needed and has it any future in this western society?

I reply at once that it most certainly has such a future. Indeed Europe is the place where the salesian mission seems to be most urgently needed. From an economic point of view modern European society is self-sufficient, but a huge mass of young people are lost and dissatisfied. Despite all the material resources at their disposal they find no meaning in their life and their horizons become oppressive and asphyxiating. These European youngsters are a direct challenge to the salesian charism; they put us to the test and question the truth, the practical relevance of the mission, pedagogy and spirituality of Don Bosco. For us the awesome challenge is to know whether or not we are able to accompany these youngsters who are searching for meaning in their lives, whether we can succeed in becoming signs and bearers of the love of God for young people marked by the new forms of poverty, whether we can bring them to the person of Christ as the only one who can satisfy the deepest yearning of their hearts and ensure for them the fullness of life.

European youngsters oblige us to deepen the heart of our charismatic identity: we need to convince them that God loves them, that God has filled them with a positive energy that must be set free, and with a power that must be developed; that God believes in them as leaders and agents of change for the building of a more human world. We cannot fail them! To do any less would be to deceive them and become useless in God's sight. The salesian mission is perfectly described in the Constitutions: "to be signs and bearers of the love of God" (C 2), which means being a visible, intelligible and effective presence of the love of God for them. Without this sign of grace the salesian presence among young people loses its missionary character and becomes nothing more than a job, mere philanthropic activity.

I wonder could there ever be any task more thrilling than this. Europe can render a great service to the Congregation: it can set us thinking and lead us to discover new ways of evangelising the young people of a post-modern and post-Christian

world. Bold and courageous initiatives have been started up, but we have to recognise that traditional formulas have little effect on the young from these new and different cultures. We must reinvent nearly everything: religious life as prophecy and a parable that speaks of God; and the salesian mission as the gateway to the meaning and fullness of life.

And this is something quite compatible with aging confreres or those who are sick, because it depends not so much on numbers and activities undertaken as on the fire carried by each one in his heart to be spread abroad and to become light.

Courses of action

Here then are the **courses of action** I propose to respond to the great challenges of the youth situation of today. We know that without Salesians Don Bosco's charism will not survive. The great problem in Europe is precisely the lack of vocations. Therefore the fundamental challenges will be to cultivate vocations, to ensure the organisation of the life of the Provinces and to restructure the Region so as to concentrate on communities that are more charismatically significant and so, from a pastoral and vocational point of view, more fruitful and productive.

1. - To develop a specific kind of work for vocations that bears witness to community life and the fruitfulness of the mission.

The way things are going with regard to vocations in the Region is disturbing, and all the indications are that the situation will remain the same in the absence of vigorous counter-measures. So decisive action must be taken. But we know that vocations are not so much the result of purely human techniques and strategies as the gift of God, who asks for our collaboration in tireless prayer to the Lord of the harvest, in the acceptance of

our own life as a vocation, and in fidelity to the charism and generous dedication to the mission among those to whom by preference we are sent.

For this reason pastoral work for vocations implies:

1.1. - *Ensuring the conditions for each community to live a true spiritual experience and be a witness to the faith that is visible and intelligible to the young.*

The current climate of secularisation and religious syncretism prompts religious communities to emphasise their character of sign and prophecy by ordering their daily life so as to express the primacy of the spiritual. A religious life that offers the world its holiness, one, that is, that aims at “the seeking and contemplation of God”, the reading, deciphering, recounting and interpreting of the constant interventions of God in history; this is the best service religious life can offer for the benefit of contemporary man. Therefore a religious family which is not a school and proposer of spirituality has little to say to this society. But spiritual depth is not given to us automatically. It is the fruit of grace and personal effort. There is a need for loving fidelity in observing the simple daily practices: meditation, spiritual reading, days of recollection, use of the sacrament of Reconciliation. The first element in the mission is allowing the young to observe our life: how we live our alliance with God, how we love each other, how the radical living of obedience, poverty and chastity makes us more free and available for generous dedication to our mission among them. This means in turn ensuring in practical terms that each community has within it the numbers and sufficient variety to enable it to bear witness to our life and animate the educative community. We must invest in the community to provide good **communication** and **interpersonal relationships**, so as to create an intense family experience; in this way the community will be both a witness and a prophecy of communion to those among whom it is work-

ing. The functioning of all the structures of the community (councils, assemblies) and the recovery of the charismatic role of the Rector will enable us to go beyond the managerial roles and enjoy the riches of salesian, religious and community life.

If we want to ensure that we are successful in our good resolutions and the objectives we set ourselves, it will be well to establish a time scale and criteria to be observed by the community to assess the witness value of their lives and apostolic zeal among the young.

1.2. - Creating a new kind of salesian presence that is truly meaningful, attractive and inviting for young people and with evangelisation as its first objective.

In the first place this implies “being present in a salesian manner” among the young, and making it clear in a practical way that the lowliest and most needy will always be given preference in salesian works and activities. We must reclaim evangelisation of the young as the primary objective of the Salesians: we are missionaries of the young. We are aware of the growing religious ignorance among the new generations; we know that the natural and traditional settings (family, school, youth centre, parish) are finding it more and more difficult to transmit the faith. The new evangelisation is the challenge for the Church and for the Salesians in Europe. Neither academic success nor social advancement is sufficient in itself to justify a salesian presence in Europe if there is not at the same time the practical possibility and a real determination to present the faith to the young.

The drawing up and putting into practice of a structured, systematic, unified pastoral plan with a concrete itinerary, as was asked for by the GC23, ranging from the first approach to personal and vocational guidance for those better disposed, will help to make of every sector (school, parish, free time) a seedbed for evangelisation.

Dear confreres, I encourage you to offer young people, with all freedom and respect and in a pedagogical manner, genuine faith experiences: schools of prayer, personalised educational approaches to sacramental life; experiences of free self-giving. the promotion of various kinds of voluntary work. At a time when the channels for communicating the faith seem disrupted we must encourage groups and associations, and the SYM as the means for the transmission of salesian spirituality and as opportunities for proposing Don Bosco's charism as it is lived in consecrated life. I emphasise the importance of ensuring for the young a sound Christian formation by means of systematic courses of religion and through catechesis. Careful attention must be given to the content, because the faith cannot be built on religious ignorance.

By the grace of God the Region can count on extraordinary material and structural resources, and especially on a number of outstanding lay people at every level, even in the field of salesianity. We must show our confidence in them by involving them in pastoral work and ensuring their proper formation. Together with them we must use creativity and imagination to find responses to the questions and challenges raised by the culture and by evangelisation of the young at the present day.

It is true that the average age begins to be much higher than it was, but young people want from us both personal and vocational guidance. It is a matter therefore of rekindling in our hearts the flame of the *Da mihi animas* of our beloved Don Bosco, which is nothing else but the passion for God and the passion for the young.

2. - To implement the necessary changes in the life and organisation of the Provinces and of the Region.

It is not difficult to identify some of the dangers that threaten us at the present time: imbalance between the number of

Salesians and the vast and complex nature of the works, which means that we have to invest our best personnel resources in the organisation, management and maintenance of structures, and so at times weaken our presence among people (youngsters, leaders, teachers and parents) and the educative and pastoral guidance of individuals; the heavy burden of work undertaken which can cause the community and the individual Salesian, the serious reasons behind the work and the community's role as animator of the EPC to be lost sight of; activism, which on the one hand deprives the salesian mission of its real meaning, and the confreres of the freshness and satisfaction of the vocation they are living, and on the other impedes reflection and becomes an obstacle to any change as it prevents us from listening to reflections within the Congregation, to the signs of the times, to the action of the Spirit, and even to youth culture itself.

The number of Salesians, the ageing phenomenon (which is going to become worse in the years immediately ahead), the fall in the number of vocations and the need to make our communities and mission more meaningful are demanding urgently a new kind of organisation within each community and Province, but also a restructuring of the Region itself, because we cannot allow routine or the weight of organisation to hold back the vitality of the charism or impoverish the service we give to the young.

The Region understands the urgency of this matter and has already taken the first steps to meet it. France has already seen the unification of its former two Provinces, and Belgium, Spain and Portugal have launched studies in view of a new restructuring.

When we speak of restructuring, we do so only in view of a better and more agile service to the mission and a more significant formulation of the charism. Within each Province and at the level of the Region itself we must make use of the dynamics of synergy and gather our forces together so that they can be applied in a more significant and successful manner, pastorally and vocationally, remembering that at the present moment the

primary objective of the Region is that of developing a specific kind of work for vocations that may be expressive of the fruitfulness of community life and of the mission.

Risks are not lacking: one of them is not being able to overcome the inertia imposed by the management of huge structures and not having the courage to make bold choices clearly consonant with our charismatic identity. If spiritual superficiality is the great danger that can destroy the meaning of religious life in the West, "genericism" is the first enemy of the mission.

It seems to me that the most important words of the Congregation on behalf of European youth have not yet been spoken. The salesian mission in this secularised world of ours is so great and important that perhaps even from a pedagogical point of view a crisis is needed to prepare ourselves adequately for a task so extraordinary and worthwhile.

New wineskins for new wine. This is the image I used in my closing address to the GC25. We cannot remain bogged down in the past. To a new culture with new kinds of poverty and new needs, we must offer new responses as Don Bosco did, inventing them to meet the needs of the young. In fact, it is not structures that make up a salesian work, but the educators defined by a charism, those to whom the work is addressed, and the programmes of education and evangelisation offered them. And there is no doubt that the first thing we must offer the young is our heart, totally focused by pastoral charity and the educative zeal of Don Bosco.

* * *

Dear confreres, the Region is living at an exciting and challenging time: a crossroads, a profound cultural turning point, a "*kairós*". And there are no special strategies for achieving the desired results. The only things that are relevant here are coherence in personal life, communal witness and boldness in the mission of evangelisation.

After this presentation of the Western European Region, during which I have had in mind grateful and happy memories of each and everyone of the confreres who have written and continue to write golden pages in the story of these countries of Europe, I conclude by thanking God who makes use of us to further his wonderful saving design for the young.

May Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco's Madonna, devotion to whom has been so wide-spread and so well received in this Region, and particularly in Spain as perhaps in no other part of the Congregation, continue to bless our communities and be with us in our apostolic work. To her I entrust each and everyone of you.

Pascual Chávez V.

Fr Pascual Chávez V.
Rector Major

2.1 GUIDELINES FOR CORRECT ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT IN THE PROVINCES

Fr Giovanni MAZZALI
Economer General

Introduction

The second area indicated in the Project of the Rector Major and his Council for the six year period 2002-2008 in the sector of the Economer's Department specifically regards administration. For this area the following two objectives are indicated:

- 1. Promoting in the Congregation the culture and practice of an uptodate and efficient accounting system.*
- 2. Attending to the development of a management mentality and practice based on criteria of budgeting and final accounting.*

I intend to consider these two important aspects of planning, providing the Provincials and Provincial Councils with some procedures that can lead to a better organisation of administration at Provincial level and therefore also at the level of the individual works and communities.

Before going further into this issue, I think a premiss is necessary. Provinces around the world undoubtedly possess characteristics that are very diversified also from the economic, administrative and management points of view. Some new circumstances, in setting up their organisation, need to face in the first place the problem of finding financial resources and then subsequently that of organising accounting and management procedures. In other Provinces, which already have a well established structure, following some negative economic and

financial experiences, they are working to overcome the situation and to exercise greater control and assessment. A good number of Provinces, thanks to wise and well thoughtout procedures are enjoying economic stability and can carry out their mission while facing today's challenges. The guidelines provided should be considered in the light of the real situation of the Province, and the Provincial with his Council should decide on those to concentrate on each successive year in harmony with the project of the Congregation.

I would like to add another general point. It is obvious that within our institutes the economic area has a functional role directed towards our mission to youth. But it is a question of an important instrument at the practical worldly level. Poor economic management damages communities and then creates problems for the communities, the works and therefore the mission. Without inverting their priorities, the Provincial and the Provincial Council need to directly assume economic and financial responsibility avoiding the temptation to delegate this aspect almost exclusively to the Provincial Economist. This means spending time and effort in drawing up the annual economic programme, in exercising control over the communities and works and in the evaluation at the end of each operation.

1. Towards a culture and practice of an uptodate and efficient accounting system

For greater clarity and understanding I shall outline the basics in schematic form, indicating the essential elements of an efficient accounting system.

α. There are certainly many ways of keeping accounts. I spare you a detailed description which in some cases would only make you smile. The most widely used method would seem to be that of “**double entry**” that is to consider the single

transactions from two points of view, both from the assets and liabilities point of view and from the profit and loss account. I won't dwell on this. The course for Provincial Economers that is offered each year aims to provide the basic elements of this way of accounting. I limit myself to making the point that without a reliable and uptodate accounting system it is impossible to manage the available resources properly. Without an accounting system, abuses, waste and undesirable expenditure of resources arise. This is something on which the Provincial Economist and his team have to work very hard, creating a mentality and providing concrete solutions.

b. Also in the area of accounts **a plan approved by the Provincial** and his Council is necessary with regard to the religious communities and to the works undertaken by the communities. The Provincial Economist should make himself responsible for overseeing the implementation of this plan.

c. To maintain an effective hold on the accounts it is very useful nowadays to make use of a **“professional accounting system”** that is uptodate and proportionate to the needs of the communities and works. In the main it is a matter of various kinds of “software” that are available in all countries of the world which provide the necessary legal guarantees.

d. A single accounting system used by **all the works in the Province** allows for greater efficiency and speed, also as regards contacts between the centre and the periphery.

e. In the particular case of religious communities in which one often notes the lack of a professional approach to accounting, it should be sufficient to adopt **methods of book-keeping** which are **compatible with the Provincial system**. Along these lines the Economist General's Office has already established a simple and easy-to-use method (RECOM) that can be downloaded from the reserved area of the *sdb.org* site and put into use in the individual communities.

f. I re-emphasise the principle, by now almost everywhere being followed, of the need **to distinguish between the different accounts** within the same salesian work: a different one for the community, another for the school, for the parish, for the oratory/youth centre, for the hostel, for the boarding school, for the holiday house, for the family home etc.

g. It is essential that the Provincial Economist has the help of a **professional consultant** or of an **accredited firm of accountants in the area of book-keeping, control and auditing** as well as a correct and updated structure. In some Provinces the "Provincial Economist's Office" means almost exclusively the "Provincial Economist". It is necessary to overcome an approach that is too "home-made", choosing some advisory groups compatible with the size of the circumscription and the finances available.

h. In conjunction with his team, the Provincial Economist should organise **every year** an **updating course** on particular topics of accounting for the Salesian and lay economists of the communities and works.

i. The Provincial Economist should regularly provide the Provincial and his Council with the documentation necessary for the control and the auditing of the accounts of each work, making use of the work previously carried out by professional advisers.

I have indicated, in schematic form, the basic elements for an efficient system. I could provide an endless list of all the difficulties that are put to me in various contexts. The aim is clear. It is important to begin or continue the process, gradually certainly, but also with the determination that will overcome approaches that are purely personal or selfish.

2. Towards a management mentality and practice based on criteria of budgeting and final accounting

Talking about the budget, the aim is obviously to indicate both the mentality and the practice that follows from it. The need for both a budget and a final accounting process is understood, accepted and therefore asked for only when the individual confreres and the community as a whole have fully appreciated the reasons behind an economic and financial management that is based on criteria of budgeting and auditing. I am heartened by the fact that in some countries these practices are well established. I am rather surprised when it is objected that these demands are those made of a business or a firm, rather than of a “family concern”. I have already had occasion to write in a similar context about the misuse of the term “family” to back up an incorrect management style, without any rules and one which often leads to discontent and discrimination.

a. For communities and salesian works that are operating in affluent circumstances and also for those living in straightened circumstances, **budgeting is the community procedure by which the witness of our evangelical poverty is given practical expression.** Thanks to this community exercise the criteria regarding expenses are related to the financial means of the community, directly in view of the mission. This means that expenditure is agreed by common consent according to what can be sustained and therefore to the living standard of the community. Criteria regarding extraordinary expenses will also be determined.

b. **Without good book-keeping it is impossible to draw up credible budgets and final accounts** that are useful for management control. In particular, drawing up a budget is based on comparisons, and it cannot work without being able to refer to the final accounts of previous years.

c. On the basis of the expectations which are related to the accounts of previous years, the Economist produces the proposed

budget, **involving the members of the religious community or those responsible for the various sectors of the work.** On the basis of the work done, the Rector and his Council and the other competent bodies make the official decisions in the matter.

d. The Provincial and his Council clearly indicate (also on the basis of what is laid down in the Provincial Directory) the **annual deadlines** for the drawing up of the budgets and the final accounts of the individual communities.

e. To develop further the mentality and practice of budgeting, the Provincial Economist will also help the communities and works of the Province providing **professional advice.**

f. The Provincial Economist should organise every year a **special meeting** for the economists and accountants of the communities and the works to re-affirm, renew and update the criteria for the drawing up of the budgets and final accounts.

g. On the basis of the final accounts of the individual communities and works, the Provincial Economist draws up the **rendiconto of the assets and liabilities and profit and loss to be sent each year to the Economist General**, for the necessary checks and assessments by the Rector Major and his Council. May I be allowed to repeat once again the need for this rendiconto to be drawn up with scrupulous care and transparency, so as to reflect the real situation of the Provincial Office and of the individual works.

I entrust to the attentive reading and assimilation by Provincials and Provincial Councils, and naturally to the particular responsibility of Provincial Economers, these guidelines which elaborate the planning project of the present six year period in the administrative area which is precisely aimed at the implementation of the salesian mission in all its aspects.

4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

– June 2004

The Rector Major dedicated the whole month of June beginning on the 1st, and most of July until the 23rd, to the work of the General Council gathered in *plenary session*, which on this occasion often involved the Councillors in two meetings each day in order to study and approve the Provincial Chapter documents.

As usual during the plenary sessions, Fr Chávez held talks with the Councillors, welcomed Provincials, Bishops, confreres and members of the Salesian Family, who had come to the Generalate for various reasons.

On the afternoon of Monday 7 he saw the newly appointed Provincial of the Czech Province (CEP) who had not yet taken up office, and the following day the Provincial of Japan (GIA).

In the evening of the 11th, the Rector Major left for **Bulgaria** on the occasion of the celebrations to mark the 10th anniversary of our salesian presence in that country. Having arrived in Sofia, he was welcomed by the Provincial, an-

other salesian confrere and the Bishop Mgr. Christo Proykov, who invited them to supper and to stay the night in his residence, since the plane had been late in arriving. The following day they continued their journey by car to Kazanlak, where the confreres, guests, religious, parishioners and young people were waiting for them. During the Holy Mass in the byzantine rite, concelebrated by the Nuncio and a number of priests, at which the Bishop Mgr Proykov presided, Fr Chávez gave the homily. At the end of the celebration the Bishop presented the Rector Major with an icon of the Madonna, thanking him for the presence of the Salesians in Bulgaria. The celebration which was a truly ecclesial event, lasted the whole day with a concert before lunch and an academy in the afternoon, in which the history of the presence of the Salesians in Bulgaria was recalled. The day ended with an address by the Rector Major. In the evening after the recitation of Vespers, Fr Chávez gave a Good Night to the community, pointing out the significance

of the day they had experienced, thanking the confreres for 10 historic years and offering some suggestions for the future.

Early in the morning on Sunday 13 June, he was taken to Jambol. When meeting the confreres before Mass he asked for their assessment of the work so far accomplished saying that as he saw it, it was important to consider their presence as a mission, with all that this implies, and at the same time to continue to implant Don Bosco's charism faithfully, which means being present among the young through education, also in schools as soon as this becomes possible. He then celebrated Mass in the Latin rite and after meeting a number of people, dined with the Salesians and with others who were present, and then left for Sofia. At the airport Mgr. Proykov was again waiting for him and they were able to have a private talk. Having returned home he took up his office work again and at supper he joined in welcoming *the new Provincials who had gathered for their course.*

This took place following the usual programme, between 13 and 23 June, while the activities of the General Council continued. In the afternoon of Monday 14 the Rector Major had his first meeting

with the Provincials in which he gave them an overall view of their mission. In the evening he gave the Good Night to a group of confreres from the Liguria-Tuscany Province.

In the afternoon of Wednesday 16, he received Mgr. Gaston Ruvezi, recently appointed Bishop of the diocese of Sakania-Kipushi, and Fr José Pastor Ramírez, Provincial of the Antilles. During the following days he met some personnel from the UPS and the Principal of the Auxilium, as well as spending a short time with the Delegate from Malta. On Saturday 19 June the Rector Major received the Irish Provincial. On Sunday he worked in his office and saw several confreres.

Throughout the morning of Monday 21, Fr Chávez took part in a day of recollection for the Provincials and two days later had his final meeting with them. Then during the evening of Wednesday 23 and on Thursday 24, the Birthday of St John the Baptist, following the tradition begun at Valdocco with Don Bosco, at the Generalate there was the celebration of the *feast of the Rector Major.*

In the evening of the following day Fr Chávez went to visit Mother Antonia Colombo, who was in hospital for an operation, and on

Saturday he went to the Polyclinic to visit the Regional for Italy and the Middle East who was also receiving treatment.

On 27 and 28 June the Rector Major presided at a meeting of the Spanish Provincial Conference being held in the Generalate to share with them the reflections of the Council following the examination of the Region carried out during the intermediate meeting.

On Monday 29 Fr Chávez received two Provincials, the Bishop of Dibrugarh and Fr Lanfranco Fedrigotti, a missionary in China.

– *July 2004*

A special feature of the month of July was the week of *Retreat* for the Rector Major and the Council held together with the General Council of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, between 4 and 10 July, at Santa Fosca di Cadore. On the way there they stopped off at Monteortone, where the Rector Major and the Council were welcomed by the community and had lunch together.

Having returned home, the Rector Major and the Council took up their work again with two sessions a day three times a week so as to continue the examination and approval of the Provincial Chapter documents that had arrived.

On Sunday 11 the Rector Major received some Rectors from the Middle East who had come for their Provincial Chapter. In the evening he went to the UPS to offer his condolences on the death of Fr Pietro Bastianini, a generous collaborator in the Vice Province and University.

The following day he met with some General Councillors, some confreres and the FMA Provincial of Korea with a group of Sisters. In the evening he held a meeting with the Vicar and the three Regionals of Europe to prepare for a meeting which will take place in the Generalate between 1 and 5 December 2004.

On Tuesday at lunchtime he had a visit from His Excellency Mgr. Angelo Mottola, Nuncio Apostolic in Iran.

On Wednesday 14 he had a visit from a confrere from Uruguay, accompanied by two Salesian Cooperators from Salto.

In the morning of Thursday 15, he met some Councillors in his office and then the new Rector of the Valdocco community (ICP). At lunchtime he received Mgr. Joseph Zen, Salesian Bishop of Hong Kong.

The following day at the end of the Council meeting he received two Italian Provincials.

On Monday 19, with the Vicar, he went to the Congregation for Consecrated Life, where he was welcomed by the Prefect, Mgr. Franc Rodé, and by the Under Secretary, Sr Enrica Rosanna FMA. In the afternoon he received the new Dean of the Faculty of Social Communication and the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the UPS, and held another meeting with the Vicar and the three Regionals of Europe.

The following day he received Mgr. Precioso Cantillas, Salesian Bishop of Maasin (Philippines).

On Wednesday 21 at lunchtime the Rector Major and the Council welcomed as their guests the Superior of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, Fr. Hugh Cleary, and his Vicar, who were concluding their General Chapter which was being held in the Salesianum. In the evening Fr Chávez gave the Good Night to a group of FMA, who were on Retreat in the Salesianum.

On Thursday 22, as is his custom before the conclusion of the plenary session, the Rector Major gave a Good Night to the community of the Generalate, indicating in broad outline the work carried out during this session.

On Friday 23 the summer plenary session of the General Coun-

cil came to an end and in the evening at Castelgandolfo in the FMA house there was a meeting with the General Council and the new FMA Provincials.

In the morning of the following day Fr Chávez said Mass at the Catacombs of St Callistus, then received some confreres in his office, and in the afternoon, accompanied by Fr Valentín de Pablo, left for **Kenya** where he was to preach a Retreat to the Provincials and Rectors of the English and Portuguese speaking areas of Africa.

Having arrived in Nairobi on Sunday 25, the Rector Major presided at Mass in the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians, where the 10th anniversary of its consecration was being celebrated, and with the Regional in the afternoon went to the salesian house at Utume where he gave the introduction to the Retreat.

During the Retreat, in addition to preaching and presiding at Mass, Fr Chávez received the Provincials of Central Africa and of East Africa, the Superiors of the Vice Provinces of Southern Africa, West Africa, Angola, Ethiopia - Eritrea, Zambia, the Delegates of Mozambique and of Rwanda - Burundi, the Bishop of the diocese of Rumbek, in Southern Sudan, Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari, and other confreres.

On Tuesday 27 the Rector Major visited the community of the novitiate of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, where he was welcomed by the Provincial and a number of Sisters representing the different communities. On Wednesday 28 he visited the community and the work of "Don Bosco Boys Town", where he spoke to all the members of the EPC. On Thursday 29, after lunch, he went to "Tangaza College", a theological centre attended also by our students. On Friday 30 he had lunch with the confreres of "Don Bosco YES".

On Saturday 31, in the morning, Fr Chávez closed the Retreat and a little later presided at the perpetual profession of 15 confreres from the Provinces or Vice Provinces of West Africa, Ethiopia - Eritrea, Zambia, Central Africa and East Africa. In the afternoon he went to "Bosco Boys Centre", where there is a pre-novitiate house and a centre for street boys. He was welcomed by the Salesians and all the educative-pastoral community, who greeted him and then he blessed the prenovitiate house. Having returned to Utume, he had a meeting with the confreres from the East Africa Province which ended with supper.

- August 2004

On Sunday 1 August the Rector Major began the day with a hour of "Taizé-style" prayer with the members of the SYM from the East Africa Provinces of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians in Nairobi, followed by an outdoor Mass with more than 2000 people present. Then there was a cultural and religious academy, a meeting with the Salesian Family, a Good Night and supper with the Salesians and FMA. The day ended with the journey to the airport for the return flight to Rome.

On Monday 2 having returned home, Fr Chávez spent the whole day working in his office.

On Thursday 5, in the late morning, the Rector Major left for Turin and, in the evening, had a meeting with those who had come from Spain to attend *Campobosco*, concluding with Mass at which some SDB and FMA renewed their religious profession.

Between 6 and 13 Fr Chávez took a few days' rest at Les Combes, broken only by a visit to the community at Châtillon and an evening at Cogne, on the 11, to attend a conference to mark the

50th anniversary of the presence of the Salesians there.

In the morning of 14 the Rector Major transferred to Colle Don Bosco where in the company of Mother Antonia Colombo he met the young people of the *Confronto Europeo* for an open discussion. They both stayed for lunch with the young people and in the afternoon Fr Chávez visited the confreres in the "Andrea Beltrami" community. The following day, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he went to Pinerolo - Monteoliveto, for a meeting with the novices, followed by Mass and lunch. In the afternoon he visited the St John the Evangelist community in Turin.

On 16 August, "Don Bosco's birthday", once again at Colle, the Rector Major met a group of young confreres from the Southern Province before Mass. He then celebrated the Mass that concluded the *Confronto*. In the afternoon he returned to Rome.

The following day he went to Spain for a meeting and celebration with Salesians from the Salamanca region gathered at Valsalabroso. Having returned home he stayed working in his office between 19 and 27 preparing for his future talks and travels and receiving confreres.

The month came to an end with his journey to **Brazil** to visit four Provinces, beginning with that of São Paulo, where he had a very full programme of visits, celebrations, meetings with Salesians, formation communities, youngsters, teachers and the Salesian Family.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Council

The **summer plenary session** of the General Council began on 1st June 2004 and kept the Councillors busy until 23 July 2004. In addition to the plenary meetings - 39 in all, there were meetings of groups and commissions to examine various topics. Between 13 and 23 June during the session there was also the *course for new Provincials* who met with the Rector Major and his Council.

The Councillors also made their own contributions to various meetings especially those taking place at the Generalate. In addition each Departmental Councillor gave a brief report of activities in his own sector.

As always, in addition to the more pressing topics or problems for the animation and guidance of the Congregation, sufficient time was given to the ordinary matters of business coming from the Provinces, such as: appointments of Provincial Councillors and the approval of the appointments of Rectors, the opening and canonical erection of houses and/or activities, matters regarding confreres and economic-administrative issues.

The following is a summary of the more important items on the agenda

1. Appointment of Provincials

In this session there were the appointments of new Superiors for seven Provinces or Vice Provinces. In the case of the three new Vice Provinces they were the first Superiors to be appointed. Following a careful process of discernment, and taking special account of the results of the consultation held in the Province or Vice Province the General Council made the necessary provision. This is the list in alphabetical order of the Provincials or Superiors of Vice Provinces appointed in the course of the session: Blaha František, for the

Province of the Czech Republic; Calleja Andrés, for the Vice Province of Indonesia-Timor; Lody Pires, for the Vice Province of Panjim, India; Pinto Humer Anthony, for the Vice Province of Sri Lanka; Roca Alfredo, for the Vice Province of Africa Ethiopia-Eritrea (2nd six year period); Santilli Vicente, for the Province of Perú; Ye Maung Joachim, for the Vice Province of Myanmar.

N. 5.2 in this issue of the AGC provides some biographical details of those appointed.

2. Reports of Extraordinary Visitations

The examination of the reports of the Extraordinary Visitations to the Provinces presented by the respective Visitors is always one of the more important items on the agenda of the General Council for the animation of the Congregation in its various local presences. It provides the opportunity to reflect together on the progress of each Province on the basis of the Visitor's observations and to offer suggestions for action regarding its government. This results in recommendations useful for the Rector Major's concluding letter and in proposals for initiatives and

guidance on the part of the General Council.

During this session reports were considered from the following Provinces or Vice Provinces: the Vice Province of Tropical Equatorial Africa; the Province of Belo Horizonte, Brazil; the Province of Bogotá, Colombia; the Province of Medellín, Colombia; the Circumscription of East Europe; the Province of the Philippines North; the Province of France; the Province of Bombay, India; the Province of New Delhi, India; the Province of Ireland; the Province of the Middle East; the Vice Province of Italy-Sardinia.

3. Topics studied and decisions made

In the course of the session, as well as matters concerning the Provinces and Regions, the Council considered some issues connected more generally with the government and animation of the Congregation, paying particular attention to the Project of animation and government for the six year period and to the life and activity of the Council itself. Some practical decisions were taken regarding matters discussed. The main topics considered were.

- **Updating** on some of the topics dealt with by the *Intermediate Council*: analysis and examination of the Italy-Middle East Region and the West Europe Region; approval of restoration work for the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians and Colle Don Bosco; the Salesian Theological Institute *Salesian Ratisbonne Monastery* in Jerusalem; particular issues in some Provinces.

- **The Strenna of the Rector Major for 2005.** In the Council there was some reflection on the theme presented by the Rector Major for the 2005 Strenna. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican Council II, in the light of *Lumen Gentium* and of *Gaudium et Spes* it could be seen that the Church is the People of God, the Body of Christ, Mother of believers, servant of the world, and aware that «it is the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium» (NMI 16), as the Salesian Family we commit ourselves to **Rejuvenate the face of the Church, the Mother of our faith.**

It is not a matter of a "face-lift" or of cosmetic surgery, but of com-

mitting ourselves to grafting onto her new energies, and making her more beautiful and attractive, to love her and give ourselves for her. The beauty of the face of the Church consists in reflecting the face of her Lord. Our task is that of being in the Church, or rather being Church, working with the Church and for the Church. The challenge is precisely that of making people, especially young people, fall in love with the Church, of seeing that Christ shines through her and she takes on the appearance of the "heavenly Jerusalem" (Ap. 21, 10-23): a community of believers renewed by the breath of the Spirit, which gives life; a community enriched by many vocations, charisms and ministries; a community open and welcoming, especially towards the poor; a community that lives with a passion for life, justice and solidarity; a community that is the leaven of hope for a society worthy of man and for a culture rich in moral and spiritual values; a young church, in which the young feel at home, part of the family.

- **Approval of Provincial Chapters.** A special feature of this particularly busy session was the examination and approval of the documents of many *Provin-*

cial Chapters, a task that often obliged the Council to hold two meetings each day in order to digest the many documents that had been sent in. 63 Provincial Chapters were examined, which means that for the winter session there are a further 30. It should be said that if the Council had to work particularly hard, a far more demanding work had been done by the Provincial Chapters, of whom the following tasks had been requested: an evaluation of the communication, assimilation and implementation of the GC25; the drawing up of the PSP (Provincial Strategic Plan); the updating of the Formation and the Economic Sections of the Provincial Directory; the re-launching of the vocation of the Salesian Brother. Even though not all the Provinces had succeeded in completing everything that had been asked of them, and especially not all Provinces had understood the PSP in the same way, nevertheless, it has been a significant occasion for the Congregation which has undertaken in a responsible manner a process of salesian discernment. For the General Council, this has provided an opportunity for contact with almost the whole of the Congregation, as seen through the Provincial Chapters,

and also for ongoing formation, both with regard to greater precision in what was being sought, and in reference to the Constitutions and Regulations.

- New branch of the Salesian Family. The Council expressed its favourable opinion regarding a new group becoming part of the Salesian Family: the *Hermanas de la Resurrección*, founded by Fr. Jorge Puthenpura, in the missionary area of San Pedro Carchá, in Guatemala. It is a congregation of native women (Kekchies), whose mission is the education and evangelisation of the native people, especially the women. It already has a salesian identity, a good organisation, a formation programme and diocesan approval.

- Moldavia Project. Recognising that Moldavia is one of the poorest countries in Europe, and that the young people are in need of some kind of educational and formative action to give them a happier future based on Christian values, the General Council expressed its favourable opinion regarding the establishing of a salesian presence in Moldavia by December 2005. The new foundation will be entrusted to the North-East Italian Province (INE), with

links to the salesian foundations in Romania. The new community will be composed of confreres from various Provinces, so as to form an international community. Particularly involved in sending personnel will be the Warsaw Province (PLE). It is intended to begin by sending two confreres, one from INE and another from PLE, to study the language and to examine the possibilities for a significant salesian presence. In the meantime two other confreres are being sought to strengthen the community.

- Translation and publication of basic salesian texts.

Another very significant step forward has been made with regard to what was proposed in the Project of animation and government for this six year period, in a return to Don Bosco and a getting to know him better. A decision was reached to indicate certain books which – as a policy of the Congregation – it is considered should be translated into the main languages (Spanish, English, French, Portuguese, Polish, German), so as to encourage the formation of a mentality that is enlightened in a salesian way, well-founded and open to change, in the conviction that someone who does not know

his own cultural and also vocational roots (the Founder and the Congregation in which he lives) will not be in the position to live the charism fully and to inculturate it: Source Books; Lives of Don Bosco; Reference Books; a Collection of sources and documents (which should then be translated into every language).

- Approval of the accounts for 2003. During this session, following its presentation by the Economist General, the General Council examined and approved, according to the norms of the Regulations, the consolidated account of the Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, at 31 December 2003.

- Distribution of "Mission Funds". The General Council considered and approved the proposals, n. 134, June 2004, presented by the commission for the distribution of assistance from the Mission Fund.

- On the way to establishing a Vice Province in the Provincial Delegation of Rwanda and Burundi. The General Council, after carefully considering the proposal to establish a Vice Province in the Provincial Delegation in Rwanda and Burundi

(AFC), expressed its intention to work towards the setting up of this autonomous Vice Province, formed from the communities of Rwanda and Burundi, by 2007. The intervening period of time will enable the results of an extensive study of the whole Africa-Madagascar Region which the General Council will undertake in 2005 to be taken into consideration; it will enable a clear indication of which confreres wish to belong to the new Vice Province; it will allow for the consolidation of the Commissions for the animation of the future Vice Province and their operation.

Among the **moments of significance** during the session, particular note should be made of the **Retreat** (3-10 July, at Santa Fosca di Cadore), preached by Fr Giannantonio Bonato, made with the General Council of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Even though it was the first time in the history of the two Institutes that something like this had happened and this fact was of considerable significance for the Salesian Family, nevertheless, from the very beginning the point was made that it was important to go beyond this and to give much more significance to the

charismatic event, in so far as it was the sharing of a spirit, and even more to put themselves in an atmosphere of spiritual discernment striving to see God's footsteps in the Church and in the World and therefore what kind of salesian consecrated life they were being called to foster. It was

a beautiful and enriching experience, in spectacular surroundings with very pleasant weather, and many themes for reflection (the gospel texts were: *John* 1, 35-51: the call of the first disciples; *John* 20, 11-18: the Risen Lord's appearing to Mary Magdalen in the garden).

5. DOCUMENTS AND NEWS ITEMS

5.1 Message of the Rector Major to the World Advisory Body for Social Communications.

Below is the text of the message the Rector Major sent to the World Advisory Body for Social Communications meeting in Rome between 25 and 28 July. The contents of the message will clearly be of interest to the whole Congregation in view of the role it is called to play through Social Communications.

Prot. 04/0871
Rome, 25 July 2004

My dear friends,

I am happy to be able to pass on my greetings by means of this message to the Salesian World Advisory Body for Social Communications, meeting these days. I cannot take part because at the same time I find myself in Kenya leading a Retreat for Provincials and Rectors from English-speaking Africa. In the decidedly missionary and spiritual climate of these days, then, I find myself near to you in mind, affection and in prayer.

Speaking about Social Communications is so important that my predecessors wrote a Circular Letter to the Congregation on the

theme. It could not be otherwise, knowing how much our beloved Don Bosco was truly in the forefront in this field. Perhaps I will write similarly. In the meantime I will take the opportunity offered me to say something to you.

1. Forty years of “*Inter mirifica*”: together with the Church

The Universal Church has recently recorded the fortieth anniversary of the conciliar decree *Inter mirifica*, published 3rd December 1963. The Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, held in Rome from 8th to 12th March last, has reviewed the forty years and pointed out an outline of the development of the Church’s commitment to this new areopagus. The results of this important meeting of Cardinals, Bishops and others responsible for social communications were given to the Holy Father who, as has been announced, will publish an Apostolic Letter on the theme.

As Salesians, we are on the same wavelength as the Church in the journey it has made over these years, we share the concerns and hopes, and we work with all our

intelligence and commitment together with the Church towards the new frontiers that the Council and the Bishops and Pastors indicate (Cf. *Cristifideles laici*, 44).

Above all we should go back to studying the three documents in which the Church has outlined its *magna carta* for ecclesial communications and for the presence of Catholics in the new areopagus of the Media.

* The decree *Inter mirifica* was the point of departure in 1963. For the first time in two thousand years of history in the Christian community a Council offered a theological reading of the phenomenon of modern communication and wrote the word "communication" into the agenda of the Universal Church and that of particular Churches.

After the publication of that decree, the World Day of Social Communication became an annual appointment with communication professionals and a renewed awareness-raising of problems and challenges that media communications poses for mankind and for ecclesial communities.

The thirty messages of the Supreme Pontiffs for the World Day of Social Communication have accompanied the route taken by particular Churches in new mission territories and have offered a guide for Christian activity in the face of the many problems that Social Communications poses, as well as the resources it offers: development of people, the young, family, evangelisation...¹

As a Congregation we would like to commit ourselves to living, together with the young and our various co-workers, this World Day and to concerning ourselves with the theme that it proposes. They are all of huge interest for our educational and pastoral activity.

* The instruction which followed, *Communio et progressio* in 1971, completed the theological and pastoral picture of the Church's vision concerning the means of Social Communication. It offered an accurate discernment on what has happened and is happening in the human family through the means of Social Communication. Never has mankind been in immediate and universal communication of the kind that

¹ Cf. F. J. EILERS - R. GIANNATELLI, *Chiesa e comunicazione sociale. I documenti fondamentali*, LDC, Torino 1996.

has occurred since the ether has been filled with radio and television communications, and now the Internet. At the origins of this phenomenon the believer is aware of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the ministry of Christ the perfect communicator, the mystery of the Church which is at the same time communion and communication.

On the basis of the teaching of the Universal Magisterium, individual Bishops and particular Churches have given depth to what we can define as the theology and pastoral understanding of communication. The then Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Carlo M. Martini, had a great influence on Catholic thinking through his two pastoral letters, *Effatà* and *Il lembo del mantello* in 1991 and 1992.

It is imperative for us Salesians of the 21st Century to acquire a way of thinking about communication which is in accordance with the theological thinking of the Church. This should be more than just a secondary issue in the formation of young confreres, as well as a topic for ongoing formation.

* The third intervention from the Pontifical Council for Social

Communications was the instruction *Aetatis novae* in 1992. In it we find highlighted the fact that the Church today is not only confronted with new means and technologies, but with the new communications culture. We see its effects on the young; and it is without doubt, in fact, that today's youth are marked by life models, by fashions, behaviours, and information furnished by the media. This occurs at world level: the media are the first to construct globalisation. If the Church is called to «integrate the Gospel and the new culture of media»,² we educators are equally called to “integrate” educational wisdom, received values, models of assimilated behaviour, the preventive system, with the “new world” represented and carried through the mass media. This is an epochal challenge that cannot be resolved in terms of censure and control, but in active terms of education, citizenship, ethical values.

Social Communication is the new areopagus calling today's apostle to a new kind of audacity and adaptiveness.³ And it likewise calls on the educator. We are not talking about being “modern”

² GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Redemptoris missio*, 37.

³ Cf. CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Gaudium et spes*, 44.

such that our house becomes a media centre or we become confident in the use of new technologies; we are talking about how to acquire a deeper understanding of what is happening around us and to the young, by means also of the media, and knowing how to mature the required "policy" choices so as not to be excluded from the development of history.

The Italian Bishops' Assembly in May this year approved the new Directory for Social Communications in Italy, and our confreres from the UPS helped in its drawing up.⁴ As well as a reading of the phenomenon of our times and a deepening of the theological and pastoral motives which urge on the Church in this area of communications, the Directory contains important indications for renewal of catechesis and education. It is necessary that catechesis acquires the new languages of religious communication and that education knows how to involve itself with critical and creative formation of the Social Communications users.

The Italian provinces should be committed to a study and implementation of the Directory's

guidelines. Other provinces should do similarly in connection with their local Churches and respective continental areas. I invite all confreres to be attentive, solicitous, work along with, breathe with the Church and walk beside mankind and believers in our own time.

2. The foundation of ISCOS: a charismatic event for the Congregation

The beginnings of the Institute for Social Communication in our Pontifical Salesian University came about through a decision of the General Council following the 1984 Chapter, as something to be connected with the centenary of Don Bosco's death in 1988 and as a making present today of our dear Father's charism, he who had been such a great communicator and educator.

The Congregation for Catholic Education interpreted it this way when it issued the decree of approval, dated 17th December 1988, making it a gift of the centenary year. Fr. Egidio Viganò on 8th December 1989 underlined

⁴ CEI, *Comunicazione e missione. Direttorio sulle comunicazioni sociali nella missione della Chiesa*, Roma 2004.

this when the new Institute was solemnly inaugurated: «We are convinced that with the creation of ISCOS – which joins other Catholic institutions already in place or about to come into existence – we are playing an important card, even if a humble one, in the evangelisation of young people and ordinary folk: helping to give growth to the ability to communicate with modernity, to dialogue effectively, with humankind today».⁵

From this new foundation the Congregation expects the highest level of formation of educators and communicators in the Salesian Family and courageous research in the field of Social Communications, with attention given to theological and pastoral understanding of Social Communications itself, to the study of social theories of media, to trying out methods of education to media, to the new languages of catechesis and religious communication, to the production of religious and educational programmes.

Today ISCOS is a Faculty; the wise and brave decision to have a

Faculty of Sciences of Social Communication in our University, followed by other faculties in the different university centres belonging to IUS, indicates our commitment to preparing personnel in the Congregation and the Salesian Family who are up to this new task. It is evident that the support form a Faculty as relevant as this one demands collaboration and co-responsibility from the whole Congregation, and I appeal for this here.

3. The Salesians in the new areopagus of Social Communication

Our 25th General Chapter, considering the growing importance of the sector of communication in the context of the Salesian Congregation's activities, in the spirit of art. 6 and 43 of the Constitutions, which calls this «a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the Salesian mission», has decided to have a General Councillor specifically and exclusively dedicated to Social Communication. He «has the task of animating the Congregation in this area.

⁵ Cf. F. LEVER, a cura di, *I programmi religiosi alla radio e televisione*, LDC, Torino 1991, p. 138.

He promotes Salesian activity in the Social Communication sector and in particular coordinates at world level, the structures and centres for which the Congregation has responsibility in this field» (C. 137).

Following the Chapter, furthermore, in the Project of animation and government of the Rector Major and his Council, detailed attention has been given to this sector, indicating objectives, processes and interventions in four areas: overview, animation and formation, information, business-type activities. The Councillor for Communication is carrying out an organic and progressive work in this area with intelligence and determination. Your meeting during these days will contribute undoubtedly to giving a further push to realising the Six Year Plan.

The mass media represent an extraordinary resource in our time. An awareness has grown in the Church of the "gift" that the media are for the human family and for each human being. This is how we can interpret, for example, the title of the Magisterium's contributions: *Miranda prorsus* (Pius XII, 1957), *Inter mirifica* (1963), *Communio et progressio* (1971), *Aetatis novae* (1992).

The media are, however, also a risk and a danger. The Pope emphasised this in his last message for the 38th World Day of Social Communication: *The media in the family: a risk and a richness*.

Control, limitations and prohibitions, however, are not a solution, as the magisterium has emphasised in its last message. To the "power" of the media we are called to add the "other power" of education, citizenship, ethical values, formation of leaders and Catholic professionals in Social Communication.

At this point I consider it important to invite you to go back and read the policy-proclaiming Letters of Fr. Egidio Viganò "*Social Communications challenges us*" and of Fr. Juan E. Vecchi "*Let the deaf hear and the dumb speak*". I draw your attention then to some details.

- *Media education* has repeatedly been recommended by the Church (cf. *Inter mirifica* 15-16, *Communio et progressio* 107, *Aetatis novae*, 18). Our schools, parishes, oratory-youth centres must commit themselves to this new field of the educational mission. It is not a question of buying up technology or playing with the

Internet, but competently taking up the new objectives of literacy and communicative competence, critical autonomy, exercise of citizenship inspired by values of personal dignity and social solidarity, beginning with those most in need. I ask that in the provinces, programmes are put into place for education to media and for formation of media educators.

- The *formation of leaders* is the second strategic point of our activity in the field of Social Communication. Leaders means Salesians in the first place. Little has been done up till now to put into place guidelines on the formation of future priests to [use of] instruments of Social Communication. The instruction from the Congregation for Catholic Education,⁶ published in 1986 in this regard, carried the signature of our own Card. Javierre. Our Faculty of the Sciences of Communication could help the Departments of Formation and Social Communication, together with the provinces, to study how to put into practice what the Ratio says about this essential dimension of the formation of the Salesian and of our co-workers. Provincials should then

evaluate the putting into place of its requirements and form competent personnel.

- Our *Social Communication works* are a resource. It is a Salesian tradition to be committed to Publishing, the theatre, music, graphics, ..., in a word in both old and new communication. Don Bosco gave us the example: "always in the vanguard of progress, and he would talk about publishing and printing" (MB XIX, 81). Our renewed Constitutions have put Social Communication amongst our "apostolic priorities" (C. 43). The panorama of our publishing houses, centres for audiovisual production, printed publications is impressive. We must ask ourselves however about the quality, cultural significance, the teamwork we can achieve; for example, a theological or teaching centre should be offering consultation and collaboration to the Social Communication's works in a Province or Region.

Dear Confreres,

We have to undergo a "pastoral conversion". In these past ten years we have worked a lot, but

⁶ CONGREGAZIONE PER L'EDUCAZIONE CATTOLICA, *Gli strumenti della comunicazione sociale nella formazione dei futuri sacerdoti*, Roma 1985.

now the Church and history are asking us for an even greater impulse in understanding our times and for a wiser and more courageous vision of our apostolate.

May Don Bosco give us light and courage to be able to be competent and credible educators, evangelisers and communicators, as demanded by our mission today.

D. Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA
Rector Major

5.2 New Provincials

We provide (in alphabetical order) some biographical details of the Provincials appointed by the Rector Major with his Council during the plenary session June-July 2004.

1. *BLAHA František, Provincial of the CZECH REPUBLIC.*

Fr František BLAHA is the new Provincial of the “St John Bosco” Province of the Czech Republic (CEP). He succeeds Fr. Jan Komárek.

Born on 12 October 1962 at Svitavy, in the diocese of Brno, in what was Czechoslovakia, he made his first salesian profession on 13 September 1985 (while studying theology in the diocesan

seminary). They were times of limited freedom for the Church and for the Congregation in Czechoslovakia. He was ordained priest on 28 June 1987 and began to exercise his ministry within the restrictions of the time. He made his perpetual profession in 29 June 1991.

After the policial changes František Blaha was in the house of Brno - Žabovřeski, where he worked between 1992 and 1999 (from 1995 as Vice Rector). In 1996 he was appointed to the Provincial Council. In 1999 he was appointed Vice Provincial and transferred to the community of Praha - Kobylišy, where from 2001 he was also Rector. Having completed three years as Vice Provincial in 2002, he continued as Rector of Praha - Kobylišy. Now he has been called to assume the responsibility of Provincial.

2. *CALLEJA Andrés, Superior of the Indonesia - Timor Vice Province.*

Appointed to succeed Fr. Andrew Wong as Superior of the “St. Callistus Caravario” Vice Province of Indonesia - Timor (ITM) is Fr. Andrés CALLEJA.

Born on 30 May 1957 in Madrid (Spain), he became a Salesian on

16 August 1974, when he made his first religious profession at Mohernando, where he had made his novitiate, in the Madrid Province. Having made his perpetual profession on 25 July 1980, he left for East Asia as a missionary assigned to Timor. He completed his theological studies in the studentate at Parañaque, in the Philippines, where he was ordained priest on 8 December 1984.

After ordination, in 1985 he was sent to Fatumaca (East Timor), the Novitiate house, and in 1988 was appointed Director of Novices, a position he held until 1995 (from 1989 he was also Rector of the community). After completing his service as Director of Novices in 1995 he was appointed Rector of Jakarta (Indonesia) and in 1998 Vice Provincial, a position he held until 2002. Since 2001 he has been Rector in Dili - Comoro (East Timor).

3. *PINTO HUMER Anthony, Superior of the SRI LANKA Vice Province.*

Fr Anthony *PINTO HUMER* is the first Superior of the "St Joseph" salesian Vice Province of Sri Lanka (*LKC*), canonically erected on 13 June 2004 (cf. AGC 386, p. 86).

Anthony Pinto Humer was born on 23 December 1957 in Colombo (Sri Lanka) and became a Salesian on 24 May 1977, when he made his first profession in the Novitiate in Yercaud, in the Madras Province (to which at the time Sri Lanka belonged). He was perpetually professed on 24 May 1984, did his theological studies at Parañaque, in the Philippines, and was ordained priest on 31 January 1988.

After completing his studies at Parañaque, in 1991 he was sent to the community in Negombo (Sri Lanka), where he remained until 2000, first as Vice Rector then as Rector (1995-2000). Since 2000 he has been in the community in Nochchiagama (Sri Lanka) as Rector and parish priest. Now he has been called to guide the new Vice Province.

4. *PIRES Loddy, Superior of the Vice Province of PANJIM, India.*

Fr Loddy *PIRES* is the first Superior of the "Bl. José Vaz" Vice Province of Panjim, India (*INP*), canonically erected on 13 June 2004 (cf. AGC 386, p. 88).

Born on 20 December 1947 at Dadar-Bombay, India, he made his first salesian profession at Yercaud on 24 May 1965, as a mem-

ber of the Bombay Province. Perpetually professed on 24 May 1972, he did his theological studies at Bangalore, and was ordained priest on 20 December 1975 at Bombay-Matunga.

After ordination, in 1980 he was sent to Lonavla, as Rector; then between 1982 and 1988, to Bombay, as Vice Provincial and Rector of the Provincial House. In 1988 the Rector Major appointed him Provincial of Bombay (INB). In 1994, at the end of the six year period, for two years he was at the study centre in Berkeley (USA), for further studies, and was then appointed Rector of Pune - Koregaon Park (1996-2002). In 2002 he was transferred to Bombay - Wadala and became a member of the Provincial Council. Since 2003 he had been Rector of Lonavla. Now he has been entrusted with the guidance of the Panjim Vice Province.

5. *ROCA Alfredo, Superior of the Vice Province of ETHIOPIA-ERITREA.*

Fr *Alfredo ROCA* has been confirmed for a *second six year period* as Superior of the "Maria Kidane Meheret" ("Mary Mother of Mercy") Vice Province of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Born on 3 October 1933 at Pallesja, in the diocese of Barcelona, Spain, Alfredo Roca became a Salesian on 16 August 1950, when he made his first profession at Barcelona-Horta, after his novitiate at Sant Vicenç dels Horts.

After philosophy and practical training, he studied theology in England (Sherfield English), and then returning to his Province was ordained priest in Barcelona (29 June 1959). During his studies he obtained a Licence in Philosophy and a diploma in English.

Being involved in educational and pastoral work, in 1965 the Superiors entrusted him with the direction of the formation house (studentate of theology) at Sentmenat, until 1974, when he was transferred – again as Rector – to the formation house at Martí Codolar, Barcelona. Two years later in 1976, the Rector Major with his Council appointed him Provincial of Barcelona.

At the end of his six years, and after three years as Rector of Terrassa (1983-1986), he left for Ethiopia, to make his contribution especially in the field of formation. For ten years from 1987, he was Rector of the formation house in Adigrat; in 1997 he moved – again as Rector – to the house in Addis Abeba - Gotera. In 1996 he was

appointed Delegate of the two Provincials of the Middle East and of Lombardy-Emilia for all the salesian foundations in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In July 1998 he was appointed the first Superior of the Vice Province of Ethiopia-Eritrea.

6. *SANTILLI Vicente, Provincial of the PERÚ Province.*

To lead the "St Rose" Province of Perú (PER) Fr *Vicente SANTILLI* has been appointed. He succeeds Fr. Santo Dal Ben.

Born on 15 December 1937 at Spigno Saturnia (LT), Italy, following a missionary vocation he left for Perú, where he made his Novitiate 1957-1958, and took his first religious vows as a Salesian at Magdalena del Mar on 31 January 1958. After philosophy and practical training he made his perpetual profession on 20 January 1964. For theological studies he returned to Italy, to Rome, where he was ordained priest on 22 December 1967. After ordination he returned to Perú where he was soon entrusted with positions of responsibility, as Rector successively in various houses: Magdalena del Mar - Postnovitiate (between 1971 and 1974 and again between 1989 and 1992), Lima - San José (on three

separate occasions: 1975-1978, 1992-1995, 1997-2003).

Provincial Councillor from 1975, in 1992 he was appointed Vice Provincial a position he held for three years. In 2001 he again became Vice Provincial, and has now been appointed Provincial. Since 2003 he was also for a third time Rector of the Postnovitiate of Magdalena del Mar.

7. *YE MAUNG Joachim, Superior of the Vice Province of MYANMAR.*

Fr *Joachim YE MAUNG* is the first Superior of the "Mary Help of Christians" Vice Province of Myanmar (MYM), canonically erected on 13 June 2004 (cf. AGC 386, p. 85).

Joachim Ye Maung was born on 11 August 1947 at Monhla-Ye, Mandalay (Myanmar) and became a Salesian on 28 April 1966, when he made his first profession at Anisakan (Myanmar), in the Calcutta Province on which the salesian houses in Burma depended. Perpetually professed on 24 May 1972, he was ordained priest at Mandalay on 10 February 1974.

After ordination, in 1975 he was entrusted with the direction of the formation house in Aniskan and in 1980 he was appointed Director

of Novices a position he held until 1990 (from 1983 he was also Rector). He then worked in Lashio (1992-1994) and in Kunlong, as parish priest (1994-1999). In November 1998 he was appointed Delegate for the Provincial Delegation of Myanmar, a position he has held until his appointment as Superior of the Vice Province.

5.3 Decree by which the “San Francesco di Sales” salesian house in the Vatican becomes directly dependent upon the Rector Major.

We publish a new Decree of the Rector Major regarding the “San Francesco di Sales” salesian house situated in the Vatican City State. This new decree replaces that published in AGC n. 386, pag. 89-90. With greater juridical precision, it states that this house, which until now belonged to the Roman Province, becomes “a house directly dependent on the Rector Major”, with its own statute as explained in the Decree. It will have links with the Generalate (which is also “a house directly dependent upon the Rector Major”, with its own statute) on the occasion of the elections of a Delegate for the General Chapter (cf. Decree n. 5).

Prot. n° 276/2004

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 Vatican Press and the Administration of the Osservatore Romano), 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 of his Council;
- having obtained the consent of the General Council in a meeting on 5 December 2003 and subsequently on 21 July 2004, 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, belonging first to the Central Province and

subsequently to the Roman Province (from 01-09-1993), becomes directly dependent on the Rector Major with his Council, with the Statute of "A house directly dependent on the Rector Major", with the specific points indicated in the following numbers.

2. 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 directed 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. In view of 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 to be held 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, 24 July 2004.

Fr. Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA
Rector Major

Fr. Marian STEMPEL
Secretary General

5.4 Our dead confreres (3rd 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
P AGUERO ESPINOLA Eleucadio	Asunción (Paraguay)	27-06-2004	63	PAR
P ARDENGHI Mario	Ferrara	07-08-2004	73	ILE
P BASTIANINI Pietro	Roma	11-07-2004	87	UPS
P BECKERS René	Edegem (Antwerpen, Belgio)	11-08-2004	87	BEN
P CALLEGARI Emilio Bruno	Torino	13-07-2004	92	ICP
P CARLE Michele	Cochabamba (Bolivia)	28-06-2004	80	BOL
L CASTRO PUENTE José M.	Barcelona (Spagna)	23-06-2004	82	SBA
P CEREZO CABAÑES Marcelino	Burgos (Spagna)	03-09-2004	83	SBI
P CESTI Giovanni	Roma	29-08-2004	76	IRO
L COGO Giuseppe	Civitanova Marche (MC)	09-08-2004	67	ILE
L DE MUNARI Antonio	Castello di Godego (TV)	21-06-2004	75	INE
L DE SOMER Hugo	Halle (Belgio)	20-07-2004	74	BEN
L DEPLANO Stefano	Cremisan (Israele)	21-06-2004	96	MOR
P DINH XUAN HIEN Giuseppe	Dong Nai (Vietnam)	22-08-2004	69	VIE
L FASANI Pierre Octave	Châtillon (Aosta)	06-08-2004	79	ICP
L FERNANDEZ PONCE Modesto L.	Cochabamba (Bolivia)	08-09-2004	83	BOL
P GALLO Giacomo	Recife (Pernambuco, Brasile)	07-09-2004	83	BRE
P GARCIA MONTEIL Felipe	Foz (Spagna)	19-08-2004	75	SLE
P GIJSBRECHTS Damien	Port-au-Prince (Haïti)	23-06-2004	57	HAI
P GOLDING Paul	Hammersmith, London (GBR)	05-09-2004	84	GBR
P HONKA Josef	Uherské Hradiště (Rep. Ceca)	23-06-2004	75	CEP
P HUERTAS UMAÑA Manuel	Guatemala (Guatemala)	21-07-2004	75	CAM
P ILENCIK Ludwig	Amstetten (Austria)	21-08-2004	93	AUS
L KOGOVŠEK Janez	Ljubljana (Slovenia)	16-06-2004	79	SLO
P KOŠTRIC Ciril	Murska Sobota (Slovenia)	21-07-2004	56	SLO
P LAVAGNA Horacio	Corrientes (Argentina)	15-06-2004	88	ARO
P LEONHARD Walter	Haßfurt (Baviera, Germania)	05-08-2004	67	GEM
P LEQUIS Albert	Esneux (Liège, Belgio)	30-07-2004	88	BES
P MALLON John Patrick	Edendork (Irlanda)	16-06-2004	89	IRL
L MANNO Paolo	Castellammare di Stabia (NA)	22-06-2004	72	IME
P MANO Giovanni Battista	Torino	27-08-2004	80	ICP
P MARCHESI Luiz	Vitória (Brasile)	02-09-2004	83	BBH
L MARTÍNEZ Natanael	Bogotá (Colombia)	20-08-2004	85	COB
P MENDOZA GALINDO Humberto F.	Cochabamba (Bolivia)	17-08-2004	88	BOL
P MITTERMAYER Johannes	Ravenna (Italia)	07-09-2004	78	GEM
L MORÁN GONZÁLEZ Antonio	Arévalo (Spagna)	23-08-2004	98	SMA
P MUÑOZ ABAD Agustín	Barcelona (Spagna)	18-07-2004	82	SBA
P NEYRET Maurice	Toulon (Francia)	04-08-2004	85	FRA
P PEREZ Francis	Chennai (India)	17-07-2004	77	INM
P PIŁAT Kazimierz	Przemyśl (Polonia)	18-07-2004	77	PLS
P RIZZO Marcello	Negrar (Verona)	19-07-2004	88	INE

SURNAME AND NAME	PLACE of death	DATE	AGE	PROV
P ROMANOWICZ Jan	Bydgoszcz (Polonia)	29-06-2004	77	PLN
P ROUSSEY Jules	Bruxelles (Belgio)	20-06-2004	78	BES
P SAAVEDRA Juan José	La Plata (Argentina)	02-07-2004	77	ALP
P SALCEDO ROJAS Justo Pastor	Medellín (Colombia)	02-09-2004	81	COM
P SAMPOGNARO Francesco	Catania	08-08-2004	76	ISI
P SELVESTREL Mario	Caleta Olivia (Argentina)	31-08-2004	84	ABA
P STELMASZCZYK Vicente	Bagé (Brasile)	16-06-2004	89	BPA
L SZÜCS Mihály	Esztergom (Ungheria)	17-09-2004	79	UNG
P TELEMAN Mieczysław	Dębno (Polonia)	19-06-2004	42	PLN
P THÉVENOT Xavier	Paris (Francia)	14-08-2004	65	FRA
P VACA Jacinto	Quito (Ecuador)	04-08-2004	72	ECU
L VALENTINI Ezio	Roma	07-07-2004	86	IRO
P VELASCO GARCÍA Juan	Coacalco (Messico)	13-07-2004	81	MEM
L VELTRI Pietro	Santiago de Chile	15-07-2004	86	CIL
P VENZON Severino	Torino	27-06-2004	87	ICP
P VERGARA YÁÑEZ Julio Esteban	Santiago de Chile	04-09-2004	73	CIL
P VILA NOVA Clovis	Pindamonhangaba, SP (Brasile)	30-07-2004	95	BSP
P VISALLI Giuseppe	Messina	25-07-2004	79	ISI
P VOILLAT Albert	Neuchâtel (Svizzera)	06-08-2004	87	FRA
P ZINK José	Río Grande (Argentina)	03-07-2004	81	ABA

