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official organ
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**Sede Centrale
Salesiana
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

Year CVII
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ANCHORED IN HOPE, PILGRIMS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Strenna 2025

Rome, 31 December 2024

Dear sisters and brothers belonging to the different Groups of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco,

My warmest greetings to you at the beginning of this new year 2025!

It is with some emotion that I address each and every one of you in this time of grace marked by two important events for the life of the Church and our Family: the Jubilee 2025 year which began solemnly on 24 December last with the opening of the holy door at St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, and the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition at the express wish of our father Don Bosco. This expedition left on 11 November 1875 for Argentina and other countries in the Americas.

These are two important events that find their point of intersection in hope. This is precisely the virtue that Pope Francis identified as a perspective when announcing the Jubilee. Similarly, the missionary experience is a harbinger of hope for everyone: for those who have left (and are leaving) for the missions and for those who have been reached by missionaries.

The year that is given to us is, therefore, rich in ideas for our daily growth in practical terms, so that our humanity becomes fruitful in its attention to others... This will only happen in hearts that place God at the centre, to the point of being able to say, "I have placed you ahead of myself."

I will try to highlight these elements in this commentary, and explore what the Church is invited to experience through-

out this year from our charismatic perspective. I will try to emphasise what it is that should guide us, the Family of Don Bosco, towards new horizons.

1. ENCOUNTERING CHRIST OUR HOPE TO RENEW DON BOSCO'S DREAM

The Strenna's title involves the interweaving of two events: the ordinary jubilee of the year 2025 and the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition sent by Don Bosco to Argentina.

This concurrence of the two events, which I venture to call "providential", makes 2025 a decidedly extraordinary year for all of us and even more so for the Salesians of Don Bosco. Indeed the 29th General Chapter will be held in February, March and April, leading to the election of the new Rector Major and the new General Council, among other things.

Global and particular events, therefore, that involve us in different ways and that we will seek to experience profoundly and intensely, because it is precisely thanks to these events that we can experience the joy of encountering Christ, and the importance of remaining anchored in hope.

1.1. The Jubilee

*"Spes non confundit! Hope does not disappoint!"*¹

This is how Pope Francis presents the Jubilee to us. How wonderful! What a "prophetic" cue!

The Jubilee is a pilgrimage for putting Jesus Christ back at the centre of our lives and the life of the world. Because he is our hope. He is the Hope of the Church and of the whole world!

¹ FRANCIS, *Spes Non Confundit*. Bull of indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee for the Year 2025, Vatican City, 9 May 2024.

We are all aware that the world today needs the hope that connects us with Jesus Christ and with our other brothers and sisters. We need the hope that makes us pilgrims, that propels us into motion, and prompts us to start walking.

We are speaking of hope as the rediscovery of God's presence. Pope Francis writes "May hope fill your hearts!", not only warm your hearts, but fill them, fill them to overflowing!²

1.2. Anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition

And this overflowing hope filled the hearts of those who took part in the first Salesian missionary expedition to Argentina 150 years ago.

From Valdocco, Don Bosco throws his heart beyond every border, sending his sons to the other side of the world! He sends them beyond all human security, sends them to carry forward what he had begun, setting out with others, hoping and infusing hope. He simply sends them – and the first (young) confreres leave and head off. Where? Not even they know where! But they rely on hope and obey, because it is God's presence that guides us.

Our current hope also finds new energy in that enthusiastic obedience, and urges us to set out as pilgrims.

That is why this anniversary should be celebrated: because it helps us to recognise a gift (not a personal achievement, but a free gift, from the Lord); it allows us to remember and to gain strength from this memory to face and build the future.

Today, therefore, let us live to make this future possible and let us do it in the only way we consider great: by sharing our journey of encountering Christ, our only hope, with young people and with all the people in our settings (starting from the poorest and most forgotten).

² *Ibid.*

2. THE JUBILEE: CHRIST OUR HOPE

The Jubilee is journeying together, anchored in Christ our hope. But what does this really mean?

Let me pick up some of the elements of the Bull of indiction for Jubilee 2025 that highlight some of the characteristics of hope.

2.1. Pilgrims, anchored in Christian hope

We are convinced that nothing and no one can separate us from Christ.³ Because we want to and must remain anchored, clinging to him. We cannot make the journey without our anchor.

The anchor of hope, therefore, is Christ himself who carries the sufferings and wounds of humanity on the cross in the presence of the Father.

The anchor, in fact, is the shape of a cross, which is why it was also depicted in the catacombs to symbolise the belonging of the deceased faithful to Christ the Saviour.

This anchor is already firmly attached to the port of salvation. Our task is to attach our life to it, the rope that binds our ship to the anchor of Christ.

We are sailing on troubled waters and need to anchor ourselves to something solid. But the task is no longer to cast anchor and fix it to the seabed. The task is to attach our ship to the rope that hangs down from Heaven, so to speak, where the anchor of Christ is firmly fixed. By attaching ourselves to this rope we attach ourselves to the anchor of salvation and make our hope certain.

Hope is certain when the ship of our life is attached to the rope that binds us to the anchor that is fixed in the crucified Christ who is at the right hand of the Father, that is, in the eternal communion of the Father, in the love of the Holy Spirit.⁴

³ Cf. *Rom* 8:39.

⁴ *Rom* 5:3-5.

Everything is well expressed in the liturgical prayer for the Solemnity of the Lord's Ascension:

Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.⁵

Czech writer and politician Vaclav Havel describes hope as a state of mind, a dimension of the soul. It does not depend on prior observation of the world. It is not a prediction.

Byung-Chul Han adds, "Hope is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart that transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.

"I feel that its deepest roots are in the transcendental... Hope in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy that things are going well. We might think that hoping is simply wanting to smile at life because it in turn smiles at you, but no, we have to go deeper, we have to walk that rope that leads us to the anchor.

"Hope is the ability of each of us to work for something because it is right to do so, not because that something will have guaranteed success. It could be a failure, it could go wrong: we do not hope it goes well, we are not optimistic. We work to make this happen. That is why hope does not equal optimism. Hope is not the belief that something will go well but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of its outcome.

"Doing something because it makes sense: this is the hope that presupposes values and presupposes faith.

"This is what gives hope the strength to live, and gives us the strength to feel something again and again, even in despair."⁶

⁵ *Roman Missal*, LEV, Rome 2020³, 240.

⁶ BYUNG-CHUL HAN, *El espíritu de la esperanza*, p.18, Herder, Barcelona 2024. The translator, however, has translated here from the Italian text in front of him, with some reference also to the English translation of *The Spirit of Hope*, Polity Press, 2024 (an e-book version).

But how can you be on a journey while remaining anchored? The anchor weighs you down, holds you back, and pins you down. Where does this journey lead to? It leads to eternity.

2.2. Hope as a journey to Christ, a journey to eternal life

The promise of eternal life, just as it is made to each of us, does not bypass life's journey, it is not a leap upwards, does not propose mounting a rocket that leaves the earth behind and flies off into space, disregarding the road, the dust of the path, nor does it leave the ship adrift mid-ocean without us.

This promise is indeed an anchor that is fixed in the eternal, but to which we remain attached by a rope that steadies the ship as it crosses the ocean. And it is precisely the fact that it is fixed in Heaven that allows the ship not to remain stationary in the middle of the sea, but to move forward through the waves.

If the anchor of Christ were to pin us to the bottom of the sea, we would all stay in place where we are, maybe calm and problem-free, yet stagnant, without travelling or advancing. On the contrary, anchoring life to Heaven guarantees that the promise that gives rise to our hope does not impede our progress or provide a sense of security in which to shelter and confine ourselves, but rather instils confidence as we walk and proceed along our path. The promise of a sure goal, already reached for us by Christ, makes every step in life firm and decisive.

It is important to understand the Jubilee as a pilgrimage, as an invitation to get moving, to come out of self to go towards Christ.

Jubilee, then, has always been synonymous with a journey. If you really want God, you have to move, you have to walk. Because the desire for God, the longing for God moves you to find him and, at the same time, leads you to find yourself and others.

“Born to never die”.⁷

⁷ C. PACCINI – S. TROISI, *Siamo nati e non moriremo mai più. Storia di Chiara Corbella Petrillo*, Porziuncola, Assisi (PG) 2001.

The title of the life of Servant of God Chiara Corbella Petrillo is beautiful and significant. Yes, because our coming into the world is directed to eternal life. Eternal life is a promise that breaks through the door of death, opening us to being “face to face with God”, forever. Death is a door that closes and at the same time a door that opens to the definitive encounter with God!

We know how keen was Don Bosco’s desire for Heaven, something he joyfully proposed and shared with the young people at the Oratory.

2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF HOPE

2.3.1 Hope, continuous, ready, visionary and prophetic tension

Gabriel Marcel,⁸ the so-called philosopher of hope, teaches us that hope is found in the weaving of experience now in progress. Hope means giving credit to some reality as a bearer of the future.

Eric Fromm⁹ writes that hope is not passive waiting, but rather a continuous, constant tension. It is like crouched tiger which will jump only when the time is right.

To have hope is to be vigilant at all times for everything that has not yet happened. The virgins who waited for the bridegroom with their lamps lit hoped; Don Bosco hoped in the face of difficulties and knelt down to pray.

Hope is ready at the moment when everything is about to be born.

It is vigilant, attentive, listening, able to guide in creating something new, in giving life to the future on earth.

⁸ GABRIEL MARCEL, *Philosophie der Hoffnung*, Munich, List 1964.

⁹ ERICH FROMM, *La revolución de la esperanza*, Ciudad de México 1970.

This is why it is “visionary and prophetic”. It focuses our attention on what is not yet, it helps to give birth to something new.

2.3.2 Hope is our wager on the future

Without hope there is no revolution, no future, there is only a present made of sterile optimism.

Often it is thought that those who hope are optimists while pessimists are essentially their opposite. It is not so. It is important not to confuse hope with optimism. Hope is much more profound because it does not depend on moods, feelings or sentimentality. The essence of **optimism** is innate positivity. The optimist lives in the belief that somehow things will get better. For optimists, time is closure. They do not contemplate the future: everything will go well and that is it.

Paradoxically, even for **pessimists** time is closure: they find themselves trapped in the time as a prison, rejecting everything without venturing into other possible worlds. The pessimist is as stubborn as the optimist, and both are blind to the possible because the possible is alien to them, they lack the passion for the unprecedented.

Unlike both of them, hope wagers on what can go beyond, on what could be.

And still, the optimist (just like the pessimist), does not act, because every action involves a risk and since they do not want to take this risk they stay put, they do not want to experience failure.

Hope instead goes in search, tries to find a direction, heads towards what it does not know, sets sail for new things. This is the pilgrimage of a Christian.

2.3.3 Hope is not a private matter

We all carry hope in our hearts. It is not possible not to hope, but it is also true that one can delude oneself, considering

prospects and ideals that will never come true, that are just illusions and false hopes.

Much of our culture, especially Western culture, is full of false hopes that delude and destroy or can irreparably ruin the lives of individuals and entire societies.

According to positive thinking, it is enough to replace negative thoughts with positive ones to live more happily. Through this simple mechanism, the negative aspects of life are completely omitted and the world appears like an Amazon marketplace that will provide us with anything we want thanks to our positive attitude.

Conclusion: if our willingness to think positively were enough to be happy, then everyone would be solely responsible for their own happiness.

Paradoxically, the cult of positivity isolates people, makes them selfish and destroys empathy, because people are increasingly committed only to themselves and do not care about the suffering of others.

Hope, unlike positive thinking, does not avoid the negativity of life; it does not isolate but unites and reconciles, because the protagonist of hope is not me, focused on my ego, entrenched exclusively on myself. The secret of hope is us.

Therefore, Hope's siblings are Love, Faith, and Transcendence.

3. HOPE, THE FOUNDATION OF MISSION

3.1 Hope is an invitation to responsibility

Hope is a gift and, as such, should be passed on to everyone we meet along the way.

Saint Peter states this clearly: "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you."¹⁰ He invites us not to be afraid, to act

¹⁰ *1 Pet* 3:15.

in everyday life, to give our reasons – how much Salesian spirit there is in this word “reasons”! – for hope. This is a responsibility for the Christian. If we are women and men of hope, it shows!

“Giving an account of the hope that is in us” becomes a proclamation of the “good news” of Jesus and his Gospel.

But why is it necessary to respond to anyone who asks us about the hope that is in us? And why do we feel the need to recover hope?

In the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee, *Spes Non Confundit*, Pope Francis reminds us that “All of us, however, need to recover the joy of living, since men and women, created in the image and likeness of God, cannot rest content with getting along one day at a time, settling for the here and now and seeking fulfilment in material realities alone. This leads to a narrow individualism and the loss of hope; it gives rise to a sadness that lodges in the heart and brings forth fruits of discontent and intolerance.”¹¹

An observation that strikes us because it describes all the sadness that is breathed in our societies and our communities. It is a sadness masked by false joy, the one constantly touted, promised, and guaranteed to us by the media, advertisements, politicians’ propaganda, and many false prophets of well-being. Settling for well-being prevents us from opening up to a much greater, much truer, much more eternal good: what Jesus and the apostles call “the salvation of the soul, the salvation of life”; a good for which Jesus invites us not to fear losing our life, material goods, false securities that often collapse in an instant.

It is regarding these kinds of more or less articulated “questions” (including by young people) that it is our task to “give an account”. What do I want for the young people and for all

¹¹ FRANCIS, *Spes Non Confundit*, 9.

the people I meet along the way? What would I like to ask God for them? How would I like it to change their lives?

There is only one answer: *eternal life*. Not only eternal life as a sublime state that we can reach after death, but eternal life possible here and now, eternal life as Jesus defines it: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”, that is, a defined life, enlightened by communion with Christ and, through him, with the Father.¹²

And we have the task of accompanying the younger generations on this journey towards eternal life, in the educational activity that distinguishes us. An activity that is a mission for us as the Salesian Family. And what drives our mission? Always Christ, our hope.

This educational mission, in fact, has hope at its core.

Ultimately, God’s hope is never hope for itself alone. It is always hope for others: it does not isolate us, it makes us supportive and encourages us to educate each other in truth and love.

3.2 Hope demands courage from the Christian community in evangelisation

Courage and hope are an interesting combination. In fact, if it is true that it is impossible not to hope, it is equally true that courage is necessary to hope. Courage comes from having the same outlook as Christ,¹³ capable of hoping against all hope, of seeing a solution even where there seems to be no way out. And how “Salesian” this attitude is!

All this requires the courage to be oneself, to recognise one’s identity in the gift of God and to invest one’s energies in a precise responsibility, aware that what has been entrusted to us is not ours, and that we have the task of passing it on to the

¹² *Jn* 17:3.

¹³ Cf. *Rom* 4:18.

next generations. This is the heart of God. This is the life of the Church.

It is an attitude that we find in the first missionary expedition.

I find reference to art. 34 of the Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco very useful: it highlights what lies at the heart of our charismatic and apostolic movement. I suggest to each of the groups in our diverse and beautiful Family that they review the same elements that I offer here, by rereading their respective Constitutions and Statutes.

The article is entitled: Evangelization and catechesis and reads as follows:

“This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson.” For us too, evangelizing and catechizing are the fundamental characteristics of our mission.

Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.

We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new creatures in Christ.

The Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. We make her known and loved as the one who believed, who helps and who infuses hope.”

This article represents the beating heart that clearly outlines, including for this Strenna, what the energies and opportunities are as the fulfilment and actualisation of the “global dream” that God inspired in Don Bosco.

If living the Jubilee is first of all making sure that Jesus is and returns to being in first place, then the missionary spirit is the consequence of this recognised primacy which strengthens our hope and translates into that educative and pastoral charity that proclaims the person of Jesus Christ to all. This is the heart of evangelisation and characterises genuine mission.

It is significant to recall some opening words from Benedict XVI's first Encyclical, *Deus caritas est*:

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”¹⁴

Therefore, the encounter with Christ is a priority and fundamental, not the “simple” dissemination of a doctrine, but a deep personal experience of God that urges us to communicate him, to make him known and experienced, becoming true “mystagogues” of the lives of young people.

3.3 “DA MIHI ANIMAS”: THE “SPIRIT” OF MISSION

Don Bosco always kept a sentence before his eyes that young people could read passing in front of his room, words that particularly struck Dominic Savio: “Da mihi animas cetera tolle”.

There is a fundamental balance in this motto that combines the two priorities that guided Don Bosco's life – and which, significantly, we call the “grace of unity” – that allow us to always safeguard interiority and apostolic action.

If the love of God is lacking in the heart, how can there be true pastoral charity? And at the same time, if apostles were not to discover the face of God in their neighbour, how could they be said to love God?

Don Bosco's secret is that he personally experienced the unique “movement of charity towards God and towards his brothers and sisters”¹⁵ that characterises the Salesian spirit.

3.3.1 The attitudes of the one who is sent

There are two key dreams in Don Bosco's life in which the

¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est*, Vatican City 25 December 2005, 1.

¹⁵ *SDB C. 3.*

attitudes of the apostle, of the one who is sent, are evident:

- the “dream at nine years of age” in which Jesus and Mary ask John, just a child, to make himself humble, strong and energetic, to be obedient and acquire knowledge, asking him to be always kind in order to win over the hearts of young people. He is to always keep Mary as his teacher and guide;
- the “dream of the pergola of roses” that indicates the “passion” in Salesian life that requires wearing the “good shoes” of mortification and charity.

3.3.2 Recognise, Rethink and Relaunch

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco’s first missionary expedition is a great gift for

- ***Recognising and thanking God.***
Recognition makes the fatherly nature of every beautiful accomplishment evident. Without recognition, there is no capacity to accept. All the times we do not recognise a gift in our personal and institutional life, we seriously risk nullifying it and “taking it over”.
- ***Rethinking, because “nothing is forever”.***
Fidelity involves the ability to change, through obedience, to a perspective that comes from God and from reading the “signs of the times”. Nothing is forever: from a personal and institutional point of view, true fidelity is the ability to change, recognising what the Lord calls each of us to. Rethinking, then, becomes a generative act in which faith and life come together; a moment in which to ask ourselves: what do you want to tell us, Lord, with this person, with this situation in the light of the signs of the times that ask me to have the very heart of God in order to interpret them?
- ***Relaunching, starting over every day.***
Recognition leads to looking far ahead and welcoming new challenges, relaunching the mission with hope. Mission is to bring the hope of Christ with clear and conscious aware-

ness, linked to faith, which makes me recognise that what I see and experience “is not mine”.

4. A JUBILEE AND MISSIONARY HOPE THAT TRANSLATES INTO CONCRETE AND DAILY LIFE

4.1 Hope, our strength in daily life that needs to be witnessed to

Saint Thomas Aquinas writes: “Spes introcit ad caritatem”, hope prepares and predisposes our life, our humanity, to charity.¹⁶ A charity that is also justice, social action.

Hope needs testimony. We are at the heart of the mission, because the mission is not, in the first instance, to do things but is a testimony, the witness of the one who has gone through an experience and speaks about it. The witness is the bearer of a memory, solicits questions from those who meet him or her, evokes wonder.

The testimony of hope requires a community. It is the work of a collective subject and it is contagious, just as our humanity is contagious, because such testimony is a bond with the Lord.

Hope in the testimony of mission is to be built from generation to generation, between adults and young people: this is the way of the future. Consumerism eats away the future in our culture. The ideology of consumption extinguishes everything in the “here and now”, in the “everything, and immediately”. But you cannot consume the future, you cannot appropriate what is other than you; you cannot appropriate the other.¹⁷

In building the future, hope is the ability to make promises and to keep them... such a splendid and rare thing in our world.

¹⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, II^a-IIae q. 17 a. 8 co.

¹⁷ Cf. E. LEVINAS, *Totalità e infinito. Saggio sull'esteriorità*, Jaca Book, Milano 2023.

To promise is to hope, to set in motion, that is why – as mentioned – hope is a journey, it is the very energy of the journey.

4.2 Hope is the art of patience

Every life, every gift, everything needs time to grow. So too do God's gifts take time to mature. This is why in our present time, where everything is instant, in our hurried "consumption" of time and life, we are called to cultivate the virtues of patience, because hope comes to fruition through patience.¹⁸ In fact, hope and patience are intimately linked.

Hope involves the ability to wait, to wait for growth, as if to say that "one virtue leads to another"!

For hope to become reality, to manifest itself in its full sense, patience is required. Nothing manifests itself miraculously, because everything is subject to the law of time. Patience is the art of the farmer who sows and knows how to wait for the seed sown to grow and bear fruit.

Hope begins in us as waiting, expectation, and it is experienced as consciously lived expectation in our humanity. This waiting, this expectation is a very important dimension of human experience. Human beings know how to wait, are always in a dimension of waiting, because they are creatures who consciously live in time.

Human waiting, expectation, is the true measure of time, a measure that is not numerical or chronological. We have become accustomed to calculating our waiting time, to saying that we have waited an hour, that the train is five minutes late, that the internet has made us wait fourteen endless seconds before responding to our click, but when we measure it in this way we distort our waiting, turning it into a thing, a phenomenon de-

¹⁸For these reflections I drew on the rich reflection of the Abbot General of the Order of Cistercians M. G. LEPORI, *Capitoli dell'Abate Generale OCist al CFM 2024. Sperare in Cristo* available in several languages at: www.ocist.org

tached from ourselves and what we are waiting for. It is as if the waiting were something in itself, by itself, without any connection. Instead, waiting – and here is the crucial point – is relationship, a dimension of the mystery of relationship.

Only those who have hope have patience. Only those who have hope become capable of “enduring”, of “supporting from below” the different situations that life presents. Those who endure wait, hope, and manage to endure everything because their effort has the sense of waiting, has the tension of waiting, the loving energy of waiting.

We know that the call to patience and waiting sometimes involves the experience of fatigue, work, pain and death.¹⁹ Well, fatigue, pain and death expose the illusion of having time, the meaning of time, the value of time, the meaning and value of our life. They are negative experiences, but also positive because fatigue, pain and death can be opportunities to rediscover the true meaning of life’s time.

And, once again, “to give an account of the hope that is in us”, becoming the proclamation of the “good news” of Jesus and his Gospel.

5. THE ORIGIN OF OUR HOPE: IN GOD WITH DON BOSCO

Father Egidio Viganò offered the Congregation and the Salesian Family an interesting reflection on the topic of hope, drawing on our very rich tradition and highlighting some specific characteristics of the Salesian spirit read in the light of this theological virtue. He did this by commenting, in particular for participants at the General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, on Don Bosco’s dream of the ten diamonds.²⁰

¹⁹ Cf. *Rom*, 5:3-5

²⁰ E. VIGANÒ, *Un progetto evangelico di vita attiva*, Elle Di Ci, Leumann (TO) 1982, 68-84.

Given the depth of the proposed contents, I think it is useful to recall the contribution of the 7th Successor of Don Bosco in reminding us of what we are all called to live, once again from the perspective of hope.

5.1 God is the origin of our hope

5.1.1. *Brief reference to the dream*

We all know the story of this extraordinary dream that Don Bosco had in San Benigno Canavese on the night of 10 September 1881. Let me briefly recall its structure.²¹

The Dream takes place in three scenes. *In the first scene*, the main character embodies the profile of the Salesian: on the front of his cloak there are five diamonds – three on the chest, representing “Faith”, “Hope” and “Charity”, and two on the shoulders, representing “Work” and “Temperance”; on the back there are five additional diamonds indicating “Obedience”, “Vow of Poverty”, “Reward”, “Vow of Chastity” and “Fasting”.

Fr Rinaldi calls this character with the ten diamonds “The model of the true Salesian”.

In the second scene, the character shows the adulteration of the model: his cloak “had become faded, moth-eaten, in tatters. In place of the diamonds there were gaping holes caused by moths and other insects.”

This very sad and depressing scene shows “the opposite to the true Salesian”, the anti-Salesian.

In the third scene, “a handsome young man dressed in a white cloak woven through with gold and silver thread [...] of imposing and charming mien” appears. He is the bearer of a message. He urges the Salesians to “listen”, to “understand”, to remain

²¹ Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian according to Don Bosco's dream of the ten diamonds*, in ASC 300 (1981), 3-37. The complete account can be found in ASC 300 (1981), 40-44; or in BM XV, 147-152.

“strong and courageous”, to “witness” with their words and with their lives, to “be careful” in the acceptance and formation of the new generations, to make their Congregation grow healthily.

The three dream scenes are lively and provocative; they present us with an agile, personalised and dramatised synthesis of Salesian spirituality. The content of the dream, in Don Bosco’s mind, certainly involves an important frame of reference for our vocational identity.

So then, the character in the dream – as is well known – bears the diamond of hope on the front, which stands for the certainty of help from above in an entirely creative life, i.e. one committed to daily planning of practical activities for salvation, especially of youth. Together with the other symbols linked to the theological virtues, the figure of those who are wise and optimistic stands out for the faith that animates them; of those who are dynamic and creative for the hope that moves them, and who are ever prayerful and good human beings for the charity with which they are imbued.

Corresponding to the diamond of hope, on the back of the figure we find the diamond of “reward”. While hope visibly highlights the Salesian’s energy and activity in building the Kingdom, the constancy of his efforts and the enthusiasm of his commitment based on the certainty of God’s help made present through the mediation and intercession of Christ and Mary, the diamond of “reward” instead underlines a constant conscientious attitude that permeates and animates all ascetic effort, according to Don Bosco’s familiar maxim: “A piece of paradise will make up for everything!”²²

5.1.2. *Don Bosco, a “giant” of hope*

The Salesian – Don Bosco said – “is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God’s glory and the salvation of souls require it”;²³ the inner support

²² *BM VIII*, 200.

²³ *SDB C*. 18.

for this demanding ascetic ability is the thought of paradise as a reflection of the good conscience with which he works and lives. "In all we do, our duty, work, troubles or sufferings, we must never forget that... the least thing done for his name's sake is not left forgotten; it is of faith that in his own good time he will give us rich recompense. At the end of our lives as we stand before his judgement seat he will say, radiant with love: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:2).²⁴ "In your work and sorrow never forget we have a great reward stored up for us in heaven."²⁵ And when our Father says that the Salesian exhausted by too much work represents a victory *for the whole Congregation*, it seems to suggest a dimension of fraternal communion in the reward, almost a community sense of paradise!

The thought and continuous awareness of paradise is one of the overarching ideas and one of the driving values of Don Bosco's typical spirituality and also pedagogy. It is like shedding light on and furthering the fundamental instinct of the soul that tends vitally towards its ultimate goal.

In a world prone to secularisation and the gradual loss of a sense of God – especially due to affluence and certain progress – it is important to resist the temptation, for ourselves and for the young people with whom we journey, that prevents us from looking up to Heaven and does not make us feel the need to sustain and nurture a commitment to asceticism lived out in our daily work. A temporal gaze is growing in its place, according to a somewhat elegant kind of horizontalism that believes it can discover the ideal of everything within human becoming and in the present life. Quite the opposite of hope!

²⁴ P. BRAIDO (ed), *Don Bosco Fondatore "Ai Soci Salesiani" (1875-1885). Introduzione e testi critici*, LAS, Roma 1995, 159 (Don Bosco's "To the Salesian Confreres" from which this is quoted, is also an appendix to the SDB Constitutions and Regulations).

²⁵ *BM VI*, 249.

Don Bosco was one of the greats of hope. There are so many elements to prove it. His Salesian spirit is entirely infused with the certainty and industriousness characteristic of this bold dynamism of the Holy Spirit.

Let me pause briefly to recall how Don Bosco was able to translate the energy of hope in his life on two fronts: commitment to personal sanctification and the mission of salvation for others; or rather – and here lies a central characteristic of his spirit – personal sanctification through the salvation of others. We remember the famous formula of the three “S’s”: “Salve, salvando salvati” (a greeting which in today’s language would be something like ‘Hi! By saving others, save yourself’)²⁶ It is a simple mnemonic, a pedagogical slogan, but it is profound and indicates how the two sides of personal sanctification and the salvation of others are closely linked.

In the “work” and “temperance” pair, the perception is that Don Bosco experienced hope as a practical and daily programme for the tireless work of sanctification and salvation. In contemplation of the mystery of God his faith led him to prefer his ineffable plan of salvation. He saw in Christ the Saviour of humankind and the Lord of history; in his Mother, Mary, the Helper of Christians; in the Church, the great Sacrament of salvation; in his own Christian growth to maturity and in needy youth, the vast field of the “not yet”. Therefore his heart erupted in the cry, “Da mihi animas”, Lord grant that I may save youth, and take the rest away from me! The following of Christ and the youth mission merge, in his spirit, in a single theological burst of energy that constitutes the supporting structure of the whole.

We know well that the dimension of Christian hope combines the perspective of the “already” and the “not yet”: something present and something in progress that, however, begins to manifest itself from today even if “not yet” fully.

²⁶ *MB VI*, 227.

5.1.3. *Characteristics of Don Bosco's hope*

The certainty of the "already"

When we ask theology what the formal object of hope is, it responds that it is the intimate conviction of the presence of God who helps, aids, and assists; the inner certainty about the power of the Holy Spirit; friendship with the victorious Christ that enables us to say with St Paul, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

The first constitutive element of hope is, therefore, the certainty of the "already". Hope encourages faith to exercise itself in consideration of God's saving presence in human vicissitudes, of the power of the Spirit in the Church and in the world, of Christ's kingship over history, of the baptismal values that have initiated the life of resurrection within us.

The first constitutive element of hope is, therefore, an exercise of faith in the essence of God as merciful and saving Father, in what Jesus Christ has already done for us, in Pentecost as the beginning of the age of the Holy Spirit, in what is already within us through Baptism, the sacraments, life in the Church, the personal call of our vocation.

It is necessary to reflect that faith and hope interchange in us, their dynamics prompt and complement each other and make us live in the creative and transcendent atmosphere of the power of the Holy Spirit.

A clear awareness of the "not yet"

The second constitutive element of hope is the awareness of the "not yet". It does not seem very difficult to have this; however, hope demands a clear awareness not so much of what is evil and unjust, as of what is lacking in the stature of Christ in time, and, therefore, of what is unjust and sinful and also of what is immature, partial or stunted in building the Kingdom.

This supposes, as a frame of reference, a clear knowledge of the divine plan of salvation, onto which the critical and dis-

cerning capacity of the one who hopes is grafted. Thus any critique by a person of hope is not simply psychological or sociological but transcendent, according to the theological sphere of the “new creature”; it also makes use of the contributions of the human sciences, and far surpasses them.

With the awareness of the “not yet”, those who hope perceive what is evil, what is not yet mature, what is a seed for the Kingdom of God and are committed to the growth of what is good and to fighting sin with the historical perspective of Christ. The ability to discern the “not yet” is always measured by the certainty of the “already”. Therefore, and I would say especially in difficult times, those who hope urge and stir up their faith to discover the signs of God’s presence and the mediations that guide us into the sphere that he has traced out. This is a very important quality today: knowing how to identify seeds to help them sprout and grow.

How can one hope if there is not this capacity for discernment? It is not enough to know how to perceive the full weight of evil. We must also be sensitive to the spring “that shines around us”. So in these times, which we call difficult times (and they really are, comparing them with those with a degree of tranquillity that we experienced earlier), hope helps us to perceive that there is also so much good in the world and that something is growing.

Salvific industriousness

A third constitutive element of hope is its need to be put into action accompanied by a concrete commitment to sanctification, inventiveness and apostolic sacrifice. We must collaborate with the “already” that is growing. We need to act urgently and fight against evil in ourselves and in others, especially in needy youth.

The discernment of the “already” and the “not yet” needs to be translated into practice in life, opening up to resolutions, plans, revision, inventiveness, patience and constancy. Not ev-

everything will turn out “as we hoped”: there will be failures, setbacks, falls, misunderstandings. Christian hope also naturally shares in the darkness of faith.

5.1.4. *The “fruits” of Don Bosco’s hope*

Some particularly significant fruits for the Salesian spirit of Don Bosco derive from the three constitutive elements of hope which I have just indicated.

Joy

Joy derives from the first constitutive element – the certainty of the “already” – as the most characteristic fruit. All true hope explodes into joy.

The Salesian spirit takes on the joy of hope through an affinity all its own. Even biology suggests some examples. Youth, which is human hope (and thus suggests a certain analogy with the mystery of Christian hope), is eager for joy. And we see Don Bosco translate hope into an atmosphere of joy for the youth to be saved. Dominic Savio, raised at his school, said, “We make holiness consist in being very cheerful.” It is not a superficial cheerfulness typical of the world but an inner joy, a substrate of Christian victory, a vital harmony with hope, which explodes in joy. A joy that ultimately proceeds from the depths of faith and hope.

There is little to do. If we are sad, it is because we are superficial. I understand that there is a Christian sadness: Jesus Christ experienced it. In Gethsemane his soul was saddened to death, he sweated blood. This is certainly another kind of sadness.

However, the affliction or melancholy through which a Sister gets the impression of not being understood by anyone, that others do not take her into consideration, that they are envious or misunderstand her qualities, etc., is a sadness that must not be fed. This must be contrasted with the depth of hope: God is with me and loves me; what does it matter if others don’t consider me so much?

Joy, in the Salesian spirit, is a daily atmosphere; it stems from a faith that hopes and from a hope that believes, in other words from the dynamic quality of the Holy Spirit that proclaims in us the victory that overcomes the world!... Joy is essential if we are to witness to what we believe and hope in.

This is what the Salesian spirit is, first and foremost, and not something reduced to mere observance and mortification. Hope will also lead us to practise mortification, but as flight training and not as prison jabs! So: from hope, so much joy!

The world tries to overcome its limitations and disorientation with a life filled with exciting sensations. It cultivates the promotion and satisfaction of the senses, a spicy film, eroticism, drugs, etc. It is a way of escaping from a fleeting situation that seems to make no sense, to seek something that borders on a “caricature of transcendence”.

Patience

Another “fruit” of hope – which comes from the awareness of the “not yet” – is *patience*. Every hope entails an indispensable gift of patience. Patience is a Christian attitude, intrinsically linked with hope in its “not yet” quality with its troubles, its difficulties and its darkness. Believing in the resurrection and working for the victory of faith, while being mortal and immersed in the transient, demands an inner structure of hope that leads to patience.

The most sublime expression of Christian patience was what Jesus experienced especially during his passion and death. It is a fruitful patience, precisely because of the hope that fuels it. Rather than initiative and action, patience involves conscious acceptance and virtuous passivity that endures so that God’s plan may be accomplished.

Don Bosco’s Salesian spirit often reminds us of patience. In the introduction to the Constitutions, Don Bosco recalls, alluding to Saint Paul, that the pains we must endure in this life do not compare with the reward that awaits us. He used to say,

“So take heart! When patience would falter, let hope sustain us!”²⁷ “the hope of a reward is what buoys up our patience.”²⁸

Mother Mazzarello also insisted on this. One of her first biographers, Maccone, states that hope always comforted her by supporting her in her sufferings, her infirmities, her doubts, and cheered her up at the hour of death: “Her hope was very alive and active. It seems to me” a Sister testified “that she was animated by hope in everything and that she tried to instil this in others. She urged us to carry the small daily crosses well, and to do everything with great purity of intention.”²⁹

Hope is the mother of patience and patience is the defence and shield of hope.

Pedagogical sensitivity

From the third constitutive element of hope – “salvific industriousness” - comes another fruit: *pedagogical sensitivity*. It is an initiative of appropriate commitment, both in the context of one’s own sanctification (following Christ), and in the context of the salvation of others (mission). It involves practical, measured and constant commitment, translated by Don Bosco into a concrete methodology that involves attention to the following:

- *prudence (or holy “cunning”): when it comes to initiatives, to solving problems, Don Bosco tries everything without pretending to be perfect but with humble practicality; he often said, “The best is the enemy of the good”.*³⁰
- *Boldness.* Evil is organised, the children of darkness act intelligently. The Gospel tells us that the children of light must be more cunning and courageous. Therefore, to work in the world we must arm ourselves with genuine prudence, that is, with the “*auriga virtutum*” that makes us agile, timely and pene-

²⁷ BM XII, 332.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 331.

²⁹ F. MACCONO, *Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Confondatrice e prima Superiore Generale delle FMA. Vol. I*, FMA, Torino 1960, 398.

³⁰ BM X, 418.

trating in the application of true fearlessness for the good.

- *Magnanimity.* We must not confine our gaze within the walls of our house. We have been called by the Lord to save the world; we have a more important historical mission than astronauts and scientists do... We are committed to the full liberation of humankind. Our soul must be open to very broad perspectives. Don Bosco wanted us to be “at the forefront of progress” (and when he said this he meant communications media).

We know the magnanimity of Don Bosco in launching youth into apostolic responsibilities; think, for example, of the first missionaries who left for America. Both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were little more than boys and girls!

Don Bosco operated within expansive horizons. Neither Valdocco nor Mornese was enough for him; he could not remain only within the confines of Turin, Piedmont, Italy or Europe. His heart beat with the heart of the universal Church, because he felt almost invested with the responsibility of saving all the needy youth of the world. He wanted the Salesians to feel that the most urgent and biggest youth issues of the Church were their own, so they could be available everywhere. And, as he cultivated magnanimity in his plans and initiatives, he was concrete and practical in their implementation, with a sense of gradualness, and modest beginnings.

So magnanimity must always radiate from the face of the Salesian as a mark of sympathy: Salesians must not be narrow-minded without vision, but have greatness of soul because hope abides in their hearts.

Péguy, with his somewhat violent acumen, wrote: “A capitulation is in essence an operation in which one begins to explain instead of implementing. Cowards have always been people of many explanations.” The mysticism of decision and the humble courage of practicality must always radiate from the Salesian face, as a mark of sympathy. Don Bosco was determined in

being committed to good, even if he could not begin with the best; he said that his works perhaps began in disorder and then tended towards order!

Hope brings the joy of divine sonship to the face of the Salesian, in addition to deep contemplation, the enthusiasm of gratitude and optimism that stem from “faith”. It also instils the courage to take initiative, the spirit of patience and sacrifice, the wisdom of gradual pedagogy, the visionary ideals of magnanimity, the humility of practicality, the wisdom of cunning, and the smile of joy.

5.2. God’s faithfulness: to the very end

So far we have taken a look at what Don Bosco and our Saints and Blesseds have clearly expressed in their lives. These are things that urge each of us personally and as a Salesian Family to bring forth or – to take up the words of Fr Egidio Viganò – to make shine the hope we are called to “give our reasons” for, especially to young people and, among them, the poorest.

The time has come to “peek” a little beyond what is “immediately visible” and try to understand what lies ahead in our lives and gives us the courage to wait diligently as we work together for the coming of the “day of the Lord”.

Therefore, and continuing to take up the candid and poignant analysis of the Seventh Successor of Don Bosco, let us focus our attention on the perspective of the “reward”.

The diamond of “reward” is placed with four others on the back of the cloak worn by the character in the dream. It is almost a secret, a force that operates from within, which gives us the impetus and helps us to support and defend the great values seen on the front. It is interesting to note that the diamond of “reward” is placed under the one of “poverty” because it certainly is related to the “privations” linked to it.

On its rays we read the following words: “If the rich reward

attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships.” “Whoever suffers with me will rejoice with me.” “Whatever we suffer on earth is momentary, the joys of my friends in Heaven are eternal.”

The true Salesian has the vision of the reward in their imagination, in their heart, their desires, their horizons of life, as the fullness of the values proclaimed by the Gospel. This is why “he is always cheerful. He radiates this joy and is able to educate to the happiness of Christian life and a sense of celebration.”³¹

There was a lot of talk about Heaven in Don Bosco’s house and in our Salesian houses. It was a permanent and ever present idea summarised in some famous sayings: “Bread, work and Paradise”³²; “A piece of Paradise will make up for everything”.³³ These were recurrent sayings in Valdocco and Mornese.

Certainly many Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will remember the description Mother Henriette Sorbonne gave of the spirit of Mornese: “Here we are in Paradise, in the house there is an atmosphere of Paradise!”³⁴ And it certainly wasn’t because of privations or lack of problems. It was like the spontaneous translation, sprung from the heart, of the sign that Don Bosco had put up: “Servite Domino in laetitia”³⁵.

Dominic Savio had also perceived the same warm and transcendent atmosphere of life: “We make holiness consist in being very cheerful.”³⁶

In the Lives of Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone, Don Bosco, even when describing their death throes, sought to stress this ineffable joy, combined with a true yearning for Paradise. Much more than the horror of death, his boys felt the attraction of Easter joy.

³¹ *SDB C.* 17.

³² *BM XII*, 443.

³³ *BM VIII*, 200.

³⁴ Quoted in E. VIGANÒ, *Rediscovering the spirit of Mornese*, in *ASC* (1981), 62.

³⁵ *Ps* 99.

³⁶ *BM V*, 228.

The thought of reward is one of the fruits of the presence of the Holy Spirit, that is, of the intensity of faith, hope and charity, all three together, although it is more closely linked to hope. It instils a joy and gladness in the heart that comes from above and are beautifully attuned to the innate tendencies of the human heart. We can see this as we live among boys and girls: young people instinctively understand more clearly that human beings are born for happiness.

But we don't even need to go looking for it among the young. Let's pick up a mirror and look at ourselves: we just have to listen to the beating of our heart. We are born to achieve happiness, we expect it even without confessing it.

The idea of Paradise, always there in Don Bosco's house, is not a utopia for naive deceptions. It is not the carrot that tricks the horse into trotting, but the substantial yearning of our being; and it is above all the reality of the love of God, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ at work in history; it is the living presence of the Holy Spirit that urges us toward the reward.

Don Bosco did not despise any of young people's joys. On the contrary, he gave rise to them, increased them, developed them. The famous "cheerfulness" which holiness consists of is not only an intimate joy, hidden in the heart as the fruit of grace. This is the root of it. It is also expressed externally, in life, in the playground and in the sense of celebration.

How he prepared for religious solemnities, name days and feast days at the Oratory! He was even busy organising the celebrations for his name day, not for himself but to create an atmosphere of joyful gratitude in the surroundings.

Let's think about courageous autumn walks: two or three months to prepare them, 15 or 20 days to experience them; then the extended memories and comments: a joy spread out over time. What imagination and courage! From Turin to Becchi, to Genoa, to Mornese, to many towns in Piedmont, with dozens and dozens of young people... Outings, games, the music,

singing, theatre: these are substantial elements of the Preventive System which, also as a pedagogical method, embrace an appropriate and dynamic spirituality, the result of a convinced faith, hope, and charity, heavenly values right here on earth.

Heaven was always overlooking the firmament of Valdocco, day and night, with or without clouds. Witnessing to the values of reward today is an urgent prophecy for the world and especially for youth. What has the techno-industrial civilisation brought to the consumer society? A huge possibility of comfort and pleasure, with a consequent heavy sadness.

Among other things, we read in the Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco – but it applies to every Christian – that “the Salesian [is] a sign of the power of the resurrection” and that “in the simplicity and hard work of daily life” he is “an educator who proclaims to the young ‘new heavens and a new earth’, awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise.”³⁷

In Mornese and Valdocco there were neither comforts nor dictatorships and everything breathed spontaneity and joy. Technical progress has facilitated many things today, but the true joy of human beings has not increased. Anguish has grown instead, nausea, a lack of meaning in life has become more acute, something unfortunately that we continue to observe – especially in affluent societies – in the tragic statistics of adolescent and youth suicides.

Today, in addition to the material poverty that still afflicts a very large portion of humanity, it is urgent to find a way to help young people see the meaning of life, the higher ideals, the originality of Jesus Christ.

Happiness, a fundamental human tendency, is sought, but

³⁷ SDB C. 63. See also E. VIGANÒ, “*Giving reason for the joy and commitments of hope, bearing witness to the unfathomable riches of Christ*”. *Strenna 1994. Rector Major’s Commentary*, Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Rome 1993.

the right path to it is no longer known, and then immense disillusionment grows.

Young people, also due to the lack of significant adults, feel unable to face suffering, duty and constant commitment. The problem of fidelity to ideals and one's own vocation has become crucial. Young people feel unable to accept suffering and sacrifice. They live in an atmosphere in which the separation between love and sacrifice triumphs, so that the pursuit and achievement of wealth alone ends up stifling the ability to love and, therefore, to dream of the future.

Rightly, as we said, the diamond of reward is placed below the one of poverty, as if to indicate that the two complement and support each other. In fact, evangelical poverty entails a concrete and transcendent vision of the whole reality with a realistic perspective also regarding renunciation, suffering, setbacks, privation and pain.

What is the inner energy that allows one to face everything confidently and with a cheerful countenance, without getting discouraged? It is, ultimately, the sense of heaven's presence on earth. This sense proceeds from faith, hope and charity, which enables us to reread our whole life with the perspective of the Holy Spirit.

The world urgently needs prophets who proclaim the great truth of Paradise with their lives. Not some alienating escape, but an intense and stimulating reality!

Therefore, in the spirit of Don Bosco, there is a constant concern to cultivate familiarity with Paradise, almost as if to constitute the firmament of the mind, the horizon of the Salesian heart: we work and struggle, sure of a reward, looking towards our Homeland, the house of God, the Promised Land.

It should be made clear that the prospect of the reward does not consist, in some reductionist way, in the attainment of a kind of "recompense", some kind of consolation for a life lived amidst so many sacrifices, so much endurance... None of this! If

it were just “recompense,” it would resemble blackmail. But God doesn’t work that way. In his love he can only offer human beings himself. This – as Jesus says – is eternal life: the knowledge of the Father. Where “knowing” means “loving”, becoming fully partakers of God, in continuity with earthly existence lived “in grace”, that is, in love for God and for our brothers and sisters.

We are invited to turn our gaze to Mary in this journey, who appears as daily help, Mother, forerunner and helper. Don Bosco was sure of her presence among us and wanted signs that remind us of it.

He built a Basilica for her, a centre for the animation and dissemination of the Salesian vocation. He wanted her image in our settings; he bound every apostolic initiative to her intercession and commented with emotion on her real and maternal effectiveness. We recall, for example, what he said to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the house at Nizza Monferrato: “Our Lady is truly here, here among you! Our Lady walks in this house and covers it with her mantle.”³⁸

In addition to her, we also look for other friends in God’s house. Our Saints and Blesseds, starting with the faces that are most familiar to us and that are part of the so-called “Salesian garden”.

We are not making these choices to divide the great house of God into small private apartments, but rather to feel more easily at home and be able to speak of God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Christ and Mary, creation and history, not with the trepidation of those who have listened to the lofty lesson of a dense, difficult and even inscrutable thinker, but with that sense of familiarity and joyful simplicity with which we converse with those who have been our relatives, our brothers and sisters, our colleagues and our workmates. Some of them we

³⁸ G. CAPETTI, *Il cammino dell’Istituto nel corso di un secolo. Vol. I, FMA*, Roma 1972-1976, 122.

have not met in life, but we feel close to them and they inspire us with particular confidence. Speaking with Saint Joseph, Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, Father Rua, Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Father Rinaldi, Bishop Versiglia and Father Caravario; with Sister Teresa Valsè, Sister Eusebia Palomino, etc., really is an “in house”, family conversation.

This is what the diamond of reward suggests to us: to feel at home with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the Saints; to feel their presence in our own house, in a family atmosphere that gives a sense of Paradise to the daily settings of our life.

6. WITH... MARY, HOPE AND MATERNAL PRESENCE

At the end of this commentary we can only but turn our hearts and gaze to the Virgin Mary, as Don Bosco taught us.

Hope requires confidence, the ability to surrender and trust. In all this we have a guide and a teacher in Mary Most Holy. She testifies to us that to hope is to trust and surrender, and it is true for this life as well as for eternal life.

On this journey Our Lady takes us by the hand, teaches us how to trust in God, how to give ourselves freely to the love passed on by her Son Jesus.

The direction and the “navigation map” that she presents us with is always the same: “Do whatever he tells you.”³⁹ An invitation that we take up every day in our lives.

We see the achievement of the reward in Mary.

Maria embodies the attractiveness and concreteness of the Reward in herself:

“on the completion of her earthly sojourn, [she] was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and the conqueror of sin and death.”⁴⁰

³⁹ *Jn* 2:5.

⁴⁰ *LG*, 59.

On her lips we can read some beautiful expressions from Saint Paul. Since they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, Mary's Spouse, they are certainly shared by her.

Here they are:

"It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."⁴¹

Dear sisters and brothers, dear young people,

Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and all our Saints and Blesseds are close to us in this extraordinary year. May they accompany us in living the demands of the Jubilee at depth, helping us to place the person of Jesus Christ "the Saviour announced in the gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world"⁴² at the centre of our lives.

May they encourage us, following the example of the first missionaries sent by Don Bosco, to make our lives always and everywhere a free gift for others, especially for the young and among them the poorest.

Finally, a wish: that this year the prayer for peace, for a peaceful humanity, may grow in us. Let us invoke the gift of peace – the biblical *shalom* – which contains all others and finds fulfilment only in hope.

My warmest best wishes,

Father Stefano MARTOGLIO sdb
Vicar of the Rector Major

⁴¹ Rom 8:34-39.

⁴² SDB C. 196.

2. ORIENTAMENTI E DIRETTIVE

2.1 “150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE APPROVAL OF THE SALESIAN CONSTITUTIONS”

Fr Stefano MARTOGLIO

**“If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our constitutions”
(Don Bosco)**

Dear confreres,

In these times so filled with events and important steps in the life of the Church and the Congregation, there is one commemoration that we must celebrate; one we cannot pass over in silence: the 150th anniversary of the definitive approval of our Constitutions and Regulations. Since 1874, with modifications and updates but in the same spirit, we have had the gift of the Salesian Constitutions that are a sure path for following Christ in the footsteps of Don Bosco.

Our “Rule of Life” is the central reference point for our life, the “sure guide” that mediates the Presence of God in our personal vocation within the Congregation of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

How much Don Bosco prayed, worked and suffered to arrive at these Constitutions! Celebrating them means recognising the Lord through the action of the Holy Spirit, the great gift of God contained in them.

Recognising them means living them, studying them, putting them into practice.

At the same time, it is with great gratitude that we reaffirm that these Constitutions are God’s Gift, one of freshness and impressive charismatic energy! They are 150 years old. They have been modernised and adapted according to the direction taken by the Church and the times, but they preserve intact

the apostolic character, disciple's heart and faithful nature of our founder Don Bosco. May we never stop contemplating this and thanking God for it!

In the following pages, in the desire to celebrate the gift of our Constitutions I will accompany these reflections with historical data concerning the formation of the Constitutions, drawing on studies by Father Francesco Motto, whom I thank profusely, and with extracts from Father Viganò's reflections that accompanied the renewed constitutions of 1984, which help us enter into the gift received.

1. What we all possess, the introduction to the Constitutions

The first step in what I write takes up what we all have in hand, with some brief comments: the introductions by three Rectors Major to the promulgation of the successive versions of the Constitutions:

Father Egidio Viganò:

Here at last, dear confreres, is our renewed and approved Rule of Life. It is offered to you in a manual which every Salesian should keep with him as his identity card.

It contains the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, our "basic code", revised and re-written in accordance with the requirements of Vatican II ("*Ecclesiae Sanctae*" II, 1,12-14).

In addition, it contains the updated version of the General Regulations, which form an integral part of the particular law of our Society. In the manual you will also find some of the writings of our father, St John Bosco, which are enriched with his spiritual experience. The serious and wide-ranging revision of the text was carried out by the whole Congregation over a period of many years and is the fruit of the work of no fewer than three General Chapters (20th, 21st and 22nd); it ensures continuity with our origins, the ecclesial character of the Salesian apostolic consecration and the natural tendency of Don Bosco's mission to reach out to the whole world.

On 25 November 1984, Solemnity of Christ the King, the Apostolic See

approved the present Constitutions, once again declaring authoritatively “the authenticity of the gospel way of life traced out by the founder.” They set out the spiritual riches of our Salesian tradition; they define its apostolic project; they trace out our path of holiness and invite us to witness to it as the most precious gift we can offer the young.

On 8 December 1984, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the date “on which all our greatest enterprises and events began and reached fulfilment”, the Rector Major promulgated this precious rewritten text. We welcome our rule of life with gratitude and trust as being the “living testament of Don Bosco” coming from the hands of the Virgin Help of Christians herself.

Father Egidio Viganò:

Rector Major

Rome, 8 December 1984,

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This introduction by Father Viganò, which we all carry in our hearts and which for many of us is the introduction to the Constitutions that were given to us at our first religious profession, is extremely enlightening for the direction this letter takes, because it sets out some focal points briefly but clearly: the contents we will find, the authentic spirit contained there as “the authenticity of the gospel way of life traced out by the Founder”, the spirit of grateful prayer for the gift received.

The prayer that Father Egidio Viganò adds at the end of his introduction, words of thanks for the gift received in the Constitutions, is a prayer to be faithful in our personal lives to the path of the gospel way of life given to us, to be open to contemplation of the presence and action of God that is expressed through this rule of life.

Father Pascual Chávez

Dear confreres,

Eighteen years have passed since the promulgation of the renewed and approved text of our Rule of Life, the result of three extraordinary General Chapters in response to the request of Vatican II.

As the then Rector Major, Father Egidio Viganò, said in the presentation of the Constitutions and Regulations, they “set out the spiritual

riches of our Salesian tradition; they define its apostolic project; they trace out our path of holiness, and invite us to witness to it as the most precious gift we can offer the young." As such, the text retains all its validity and all its richness, and should therefore be known, meditated upon, prayed and brought into our life.

However, while attempting to adapt the Rule of Life to the new needs of the Congregation, during the last three General Chapters (23rd, 24th, 25th) some appropriate modifications have been made which were subsequently approved by the Holy See.

In the Constitutions, changes have been introduced in articles ... It is therefore considered appropriate to publish a second edition including the aforementioned changes. I hope that it offers the possibility of once again welcoming the Constitutional text "as a precious treasure" entrusted to us by Don Bosco, while we hear him say: "If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions".

May Mary Help of Christians, on whose solemnity I present this second edition, make us docile to the transforming action of the Holy Spirit in order to model our lives on Don Bosco's life, like the first Salesians.

Father Pascual Chávez V.
Rector Major

In the presentation of the renewed Constitutions, Father Pascual Chávez briefly takes up two fundamental points: fidelity to the Spirit and updating some of the contents of the texts. Authentic fidelity is the ability to accept and integrate the signs of the times, after the careful evaluation of the General Chapters, into the constitutional texts, as has been done.

In a few brief words Father Pascual leaves us with the way for us to appropriate the Constitutions: the text "must therefore be known, meditated upon, prayed and brought into life". Four steps that are worth a religious life!

Known: we all studied the rule of life in the novitiate; but did the novitiate finish this study? Knowing means having an experience of wisdom which always begins by comparing the rule with our personal life, and vice versa.

Meditated upon: putting life and faith together; as for the Word of God so also for the Constitutions.

Prayed: the first reflection is always in union with God, in prayer. What is given to us in the Constitutions has the fragrance of eternal life, cannot but lead to prayer, and cannot be contained in prayer.

Brought into life: a living rule, life lived! Observance is the spirit of a life. Over the years, our fidelity to the Constitutions grows with us, otherwise it would have already died out, as well as our vocation through fidelity to the Constitutions.

Ángel Fernández Artime

Dear confreres,

31 years have passed since the promulgation of the renewed and approved text of our Rule of Life, the fruit of the work of no fewer than three General Chapters in accordance with the requirements of Vatican II.

As the then Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò said in presenting the Constitutions and Regulations, these “set out the spiritual riches of our Salesian tradition; they define its apostolic project; they trace out our path of holiness and invite us to witness to it as the most precious gift we can offer the young.”

...

I think it would be therefore appropriate to publish a third edition containing these modifications. I hope that it will provide the opportunity once again for us to welcome the text of the Constitutions “as a precious treasure” entrusted to us by Don Bosco.

Again he is saying to us: “If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions.”

...

Father Ángel Fernández Artime
Rector Major

In handing over the renewed Constitutions to us, Father Ángel takes up the theme of continuity in the changes made and above all the dimension of “the most precious treasure” entrusted to us by Don Bosco.

Precious treasure: the freshness of the Constitutions is impressive! They do not age as the years go by. They are continu-

ously subject to personal and institutional discernment. They need to integrate and evolve in the same spirit, but they are always very fresh and up to date.

We must give thanks for a gift of a charism that is so relevant and so well expressed and renewed by our fathers, who were able to remove the encrustations of time so that the gift of the Spirit would always shine through.

In a word: it is clear that the Salesian Constitutions are a gift greater than each of us, but also than all of us. They embody a fidelity to the spirit of the Founder that materialises in the Congregation today. But at the same time they place us before the Congregation to come, in fidelity to Christ and in the footsteps of Don Bosco.

I would like to conclude this first part, drawn from the introductions of our Rectors Major to the different editions, with what is expressed in the Foreword of the text of the Constitutions:

For us Salesians, our Rule Book is Don Bosco's living testament. "If you have loved me in the past," he tells us, "continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions."¹

Fr Michael Rua, Don Bosco's first successor, reminds us: "When Don Bosco sent his first sons to America he had himself photographed in the act of handing to Fr John Cagliero, who headed the expedition, the book of the Constitutions as though to say: 'I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place. Keep them as you would a precious treasure!'"²

Constitutions: the living Don Bosco! The observance of the Constitutions, an expression of love for Don Bosco. Nothing is clearer and stronger, accompanied by the image of Don Bosco giving Father Cagliero the Constitutions as "his presence". This was entrusted to us by the first of Don Bosco's disciples, Father Rua.

¹ BM XVII, 232

² cf. Don Rua, L. 1.12.1909

2. The path that led to the Rule's approval

Let us now immerse ourselves in the historical process of the formation and approval of the Salesian Constitutions. I am drawing on a document written by Father Francesco Motto, whom I sincerely thank, on the process of approval of the Constitutions, referring you to a broader and more developed reading of Father Motto's complete text.

It is a valuable and most enlightening chronological description which I believe is not known to many of us confreres, at least in all its parts, and for this reason is even more valuable.

Below is a summary of Father Motto's text:

The process of the papal approval of the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales [henceforth the Salesian Congregation], culminated with the decree of 13 April 1874 by the then Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars [henceforth SCBR]. We assume that the main stages are well known.³ Equally well-known, we assume, is also the sequence of dozens of constitutional texts at the heart of this process.⁴ Here we simply intend to examine some problematic issues that the parties in question had to face over a decade from 1864-1874, with a final outcome that must have left them all moderately satisfied.

A quick look at the formation, temperament, mentality and above all the role of the key figures will immediately explain the complexity of the process.

³ Cf. F. MOTTO, *Il laborioso e sofferto cammino per l'approvazione delle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales (1858-1874)* in *La Parola e la Storia. Uno sguardo salesiano*, a cura di A. GIRAUDO. Roma, LAS 2017, pp 105-161; ID. *Don Bosco fondatore e la Curia romana. L'approvazione delle costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales e delle sue Costituzioni (1864-1874, in Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana)*, a cura di M. Midali. Atti del Simposio). Roma, S.D.B., pp. 225-246; ID., *Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii. Fonti letterarie dei capitoli scopo, forma, voto di obbedienza, povertà e castità*, in RSS 2 (1983) 341-384.

⁴ ID, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875*, a cura di F. Motto. Roma, LAS 1982.

I. The key figures

The applicant, legislator and negotiator, Father John Bosco

Among the key figures in the process is obviously the applicant, Father John Bosco. Although lacking personal experience in formal religious life, in-depth legal training, or consultants to systematically assist him he embarked, practically alone, on drafting constitutional texts for a new Congregation. This was a somewhat bold undertaking given the law that had just come into force in the Kingdom of Sardinia repealing the civil recognition of many religious orders, confiscating their assets, and its extension in 1866-1867 to the Kingdom of Italy (the so-called subversive laws). Actually, this legislation did not set out to restrict individual citizens' freedom to associate, to pool their capital and professional skills, even religious ones, for purposes that were obviously not against the law.

During the long process, Don Bosco, who tended to be rigid with regard to some aspects that were unrealistically unattainable at the time and even unavailable to the kinds of compromise suggested by the very authorities who were dealing with the approval, fell victim to unrealistic expectations for over a decade. *The continual appeal to his own experience*, which he tended to lengthen, the adoption of articles approved for other Congregations but in different political, social and religious circumstances, other not always persuasive arguments, did not always make an impression on the mindset of the prelates called upon to make a judgement. *Especially since heavy criticism of the Oratory's practice and the Constitutions being approved were arriving from Turin.* On the other hand, Don Bosco strongly felt the demands coming to him from the society and politics of his time, and did not resign himself to the thought that his own Society would be shaped differently from the one he had conceived. Armed with bold hope, he eventually had to **resign himself to obtaining the desired conditions of freedom and agility in his operations in stages - but more quickly than other founders.**

At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that at the same time as the process of approving the Constitutions was underway, Don Bosco was playing a delicate role as a private intermediary between the Italian government and the Holy See for the appointment of bishops pleasing to both parties and for them to be granted the temporalities [temporal possessions] through the so-called *exequatur*. This role involved further personal and correspondence contacts with Pius IX, with Cardinal Secretary of State Antonelli, other prelates in Rome, and Archbishop Gastaldi himself.

The judges: the pope, the Roman authorities and their consultants

Among those who intervened in the procedural process in the first place was Pope Pius IX, whom Don Bosco, in relations of mutual esteem and affection, addressed several times both at private audiences and through intermediaries or by correspondence. In principle, the pontiff was generous in granting him exceptions to important rules, faculties and indulgences that we did not want to include in the constitutional text; but in the formal legal field, especially in final and definitive decisions, he never bypassed the authority of the competent SCBR and possibly that of the Council.

A decisive role in the approval process was played by the SCBR, chaired successively by two cardinals (Angelo Quaglia 1863-1872, Andrea Bizzarri, 1873-1877) and by two secretaries, Stanislao Svegliati (1863-1871) and Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi (1871-1875), the latter on friendly terms with Don Bosco. The guidelines they had to comply with were given by the *Methodus* of 1863⁵, which attempted to identify some common norms, while gradually a new set of canons for congregations of simple vows were being developed; only at the beginning of the 20th century would this come to a definitive arrangement.⁶ In the suggestions and corrections to the articles of a constitutional text, above all the SCBR had to safeguard the freedom of the Ordinaries, who often felt overridden by the concessions given by the pope himself. Moreover, the judging authorities did not consider it inappropriate to establish friendly relationships and collaboration with the founder-applicant and to give explanations, suggest alternatives, inform him about the legal terms beyond which it was not allowed or productive to venture. An important role was also played by the Roman *consultors* of the SCBR, chosen from among the members of ancient Orders, **experts in religious life** who also knew the juridical requirements of such

⁵ *Methodus quae a Sacra Congregatione Episcoporum et Regularium servatur in approbandis novis institutis votorum simplicium...*, in *Collectanea in usum Secretariae Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium*, cura A. Bizzarri, archiepiscopi Philippensis secretarii edita, Romae, Ex Typographia Rev. Camerae Apostolicae, 1863, 828-829.

⁶ G. Rocca, *Le Costituzioni delle congregazioni religiose dell'Ottocento. Storia e sviluppo fino al Codex Iuris Canonici del 1917*, in A. Dieguez (a cura di) *Le Costituzioni e i Regolamenti di don Luigi Guanella. Approcci storici e tematici*. Roma, Nuove Frontiere 1998, pp. 73-88. Vatican Council I did not have time to examine the 18 provisions prepared for the purpose, but they were useful for Pope Leo XIII in drawing up his Apostolic Constitution *Conditae a Christo* of 8 December 1900 (ASS, 33 (1900) 341-347).

life very well, but could not easily interpret the needs of the political, cultural and social times as the new founders, and Don Bosco in particular, could do. In a time like the nineteenth century, with the general restructuring of religious life after the upheavals of the French Revolution, the events of 1848, and a time of liberal legislation, their conservative tendency was taken for granted.

Turin's archbishops⁷

According to the *Methodus*, the bishop of the main house and the houses where the works of the Congregation itself were located was necessarily involved in the papal approval of a Congregation and its Constitutions. In addition to drafting letters of commendation favourable or otherwise to the fledgling Congregation, they could also freely grant it diocesan approval and enrich it with concessions and privileges, as in fact the bishop of Casale Monferrato did with regard to the Salesian Congregation.

In Turin, after the death of Archbishop *Luigi Fransoni* (1862), who had always been very supportive of Don Bosco and his work but was cautious about approving the Constitutions, five years later, in February 1867, he was succeeded by Archbishop *Alessandro Riccardi di Netro* (1808-1870), who had already been Bishop of Savona and Noli for 25 years. While originally on good terms with Don Bosco, during his time in Turin he transitioned from agreement to aloofness, and subsequently to being distant, ultimately adopting an attitude of resistance. He was only in Turin for four years, and Don Bosco would have found him much less flexible than he could have imagined on issues of episcopal jurisdiction and the autonomy of his as yet inchoate Institute. The formation the archbishop had received at the theological faculty of the university had shaped the cultured prelate in a very specific ecclesiology which would make him a staunch opponent of the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility at the Vatican Council. With Archbishop *Riccardi*, who hoped for a Salesian Congregation at the service of the individual bishops and not a centralised and independent inter-diocesan Congregation, the **real nub of the issue** came to the surface, which then became the bone of contention, namely the relationship of the fledgling society with the jurisdiction of the bishops. Even more demanding in Don Bosco's regard was his successor, Archbishop *Lorenzo Gastaldi* (1815-1883), a former Rosminian, a man with

⁷In this regard see the study by G. Tuninetti, *Gli arcivescovi di Torino e don Bosco fondatore* in *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana*, a cura di M. Midali. Atti del Simposio). Roma, S.D.B., pp. 247-278.

a strong character, tenacious convictions. He was a genuine reformer whose programme of episcopal government aimed at normalising the ecclesiastical discipline of the diocese, and was inspired by a very precise ecclesiological perspective, including the relations between bishops and religious institutes. He fought for the seriousness of the ecclesiastical and religious life of the archdiocese, convinced that “good must be done well”. It was therefore easy to clash with Don Bosco, a man of action, intent on consolidating his religious Society, and who was motivated by a different angle on things: “Good is to be done as one can”. Paradoxically, as bishop of Saluzzo in 1867, Bishop Gastaldi proposed an immediate and broad approval of the Salesian Congregation and Constitutions to the Roman authorities; as archbishop of Turin, besides triggering a dispute with Don Bosco for various reasons of ecclesiastical discipline that spanned a decade, he also repeatedly submitted substantial and critical observations on the Constitutions to Rome, right up to the eve of their approval and even afterwards. His appointment to both dioceses had been suggested by Don Bosco and unfortunately, once he pointed this out to the archbishop, the latter only took a harder stance. Other bishops also had a say, *especially those from Piedmont*, all in favour of Don Bosco, with the exception of very few who were only opposed to the constitutional articles that overrode their episcopal authority: in practical terms the formation of novices, candidates for Orders and canonical procedures. For the rest, none of the authoritative figures who expressed themselves regarding the Salesian work – cardinals, bishops, priests, religious – had ever raised any criticism regarding the education of young people provided at Valdocco.

II. Initial stage

Turin, 1854-1863

Don Bosco, director of the Turin Oratories from March 1852, felt the need to draw up a set of regulations for the heterogeneous group of volunteers, priests and laity around him in 1853-1854. He planned to structure it according to a pattern that became increasingly clear as his experience progressed. When his plan to induct four seminarians failed, he tried again with another four (John Cagliero, Michael Rua, Joseph Rocchietti in 1852 and James Artiglia in 1854) who accepted the invitation to “*engage in... a trial of practical charity toward neighbour, in view of making a promise of it, and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow to the Lord.*”⁸ In 1855 a priest, Vittorio Alasonatti,

⁸Manuscript of Fr Rua, undated, in ASC A 4630102.

undertook private vows or promises, followed in 1856 by two clerics, Michael Rua and John Baptist Francesia.

The following year, having received the precise point of view of the new liberal jurisprudence from Minister Rattazzi, he decided to consult Pope Pius IX directly. During his long stay in Rome in 1858, he drew up a "Draft set of Regulations", which he had reviewed by Rosminian Father General Giovanni Battista Pagani before talking to the pope about it. Pius IX advised him – as Don Bosco repeated so often – to found a religious association with simple vows, but which before the State would be a simple association of private citizens who preserved all their civil rights.⁹

In a very short time, thanks to other Constitutions, Don Bosco prepared a new "Draft set of Regulations" (**Ar**) consisting of a foreword, historical information and 8 chapters with a total of 58 articles. In the following two years, with minimal input from clerics Ghivarello and Rua, he made changes and added four new chapters with a total of 78 articles. The resulting text (**Do**), signed on 12 June 1860 by members of the new society (18 December 1859), was sent to Archbishop Fransoni in exile in Lyon.¹⁰ He received only a small reservation on the vow of chastity from the prelate, while the superior of the Lazarists (aka Vincentians) in Turin, Father Marcantonio Durando, consulted by the Vicar Capitular, Giuseppe Zappata, expressed reservations especially concerning *the higher authority* in the Congregation. Thus he had very early identified the *punctum dolens* – the so-called *dimissorial letters* for tonsure and minor and major Orders issued by the Superior and not by the Bishop – something that would drag on until after the approval of the Constitutions, to the great suffering and disappointment of Don Bosco.

The **Do** constitutional text of 1860 was subsequently subjected to corrections and additions with the addition of **three new chapters** with a total of 107 articles; among them the problematic ones regarding the holder of the concession for the aforementioned *dimissorial letters* and the one concerning *the education of the clergy*, added as one of the purposes of the Congregation.

With Turin by then a *sede vacante*, Don Bosco requested the diocesan approval of the constitutional text at the time from the Vicar Capitular.¹¹

a. He specified in it that he had taken into account the observations of various authoritative members of the clergy in Turin and

⁹ Don Bosco reiterated this papal advice on many occasions, mistakenly convinced it was a pass for easy and rapid approval of the Congregation and the Constitutions.

¹⁰ E(m) I, lett. 438, 11 June 1860, see also E(m) X, lett.

¹¹ E(m) I lett. 643 Bosco-Zappata, [9] March 1863.

Piedmont and that he had followed the rules of similar institutes that he cited.

- b. He also highlighted the special nature of the new Institute suggested by the pope, and which he would continue to repeat for a decade to each interlocutor: **“My purpose is to establish a Society whose individuals retain all civil rights before the government authorities ; while before the Church it is a true moral body or a religious society.”**

A legitimate goal, of course, but the reference to civil rights, at a time of growing Church-State conflict, would become the third major obstacle to the approval of the Constitutions after the question of *dimissorial letters* and *the education of the clergy*. It was hardly a coincidence that Zappata, the Vicar Capitular, barely issues a letter of commendation but not of diocesan approval, even assuming he had the faculty for this.

Rome 1864: decretum laudis

In accordance with the *Methodus* just published for the approval of a new Congregation, on 12 February 1864, through Secretary of State Cardinal Antonelli,¹² Don Bosco sent the constitutional text to Rome, consisting of *16 chapters and the list of commendations by bishops* that were received.¹³ In the attached letter he wrote that he had accepted “the basics” suggested by the pontiff in 1858 and that he was *willing to accept all the corrections* and changes, without making “*any kind of observation*”, indeed he would have been “very much obliged to anyone who will help me to perfect that statutes of this society”.

But as we shall see, he would not actually be as yielding and malleable. Indeed, already on this occasion in a second attached page¹⁴ he pointed out to the authorities in Rome

- a. the potential inter-diocesan *nature of the works of the newly established Society*, inferring from it the need for the *full jurisdiction* of the Superior General over it.
- b. and by anticipating the difficulties that would arise in this regard, he pointed out three reasons in favour of it: the freedom to deploy personnel *in different dioceses*, the possibility of aggregating his clerics to those dioceses with a number, lower than expected, of clerics *exempt from military service*, the necessity of freely placing personnel in formation in communities that promoted the essential

¹² E (m) II, lett. 735 Bosco-Antonelli, 12 February 1864.

¹³ E (m) II, lett. 736 Bosco-Pio IX, 12 February 1864.

¹⁴ ID., *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, p. 229.

educational experience with young people. In other words, he asked for the granting of the faculties to issue *dimissorial letters*.

On 23 July 1864, by specific decree of the SCBR, the Salesian Society was “praised and commended” as a Congregation of simple vows, ***placed under the government of a Superior General, but “without prejudice to the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries in accordance with the sacred Canons and Apostolic Constitutions”***; the ***“approval of the Constitutions was handed down at the most appropriate time”***.¹⁵ Thirteen *Animadversiones* [observations] were attached to the decree, mostly reflecting the thirteen observations in Italian by Carmelite consultant Angelo Savini.¹⁶ The ones that limited his freedom were not so pleasing to Don Bosco: namely, for granting ***dimissorial letters, dissolving vows, founding new houses and taking on the running of seminaries, accepting external members*** through affiliation. These are matters that would be at the heart of the “dispute” with authorities in Rome and Turin for ten long years.

III. Intermediate stage

Not just a question of dimissorial letters (1865-1867)

Don Bosco, who certainly expected something better, thanked them and assured them that he would welcome the observations. But in a lengthy document, the *Supra animadversiones in Constitutiones*, certainly drawn up with the help of some religious experts, **he criticised the appropriateness of many of the changes suggested by Rome, given the needs and particular circumstances of his Congregation.**¹⁷ In particular it was argued, and rightly so,

- a. that the article concerning the *dimissorial letters* granted by the Superior had been transcribed from other Constitutions already approved with a number of houses (Rosminians, Oblates of the Virgin Mary, Vincentians were mentioned)
- b. and that removing it would have questioned the very existence of the Salesian Society, since it would not have been possible to preserve the unity of the internal regime of the houses, the unity of administration, spirit, discipline, doctrine and authority. Especially since the episcopal sees were often vacant, and candidates came from distant towns and did not always know the dioceses to which

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 231.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 230.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 232-234.

they belonged. He also reiterated the issue of the aforementioned military conscription.

He then hastened to make direct contact with the key figures in Rome. Strongly pushing for the “*Decretum laudis*”, already at the end of February 1865 he made an unsuccessful request to Cardinal Quaglia for the concession to issue dimissorial letters to his ordinands.¹⁸ He then tried, still to no avail, to obtain the approval of the Salesian Society directly from the pope, whom he called *suasor and impulsor*, stating that he had accepted the suggestions of the Holy See *quoad fieri posse visum est*.¹⁹ This was an addition that had allowed him to reject various *animadversiones*.

Since further requests to the pope by correspondence were pointless, in January 1867 he attempted a direct and personal approach in Rome, mainly aimed at quickly obtaining the faculty to issue dimissorial letters “*titulo mensae communis*”, that is, without the ecclesiastical patrimony that was normally required.²⁰

- A. Three papal audiences and various interviews with cardinals, bishops, Jesuits, Piarists and other ecclesiastics did not have any effect, as well as further correspondence, once back in Turin, with the well-known cardinals Antonelli, Berardi, Patrizi.
- B. Only his Roman friend, Msgr Giovanni Battista Fratejacci, suggested a way out of the *impasse*: faced with the widespread mindset among bishops regarding their inalienable responsibilities and the Roman practice that granted the privilege of dimissorials some years after papal approval of the Congregation, he invited him to make the new archbishop of Turin agreeable to following *the path opened by another two Congregations* in the same juridical situation, namely with simple vows and lacking approval: by asking for “*the indulgence to ordain ten or twelve clerics, an indulgence that could then be extended and renewed little by little.*”²¹

But Don Bosco went his own way, and with the positive opinion of two other Roman prelates, he resubmitted the request to have the approval of the constitutional text “*with the corrections, variations and additions*” that were considered appropriate.²² Msgr Fratejacci immediately saw to extinguishing his hopes: it was not the time to insist, given the tensions between Religious Orders and Bishops; it was better

¹⁸ E (m) II, lett. 805 Bosco-Quaglia 28 February 1865.

¹⁹ E (m) II, lett. 810 Bosco-Pio IX 30 March 1865.

²⁰ E (m) II, lett. 996 Bosco-Pio IX 7 January 1867.

²¹ MB VIII 738-742 [BM VIII 319], 8 April 1867.

²² E (m) II, lett. 996 Bosco-Pio IX 26 June 1867.

to seek just the approval of the Congregation even without the privilege of dimissorial letters, indeed to withdraw the application submitted and re-present it to the Council. He advised caution for now, and not take other steps, not to distribute copies of the Constitutions.²³ Don Bosco seemed to give in, but sent, in Latin as requested, a new printed text of the Constitutions (Ls), in which he accepted minor requests, relegated the chapter on “*Externs*” to an appendix, but left the problematic articles unchanged. He certainly did not anticipate that these would increase in number in the future, with explicit requests from those dealing with the matter to add two entire chapters on the *novitiate and ecclesiastical studies*.

Steps backward in Turin, one step forward in Rome (1868-1869)

1868 seemed to resurrect hopes with the diocesan approval of the Salesian society by the bishop of Casale Monferrato and the addition of faculties and privileges.²⁴

a. But two months later, the new Archbishop of Turin, Alessandro Riccardi di Netro, after making drastic decisions about the approaches to theological studies of Salesian clerics at the Seminary and having granted a generic letter of commendation, he was quite heavy-handed with the Prefect of the SCBR Cardinal Quaglia,²⁵ putting forward many reservations about the printed text given him and asking for an expert to be sent to Turin to “examine things and report on them”.²⁶

b. He found an expert himself in Turin in the aforementioned Father Marcantonio Durando, sending Cardinal Quaglia a real *cahier de doléance* on the formation and studies of clerics, their access to Orders, the risks run by the dioceses, the studies of lay members, etc. etc. He also did not conceive of a novitiate for clerics “mixed not only with lay members, but with the boys with whom the members live today.” “The College in Turin is already in chaos as of now, with a mixture of artisans, students, laity, clergy and priests,” he concluded.²⁷

c. Even in the eyes of the Holy See’s trustee in Turin, Monsignor Gaetano Tortone, “the clerics’ over-familiarity and intimacy in the courtyard with other young men learning a trade was detrimental to *studies, ecclesiastical spirit and principles of good breeding*.”²⁸

²³ MB VIII 878-882. Fratejacci - don Bosco 8 April 1867

²⁴ F. MOTTO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 234-235.

²⁵ MB IX 95-96 [BM IX 53-54], 7 March 1868.

²⁶ MB IX 96-97 [BM IX 54], 14 March 1868.

²⁷ F. MOTTO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 236-237.

²⁸ MB IX 367-368 [BM IX 170-173], 6 August 1868.

d. Less critical was the judgement of journalist Father Giacomo Margotti. Asked for an opinion from Rome on the studies and ecclesiastical formation of Salesian clerics, he offered many praises for the “deep piety”, the “sound doctrine” guaranteed by the “Ecclesiastical Instruction”, even if it was contrary to the “principle of independence”.²⁹

e. Instead, Bishop Gastaldi, bishop of Saluzzo, sided decisively with Don Bosco, expressly asking for the approval of the Salesian Congregation and its constitutions as a new Religious Order required by the times.³⁰

In Rome, on the other hand, the aforementioned Carmelite consultor, **Angelo Savini**, sided with the opposite view, judging the text of the Constitutions that had been submitted (Ls) as little more than “the basis for Constitutions still to be drawn up”,³¹ while much more benevolent was the judgement of Msgr Svegliati who invited Don Bosco to substantially modify only the articles on the *dimissorial letters and the studies of the clerics*, since “the other things can be approved with slight modifications, although it would have been desirable for all the observations made in other circumstances to have been included in the aforementioned Constitutions.”

In this way, in accordance with the *Methodus*, on 1 March 1869 the decree of approval of the Salesian Society was signed with a novelty regarding the *dimissorial letters*: **an indult was granted to the Rector Major for ten years to admit to Orders boys who had entered Salesian houses before turning 14 and who had become Salesians**. Should they leave the Congregation, they had to suspend their priestly ministry until acquiring the expected ecclesiastical patrimony and being accepted by a bishop. As for the rest, they would *wait for the other observations to be integrated*.³²

The tenacious battle for the dimissorial letters – but the one on the vow of *poverty*, considered contradictory, was already looming on the horizon – thanks also to some heavenly aid, as Don Bosco would tell his men, had **already borne fruit, albeit partial and ad tempus**. Don Bosco could be satisfied.

When the news reached Turin, the king’s procurator tried to submit the decision to the *exequatur*, overriding the dictates of the *subversive laws*. Don Bosco rejected this: the Roman approval was an internal matter for the Church, not connected to any kind of civil recognition. Pius IX and Don Bosco had seen things well, but the ultimate conclusion was missing.

²⁹ MB IX 498-499 [BM IX 227-228], 29 January 1869.

³⁰ MB IX 237-239 [BM IX 219-220], 25 May 1868.

³¹ F. MOTTO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 237-238.

³² *Ibidem*, 239-240

IV. Indefinite stage: Issues come to a head 1873

With the Congregation approved just 5 years after the *Decretum laudis* – the *Methodus* required a *congruum tempus* – Don Bosco, with Father Rua's help, could perhaps proceed with a further revision of the constitutional text *Ls*. He then took advantage of *two short stays in Rome* in June and September 1871 – motivated by the ongoing dispute between Church and State over the granting of the *exequatur* to new bishops, among whom Archbishop Gastaldi³³ – to request the granting of the faculty to issue *dimissorial letters for cases not covered by* the decree of 1 March 1869.

At the end of August 1872, he had the favourable opinion of his confidant, Cardinal Berardi,³⁴ once again retouching the printed text of 1867 but still keeping the four points he considered essential:

- a. the faculty to grant *dimissorial letters to quemcumque episcopum* for boys taken in under the age of 14 while for others, the automatic pontifical permission upon presentation of the list of candidates;
- b. *the exclusion of all canonical references* hypothetically in conflict with the civil laws of suppression of convents in 1866 and 1877;
- c. the possibility of “affiliation” to the Society of “externs” in a chapter placed in the appendix to the text;
- d. *the omission of the formal prescription* of a three-yearly report to the Holy See.
- e. In an attached *declaratio* he justified the acceptance or rejection of the 13 *animadversiones* of 1864, reaffirmed in 1868-1869.³⁵ The new Consultor, Dominican Raimondo Bianchi, noted crudely in 1873 that “the majority of them have been omitted or evaded under more or less specious pretexts.”³⁶

Disagreement with Gastaldi

At the same time, the new archbishop of Tuirn, Archbishop Gastaldi, imposed three strict conditions on Don Bosco for the approval of the Salesian Constitutions:

1. establishing a *novitiate*;
2. *containment within precise limits of the exemption from episcopal authority*;
3. *the non-admissibility in the constitutional text of the faculty of dimissorial letters*; he considered them legitimate, wanted by the

³³ RSS 10 (January-June 1987) 3-79.

³⁴ MB IX 237-239, 2 April 1867

³⁵ F. MOTTO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, p. 248

³⁶ *Ibidem* p. 242

Council of Trent and in harmony with the limited faculties granted by the decree of approval to the Salesian Society.³⁷ Gastaldi said he was convinced that the Congregation would not survive after Don Bosco's death if his observations were not received and accepted in Rome. Don Bosco replied harshly to the archbishop,³⁸ who reiterated his conditions. Don Bosco's appeal to the papal concessions obtained *vivae vocis oraculo*³⁹ could certainly not induce Archbishop Gastaldi to change deeply rooted theological, juridical and pastoral convictions.⁴⁰

Diplomatic offensive

a. Don Bosco, in the worst period of his activity as legislator and negotiator, prepared for a diplomatic offensive. Undeterred, he prepared a new text of the Constitutions (Ns) for the press to be taken to Rome, together with the desired and essential letter of commendation from Archbishop Gastaldi, who granted it but somewhat critically.

b. Gastaldi, fearing that Don Bosco's potential renunciation in Rome of seeking the approval of the Constitutions might be attributed to the conditions he had imposed, took care to also explain them to Cardinal Prospero Caterini, Prefect of the Congregation of the Council. He only granted Don Bosco the right to issue dimissorial letters for those who had entered the Oratory before the age of 14 and had professed perpetual vows.⁴¹

In Rome, however, on 1 March 1873 Don Bosco submitted a formal request to the pope for "the definitive approval of the Constitutions and the full power to issue the Dimissorial letters".⁴² He attached various copies of the revised Constitutions (Ns), other favourable letters of commendation from Piedmont and Liguria, including a critical one from the archbishop of Genoa, similar to the one from Gastaldi.⁴³

Archbishop Gastaldi shuddered. In April he asked Cardinal Andrea Bizzarri, Prefect of the SCBR about the precise juridical status of the Salesian Society at that time, and going into the merits of the Constitutions he reiterated his already well-known observations.⁴⁴ Three months later he posed the same question again to the secretary, Vitelleschi, who replied that the Salesian Society was an institute of

³⁷ MB X 683-684. 4 October 1872

³⁸ E(m) III lett. 1701, Bosco-Gastaldi, 9 November 1872.

³⁹ E(m) III lett. 1706, Bosco-Gastaldi, 23 November 1872.

⁴⁰ E(m) III lett. 1706, Bosco-Gastaldi, 23 November 1872.

⁴¹ MB X 697-698 [BM X 315-316], 19 February 1873.

⁴² E(m) III lett. 1739, Bosco-Pio IX, 1 March 1873.

⁴³ E(m) III lett. 1782, Bosco-Gastaldi, 14 May 1873.

⁴⁴ OE XXV 348-353, lett. Gastaldi-Bizzarri, 20 April 1873

simple vows and as such not exempt from the bishop's jurisdiction, "*without prejudice to the Constitutions when they have been approved by the Holy See, and the particular privileges obtained by the same*". However, he admitted that "*Father Bosco has obtained more than one particular privilege from His Holiness regarding the dimissorial letters to be issued to a certain number of pupils; and ultimately, in the Audience of 8 August he had obtained another similar one for six students.*" **In mid-July, Archbishop Vitelleschi** advised Don Bosco that the new consultor, Carmelite Raimondo Bianchi, who was hard and ungenerous, "had proposed many amendments to the constitutional text"⁴⁵ and at the end of the month sent him 28 *animadversiones* taken from the 38 presented to him by Bianchi. He suggested that he accept them and include them in the Constitutions because "*most of them were the application of principles established by Rome for new Institutes*" and then send them back to Rome again. **Above all, he invited him to amend the articles on the three hot topics of the moment: the Novitiate, studies and Ordinations, as subjects on which "the Ordinaries have always insisted, and the Holy See has held firm and uncontested."**⁴⁶

Don Bosco took the hit. He was on the brink of discouragement, so much so that he considered not applying, **but he did not give up.** He rehashed the usual, recurring arguments, already worn out, out of time or lacking in credibility, and above all pointed out that six *animadversiones* radically contrasted with his long-standing expectations, indeed aggravated them: no. 4 on civil rights, no. 5 on the vow of poverty, no. 6 on the novitiate, no. 17 on the time and place for philosophical and theological studies, no. 25 on purchases and alienations, civil lawsuits, and the last, no. 28 but the most contentious, on dimissorial letters.

Yes to the novitiate and studies

With regard to the novitiate he reiterated his known opposition to observation no. 16 which read as follows: "*There was no appropriate chapter indicating observance of the Constitution Regularis disciplina by Clement VIII and other canonical laws, demanding complete separation of novices from the professed. The novices should reside in a special house of novitiate, be separated from the professed, be totally engaged in their spiritual exercises, and not be engaged in the work of the Society.*" **However, he was willing to accept the proposal to add a chapter on the Novitiate and also on studies.**

⁴⁵ MB X 726 [BM X 335], 19 May 1873.

⁴⁶ F. MOTTO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 244-245.

No to the elimination of civil rights and the vow of poverty

As for *civil rights*, which had implications for the *vow of poverty* the situation was complex. Of the 14 articles that made up the chapter on the “Form of the society” in the very first edition (1858-1859), as many as 13 had their direct or indirect source in the Constitutions of the Cavanis Institute in Venice. Among them the second and third, with some additions and corrections in the following years, **had passed unscathed until the printed constitutional text delivered to Rome in 1873 for final approval (Ns).**

a. He was invited by Rome to suppress “the repeated mentions of the civil rights of the laity and of submission to civil laws (no. 2) and to replace the first article on the vow of poverty with those contained in the volume *Collectanea S. C. Episcoporum et Regularium N. 859*” (no. 4) which would have also responded to another observation, no.5, on the preservation of simple Benefits after professing perpetual vows.

b. *Regarding civil rights*, Don Bosco responded by appealing to the pope’s oft-mentioned suggestion in 1858. However he did propose a **compromise**: that “everything related to the submission of members to civil laws be removed; **however, I request that the words are not removed whereby members retained civil rights even after the profession of vows.**”⁴⁷

c. As for *the vow of poverty*, Don Bosco recalled that it had been agreed with Archbishop Svegliati and Cardinal Angelo Quaglia that in this case the vow of poverty extended not to ownership, but only to the administration of the fruits [usufruct] of the members’ possessions. As a logical consequence, Don Bosco observed, the reservations about the vow of poverty (no. 4) and the possession of ecclesiastical patrimony no longer applied (no. 5) because **“the only thing that guarantees us in the eyes of civil society is the members’ possessions, otherwise we remain moral entities and therefore immediately affected by the laws.”**⁴⁸

d. Don Bosco had sure references on his side: the Rule of the Institute of Charity (Rosmini) approved in 1839 and the papal decree *Super statum Regularium* of 1857, followed the following year by some *Declarationes*, had in itself made normative the principle that the vow of poverty did not take away the ability to hold *radical* ownership of goods. Therefore, in the Constitutions of the new congrega-

⁴⁷ *Ibidem* p. 246.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

tions, it was only a question of defining the vow *in relation to the use and usufruct of goods, the ownership of which was preserved.*

V. Final stage: January-April 1874

At the end of 1873 Don Bosco arrived in Rome to follow up the final stages of the long-standing process but also to try to give his contribution to Cardinal Antonelli and Minister Vigliani to the solution of the aforementioned question of the *exequatur*, in which Archbishop Gastaldi, who was also in close correspondence with Don Bosco, was also directly involved.

But the disagreements between them were increasing, both pressing for their point of view to prevail on the Holy See. There was a kind of dual-track approach going on: while the SCBR referred to the common law in force, just as the archbishop did, the pope tended to grant indulgences and privileges, which of course Don Bosco wanted.

- a. In Rome he met with Archbishop Vitelleschi and Cardinal Berardi, considered trustworthy and influential friends; in the papal audience on 5 January, forcing matters, he spoke of negotiations for an imminent foundation in Hong Kong and the United States.
- b. On 9 January 1873 Archbishop Gastaldi made a final attempt, once again telling Cardinal Bizzarri of his well-known positions regarding the novitiate, the formation of clerics, dimissorial letters etc.
- c. Don Bosco immediately had a new text of the constitutions (O) printed in which some changes were made to articles in the chapters on *religiosum regimen* and *internum regimen*, and adding the chapter of eight articles on *the Novitiate*, conceived of as being rather like an apprenticeship in active life, and the chapter *De studio*, made up of four generic and somewhat elusive articles. **However, he kept unchanged the articles that touched on civil rights, the dimissorial letters and the presence of externs in the appendix.**
- d. After further discussions, at the beginning of March he went ahead with a new printed version (P), in which he deleted *only the appendix on externs* and made a few formal corrections. The text was submitted to the attention of the particular Congregation of the four cardinal judges.
- e. Before they had even gathered, he sent them some data – which he called *thoughts* – in favour of “the approval of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society: the 33 years of experience, the commendations of 44 Bishops, the 16 houses opened in different dioceses, the in-

creased number of Salesians (about 330), and the children entrusted to them (about 7000), the almost completed negotiations to open houses in America, Africa and China” etc. In the event that any article of the Constitutions were to be modified, he was of the opinion that it could be done *in the three-yearly report* to be submitted to the Holy See on the moral, religious and material state of the Institute, or in the General Chapters that are held every three years.”

- f. Feeling powerless, his concluding statement was almost a surrender to the discretion of the cardinals: “*Finally, the Priest Bosco... expressly declares that he will take into account any correction, modification, advice that in their elevated and enlightened wisdom they deign to propose, or simply advise... so he hopes to comply with the respective Ordinaries, and peacefully continue his negotiations in favour of the foreign Missions.*”

The lengthy meeting of the *particular Congregation* of four cardinals on 24 March was postponed until 31 March, also to give the Secretary time to thoroughly review and make the corrections suggested by the prelates on the printed text, **removing, inserting and changing several articles**. Archbishop Gastaldi’s heavy remarks prevailed over Don Bosco’s diplomatic and literary efforts, over the prestige he had in Roman circles, and over his friendship with Cardinal Antonelli and Pius IX.

With the hasty *fait accompli* approach followed by the SCBR, the guidelines that for various reasons were in favour of flexibility, application of the principle of subsidiarity, relations with civil and secular society disappeared altogether or were very much diluted. In particular the aforementioned articles 2, 3 and the second paragraph of article 6 were replaced with the first four articles on the vow of poverty that had been definitively approved the year before in the Marist Constitutions. There remained a generic reference to [civil] laws in them, but in this position and detached from civil legislation, the reference to civil rights defended to the bitter end by Don Bosco was weakened. Other Congregations were invited to adopt the same articles.

On 31 March 1874, the Constitutions were approved definitively and in perpetuity, but with the constraint of introducing the *animadversiones* of Consultor Bianchi, of asking the Holy Father for the privilege of granting for *a decade the dimissorial letters for ordinations* and of petitioning him for the approval of the Constitutions thus amended and extended. Pope Pius IX gave his assent on 3 April and on 13 April the decree approving the Constitutions and the rescript on dimissorial letters were signed.

Overall assessment

Don Bosco was substantially pleased, especially for having avoided the risk of further approval *ad tempus* and having immediately obtained other concessions from the pope *vivae vocis oraculo*. Archbishop Gastaldi also had to be satisfied, seeing that his intransigence had succeeded in the twofold intent of having the exemption reduced by an extra-constitutional *decree* and of having the chapters on the *novitiate and on studies inserted*. The Holy See in turn could feel satisfied for having laid *stable foundations for the future of the Salesian work* and having satisfied, as far as possible, the aspirations of Don Bosco, who was still involved in the painful disputes in progress between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See regarding bishops, seeking some *modus vivendi* for a solution.

Details remained open regarding the interpretation of the decree. When Don Bosco informed the archbishop that he had withdrawn “the decree of the definitive approval of our rules”, the addressee noted “news of the definitive approval of his Institute, which however is not definitive.” He was wrong (it was in fact definitive) and also right (not entirely “accomplished”) since the faculties of exemption and dimissorial letters to any bishop were still excluded from the constitutional text. Don Bosco would continue to fight with the Holy See for another ten years to obtain them, just as the dispute with Archbishop Gastaldi continued for another eight years for other reasons. Once the text had been approved, Don Bosco, with a Latin teacher, immediately improved the form, toned down some of the normative prescriptions and gave some emphasis to some original instances that had become obscured along the way. In the Italian translation, the following year he retouched some rules and reinstated some provisions removed in the previous stages of the process. He particularly retouched the article on the novitiate, which was reduced from 17 to 7 articles by virtue of the papal indult *vivae vocis oraculo*. Archbishop Gastaldi protested when he came to know of this, but only many years later would the Salesians have the original approved text in their hands.

This historical excursus, full of events that demonstrate Don Bosco’s faith and determination “to the point of recklessness” is **extremely interesting**; it clearly illustrate the positions of all the other main characters, starting with Pope Pius IX, down to the different bishops and prelates who with their

positions clearly give us a view of the “Church as an institution” at the time of Don Bosco.

Undoubtedly this rich and precise narrative gives us an account of a process of “purification and consolidation” of the Salesian Constitutions beyond Don Bosco’s own intentions. A prophetic vision, beyond its time, and some “anchor points” of bishops and consultors who in the overall vision, many years later, prove that they were not all wrong... and that they contributed to firmly establishing the Salesian religious identity in the life of the Church.

3. In fidelity, the new perspectives in the revised text, the one we have today

We will once more pick up the thread of “celebrating the Constitutions”, and following this historical excursus we will now briefly draw on an issue of the Acts of the General Council (AGC 312) of 1985 in which Father Viganò presented the renewed Constitutions to the Congregation. It is a brief extract that gives us the synthesis of the original heart of the Rule of Life, with the heart of Don Bosco, updated to the journey of the universal Church.

What has been changed has not been done because it is fashionable but to increase fidelity to the direction taken by the Church.

Going to the heart of things, the Constitutions that have been our rule of life from 1984 until today are:

- **the authoritative presentation of a project of evangelical life;** they indicate the fundamental principles of our way of following Christ, its ecclesial dimension, its charismatic originality enshrining the spirit of the Founder, its healthy traditions and its effective service structures. They present a harmonious blending of gospel inspiration with clear-cut practical structures. They are the fundamental document containing the

particular law of the Congregation. Rather than laying down as a first priority detailed norms to be followed, they set out chiefly a spiritual and apostolic way of bearing witness in the spirit of the beatitudes. They help in re-reading the mystery of Christ through the eyes of Don Bosco. For this reason it has been necessary to redesign their general structure in an order and style that make their reading become a prayer and a stimulus to a life-commitment. If the one reading them does so “in faith,” or in other words through “new” eyes, he will draw from them light and strength.

- a second “novelty” is the emphasis given to the “charismatic” aspect of our Salesian vocation. In the context of the vision of the Church as ‘mystery’, the Constitutions disclose the experience of the Holy Spirit lived out in our vocation: if the Church is “a universal sacrament of salvation” in it we are the “signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially the poorest of them”. Evident from the very first article is the presence and initiative of the Spirit of the Lord, as also is the motherly intervention of Mary and the strong emphasis given to the ecclesial aspect which makes us feel inserted in the heart of the Church and at the service of its mission. This perspective enlightens us and leads us to face up in a Salesian manner to the social and cultural transformation it poses.

- A third aspect is the explicit and impelling sense of the Founder. The renewed Constitutions direct our gaze to Don Bosco and lead us to love him in his particular style of sanctification and apostolate: “We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He lived ‘as though he saw him who is invisible’.” Vatican II urged religious to concentrate their attention on the figure of their Founder, as a concrete and original expression of the many diverse forms of life and sanctity of the Church. From the Church he was born and for the Church he lived. Constant reference to Don Bosco is thus seen as “an ecclesial necessity”. Our way of “being Church”

is precisely that of reactivating in time and space the model of the Founder, as though he repeated to us each day: "Take me for your model, as I take Christ".

For while the call of God renews itself and expresses itself in different ways according to changing circumstances of place and time, it nevertheless requires a certain "constancy of orientation."

This "constancy of orientation", drawn from Don Bosco, has inspired the redrafting of the Constitutions in order to revive in us the fervour for "pastoral charity".

If it is true that "every human institution is prone to become set in its ways and is threatened by formalism", and that "exterior regularity would not be sufficient in itself to generate the worth of a life and its inherent consistency", it means that contemplation of the Founder should lead us to enter into his heart so as to understand his gospel inspiration as the living and permanent sense of our charism.

Deserving of special mention in this connection is the chapter on "the Salesian spirit" found in Part One of the Constitutions as a constituent factor of our identity. It gives shape and life to every aspect of our way of following the Lord.

From the Foreword down to the last article, through every Part and section, the text manifests the living heart of our Father: his charism, his spirit, his mission, his pastoral creativity, his capacity for communion, his religious witness, the manner of his union with God, his formative pedagogy, his brilliance as an organiser, his fatherly style of animation and government, his inborn desire to remain always with us.

• Finally, the text clarifies and defines the concrete nature and scope of our "Rule of life". The so-called particular or proper law of the Congregation "is expressed in the Constitutions, which represent our basic code, the general Regulations, the deliberations of the general chapter, the general and provincial directories, and in other decisions made by competent authorities."

The directives given in these documents together constitute our 'Rule of Life'; they guide our daily practice, define the limits of the exercise of authority and spell out exactly how the gospel path is to be followed.

The GC22 has the special merit of having reorganised all the material in the General Regulations.

The result is that the general Regulations now exhibit a quite new perspective; they flow harmoniously from the Constitutions, for the observance of which they give practical directives which provide a concrete method of application. Don Bosco, with his pedagogical insight, gave real importance to method in behaviour and activity. The sense of an updated "religious discipline" is indispensable. It bears witness and gives vital strength to our sincere membership of the Congregation.

These elements, described by Father Viganò in 1984, are currently preserved as a permanent criterion for updating the constitutional text, in order to increase fidelity. They are a continuum that has seen other changes since 1984, and will find others in the future.

The soul of the Constitutions is well renewed by the text we have quoted, for a Congregation that is increasingly international in the life stories of its members.

4. Celebrating to live: some inspiring principles of renewal of personal and institutional life that the Constitutions guarantee and contain

I think it appropriate, at this point as a further and final step, to look forward and, in celebrating the 150th anniversary of the original text, to list some of the key themes contained in the Constitutions.

I consider them suggestive for a clarification of mindsets and for guiding personal and community efforts of renewal.

We all know them, but picking them up again can only be

good for our personal and community life. Let me focus on just the main ones:

- ***Apostolic consecration***

We have already indicated the fundamental importance of this topic; here we take it from the point of view of a key theme. *In Part One* the text, through synthetic and penetrating statements in various articles, expresses the originality of the ‘**grace of unity**’ that General Chapters have pointed out as the first characteristic we must cultivate: “The Holy Spirit”, we read in the Acts of the Chapter, “calls the Salesian to an option of Christian existence which is at the same time apostolic and religious. Thus he gives him the grace of unity to live the dynamism of apostolic action and the fullness of religious life in a single movement of charity to God and to his neighbour. This type of life is not something fixed and prefabricated, but is a ‘project’ in permanent construction. Its unity is not static but is a unity in tension and in continual need of balance, of revision, of conversion and adaptation.”

The rewritten text of the Constitutions overcomes this danger with an intelligence born of faith and offers us, as we have already shown, the “grace of unity” that makes us rethink in an original form both the living integrity of our mission and that of our consecration. They permeate each other in a unified experience of life. Such a synthesis does not derive from the abstract quality of a “concept” but from the evidence of a “model”: the life of Don Bosco.

To understand well and translate into life the great values contained in our way of being and feeling “consecrated”, it is necessary to delve ever more deeply into the very soul of the consecration as a meeting of two loves, of two freedoms which fuse and become one: the “Father who consecrates us”, and we who “offer ourselves completely to him”.

It is he who consecrates us, who envelops us with his Spirit, who captures us for himself and makes us become entirely his,

who floods us with grace so as to bring all our resources to bear on his great design for the salvation of the world, but it is we who centre ourselves on him, listen to him and keep our eyes on him. All this gives rise in us to a very close and characteristic relationship with him, one which fills our psychology or inner being as 'consecrated persons'. which becomes the subject of our contemplation, the object of our affections and the mainspring which unleashes our tireless exertions.

What does the knowledge that I am a 'consecrated person' mean to me? This brings us to the crux of the whole matter. We all have experience of our fragility, spiritual superficiality and the risks of activism. This risk, the history of the Congregation and its magisterium teach us, that is an institutional as well as a personal problem.

And I come to see that the entirely gratuitous initiative of the Father is responsible not only for the birth of the Congregation in history and the holiness of Don Bosco, but also for my own vocation and my sanctification; and I see as well that the covenant and the communion that stems from it, not only nourishes my continuous dialogue as an attentive son, but guides and animates my way of life and the intensity of my actions. In the light of this blinding revelation one can understand the extraordinary importance that a permanent attitude of union with God has for every consecrated person. It is an attitude which enables the Salesian "to enjoy an experience of God's fatherhood". To contemplate the Presence of God.

He is contemplating not a God whom we might describe as generic and well-nigh shapeless, but a God with a well-defined nature from a very concrete historical perspective. The Salesian contemplates God not to escape from reality but to imbue reality with biblical depth. This gives us back our Constitutions!

The ceaseless practice of this contemplation and union will lead the Salesian in his work and in his whole existence "to celebrate the liturgy of life". It is a fine and consoling thing to know

that our apostolic consecration is sustained and made fruitful from its very beginning by the “power” of the Holy Spirit; the Lord in fact allows us, as the Apostle says, to “be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit.”

The pastoral charity of the Salesian charism therefore implies something deeply original with a “novelty of vision” and a “novelty of consecration” fruitfully linked in an “apostolic consecration” which bears with it the grace of unity. Apostolic consecration prompts us to ensure the presence of the contemplative dimension in such a way that Salesian activity appears always as a vital expression of inner depth; and to carry out our apostolic work in such a way that it transforms our religious life objectively into an uninterrupted liturgical offering.

• *The oratory criterion*

In Part Two of the Constitutions, three inspiring principles deserve to be underlined: the Oratory Criterion, the Requirement of Community, and Familiarity with Jesus Christ. The first is found in condensed form in the new art. 40: “Don Bosco’s Oratory a permanent criterion”.

The original Oratory is considered an apostolic model for reference. It is a model which is not identified with a particular structure or institution but which at the same time excludes nothing that the concrete situation might suggest. First and foremost it calls for a specific pastoral manner for assessing our various works, be they new or in need of renewal. This way of looking at things was characteristic of the heart of Don Bosco from the first appearance of this charism, and throughout his life.

At the centre of this ‘oratorian heart’ there is the predilection for the young which gives meaning to our whole life. It is a “gift of God” which springs from a “pastoral charity” realistically attentive to the urgent needs of society, so that we can meet them by means of our apostolate for the young and ordinary people.

The inspiration provided by such a criterion throws light on the ecclesial tasks in which Don Bosco wanted the Congregation to be engaged.

It is therefore a question of a complex but concrete criterion which invites us to transcend the material nature of the works and enter into Don Bosco's heart so that we can make judgements and programs from the specific aspect of his pastoral charity.

Our times and the great variety of situations in which we work demand of us a new kind of presence, both where we already are and where we shall be asked to go. Revision is necessary, with replanning and new ideas, if we are to be truly in harmony with the inspiration of our origins.

Fidelity to the 'oratory criterion' in our mission is an compelling task with ever new beginnings. We cannot look upon our present works as a fixed and definitive answer; every day, and especially at a time marked by so many changes, new problems are coming to light; there are new situations calling for ecclesial options.

• *The necessary community aspect, our fraternity*

Another inspirational principle that we find in Part Two is the community dimension proper to the Salesian style of life and pastoral work: "To live and work together is for us Salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation."

The Salesian 'house' came into being with a genuine and intense family spirit, even among confreres of different nationalities and mentalities. This is one of our traditional and brilliant characteristics: "In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, one experiences the need and joy of sharing everything, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart." The level of our common life in fraternity is at the heart of all this, and the path we have embarked on towards GC29 confirms this in full.

But the community aspect goes beyond fraternity and a family lifestyle. A particular concrete requirement of the constitutional text is that there shall be shared responsibility with regard to pastoral activity: “the apostolic mandate which the Church entrusts to us is taken up and put into effect in the first instance by the provincial and local communities”; “each of us is responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his personal gifts”; “pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility”. Our pastoral and educative project is a community endeavour in its formulation, in its realisation and in its revision.

Magnificent summaries these, contained in the constitutional text that require us to take it into our hands constantly to “enlighten” personal and institutional life and choices.

This principle of shared responsibility for the mission is animated internally by all and in particular by those who have the service of authority; and externally by a pastoral perspective in harmony with God’s Church. This is a permanent criterion of profound personal, pastoral and institutional renewal.

• *Intimate familiarity with Jesus Christ, “passionate about Jesus Christ”.*

Another inspiring principle developed in detail, especially in Part Two of the Constitutions, is that of our friendship with Christ. A daily familiar relationship which consists in the desire “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection”. “The Salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father”. Passion for Christ!

Our religious profession is a response “to the love of the Lord Jesus who calls us to follow him more closely”, and the union with God which permeates the whole of Salesian life is rooted in a “simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ”.

The constitutional text treats with particular care two vital aspects of this familiar relationship with the Lord: the following of Christ in the practice of the evangelical counsels, and

the easy and sincere meeting with him as an individual and in the praying community.

It is of interest to emphasise in the first place that the Salesian way of following Christ, as expressed in the Constitutions, gives pride of place among the vows (as did Don Bosco) to the attitude of obedience: our life of mission tends first and foremost to make us sharers in the obedience of him who offered himself to the Father for the salvation of mankind. The gospel sense of religious obedience is accompanied by that of poverty and the oblation of oneself in consecrated chastity for the Kingdom.

It is a question therefore of living our friendship with Christ by a practical witness which carries the fundamental baptismal option to its radical consequences:

“I make the vow for ever to live obedient, poor and chaste according to the way of the Gospel set out in the Salesian Constitutions”. Surrender to Christ in religious profession is our deepest attitude of friendship.

The encounter with Christ is focused in the articles of the Constitutions on prayer, the Eucharist, Reconciliation and Penance, and discernment, so that the encounter with Christ is renewed every day in our praying dimension, from which arises the ability to read and discern the signs of the times.

These are concrete and compelling topics which help us to avoid the great danger of spiritual superficiality. And the first spark of the “grace of unity” is revived here.

The daily attitude of dialogue with Christ nourishes friendship and familiarity with him to such an extent that we appear among people as “signs and bearers” of his love. The problems arising at the present day from secularisation, liberation and inculturation call for extraordinary care of our familiarity with Christ.

How important it is for each and all of us to take up this splendid synthesis of the “path of conversion and union with Christ” that the Constitutions give us; conversion, because this is the dynamic that flows from the “light” of the Constitutions.

Death is finding fulfilment in spiritual, personal and community life. It is impressive to photograph the energy that the Constitutions contain and spread.

• ***Formation for unity in cultural pluralism, the “catholic” universality of the Congregation***

In Part Three there is an inspirational principle which permeates all the contents: the careful formation to unity of our personnel. An extremely innovative vision, a journey to be carried out permanently in the ever-increasing internationality of the Congregation.

It is important to know how to embody the Salesian identity in the local culture by means of a versatile methodology. We strive everywhere to bring to life and render incarnate the spirit of our Father and Founder Don Bosco, the one model for all: identity of vocation “dictates the specific direction our formation must take, a direction necessary for the life and unity of the Congregation”.

It is an arduous task, incredibly relevant, and is particularly intense in the period of initial formation, though it is always pressing and relevant all through a life that goes from the same generative energy to the personalisation of what has been taken on.

“Pluralistic contexts”, “rapid transformations”, the “evolutionary character” of each person, the “quality and fruitfulness of our life” call for a continual renewal of our membership of the Congregation and of our witness to the genuine spirit of Don Bosco.

The process of inculturation requires at one and the same time both that the values to be embodied are clear and well understood and that an accurate and just discernment can be made of the demands of local cultures.

An effective correlation between cultural embodiment and unity of Salesian identity is indispensable.

Evaluation of cultures need to be permeated by a clear transcendent vision. The way in which the manifestation of the “signs of the times” has grown in the last ten years, and the near-universal interchange between different cultures, puts the spotlight on each one of them. The truths too of the mystery of Christ and the creative vitality of the charisms of his Spirit, bring an agitation for revision, for purification, for a new drive that can benefit the cultures themselves. Without an objective sense of transcendence the danger can arise of a harmful provincialism or nationalism.

When we consider these words from the Constitutions, their age and yet their incredible modernity in our historical context, it opens one up to amazement!

The Constitutions, always and everywhere, give us guidance in discerning and realising a proper correlation between our vocation and cultural diversities: “The principle of unity in the Congregation”, they tell us, “is the charism of our Founder, which of its richness gives rise to different ways of living the one Salesian vocation. Formation is therefore one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions: it accepts and develops whatever is contained in the various cultures that is true, noble and just.” In the process of reviewing and updating the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis et studiorum*, this unity in the diversity of cultural expressions has been and will be our daily bread.

The most valuable contribution of the Constitutions as a whole is that they provide an authoritative description of the “one Salesian vocation” which in every province must inspire and guide the initiatives of initial and ongoing formation. Let us make of them a launching pad for the unity and future of the Congregation.

I have always been impressed, and it never ceases to impress me, by the faith of our fathers who, in reformulating the Salesian Constitutions in different eras, have always been able

to highlight and focus on the prophecy of these texts, so evocative and so concrete. A beautiful gift that is given to us.

• ***The “form” of our Society and the guide of the communities***

In Part Four the Constitutions deal with the service of authority; this is an important theme which belongs to the very ‘form’ of our Congregation.

This ‘form’ includes constituent traits which express and ensure, even from a juridical point of view, its own distinctive characteristics among religious Institutes in the Church. For this reason it is given adequate definition in various articles of the Constitutions.

The constitutional text in fact suggests to us the manner in which all the members form in the community “one heart and one soul”, and how the service of authority which promotes and shapes its identity must operate among us. “According to our tradition”, the text says, “communities are guided by a member who is a priest, and who by the grace of his priestly ministry and pastoral experience sustains and directs the spirit and activity of his brothers”. How enlightening is this constitutional text that accompanies us to GC29, where among the juridical issues, we will also have the task of “taking up” the Papal Rescript on the service of authority.

This characteristic element of our community tradition ensures the pastoral originality that characterises us. Strictly speaking our Congregation is not “priestly”, nor is it simply “lay”, and neither is it properly “unclassified”. The members are “clerics” and “laymen” who “complement each other as brothers in living the same vocation”; each one is aware that he is a member who shares responsibility for “everything”, before thinking of himself as clerical or lay.

A word to conclude

The brief consideration of the journey the constitutional text went through in its formation, the analysis of the text's key themes and the essential points that the Constitutions contain cannot fail to enthuse us. Truly the gift we have received is great!

We cannot fail to conclude, as we began, by recalling the Foreword to the Constitutions: perseverance in the life that leads to communion with the Father in fidelity.

It is incredible to read Don Bosco writing as he preceded us. In his spiritual testament, Don Bosco left us in writing: "If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions."

At our religious profession each of us offered himself "totally", that is, without reservations or limitations, trusting, despite our own weakness, in God's grace, in the intercession of Mary, in the Protectors of the Congregation and in life lived together each day with our brothers, who "help to keep [us] faithful".

Considering then the consecrating action of God in profession, the Constitutions rightly assure us that "Our perseverance is founded entirely on the fidelity of God who loved us first, and is nourished by the grace of his consecration." Moreover, and it is worth emphasising, "it is sustained too by love for the young to whom we are sent."

Between "fidelity" and "perseverance" there is a mutual reminder and supplement of attitudes that make up the integral meaning and value for life of our "response which we continually renew to the special covenant that the Lord has made with us."

Here, in short, is the true secret of our future: assimilating the Constitutions and practising them with fidelity and perseverance because they are for us "the way that leads to Love".

I would like to conclude this short journey with the prayer, in its entirety here, which was included in the introduction to the text of the renewed Constitutions of 1984. A commitment of each and every one of us to the fulfilment of our vocation.

*We thank you Father
because you have called us individually by name
from every continent
to be in the Church signs and bearers of your love.
For us too, Father, you have made to rise up
from the very heart of Christ, your apostle,
that pastoral love
which marks our ecclesial fervour
with the gift of predilection for young people.
We adore you with filial gratitude
because your Paraclete, the Spirit of the Lord,
is always with us by the grace of his consecration
as we live day by day the fullness of our gift,
renewing the mystery of the baptismal Covenant
through its more intimate and complete expression.*

*Grant, merciful Father,
that with Mary's guidance,
we may persevere to the end on this way that leads to Love.
In our religious profession
You have made to blossom in us a new and exhilarating reality
which is the offering of ourselves in the work of salvation and the liturgy of life.*

*Teach us to see and contemplate
through the indications of this Rule,
the undivided heart of your only Son;
permeate our freedom with the power of your Spirit,
so that all of us who adhere to Don Bosco
may faithfully fulfil with your help
all that by your gift we have promised.*

Father Stefano Martoglio

1 November 2024

Solemnity of All Saints

2.2 RELEVANCE OF THE PROVINCIAL SECRETARY: THE CHARISM AND HIS INSTITUTIONAL ROLE

Fr Guido GARINO

Outlining the role of the Provincial Secretary (henceforth PS) could seem to be superfluous given the extensive treatment it has received in the so-called “red book”, appropriately titled “*Juridical Elements and Administrative Praxis in the Government of the Province*”¹; this valuable text provides a neat presentation of the PS’s functions, and the personal qualities required of someone who is preparing to exercise such a public ecclesiastical role².

The purpose of this discussion, therefore, is to briefly present the role of the PS through a juridical understanding of his functions corresponding to the range of competencies, tasks and attributions that the Congregation’s norms and Canon Law have entrusted to him.

This is an understanding, ultimately, using the same norms as reference, that attempts to be of guidance for those who work at the level of governance of the Congregation.

1. The six most characteristic functions

The public ecclesiastical function that the Salesian Congregation entrusts to the PS is clearly expressed in art. 159 of the General Regulations (henceforth R.), which is divided into three paragraphs. It outlines the role in its entirety, entrusting it with six specific functions.

¹ *Elementi giuridici e prassi amministrativa nel governo dell’Ispettorato*, eds M. Stempel, and F. Maraccani, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome 2004. It is to be noted that this book exists in English translation, and page numbers in subsequent footnotes refer to the English edition.

² *Ibid.* pp. 41ff.

“The provincial and his council have at their service a secretary who has the role of a notary.

He is present at the meetings of the council without the right to vote, unless he is one of the councillors; he records the minutes.

He is in charge of the provincial archives and sees to the collecting and recording of statistics. He is appointed by the provincial after hearing the opinion of his council and remains ad nutum.”

To help determine the scope of the functions assigned to the PS (primarily aimed at assisting the Provincial and the Provincial Council in the animation and government of the Province), and still in accordance with the provisions of R. 159, we turn to article 164 of the Salesian Constitutions (henceforth C.), to which R. 159 makes explicit and direct reference.³

Indeed, this article of the Constitutions just mentioned is directly linked to another regulation in order to determine and specify what the legislator means when speaking of the “animation and government of the Province”: in other words, “...to collaborate with the provincial for the development of the Salesian life and mission, help him to gain knowledge of situations, and see that the provincial plan is being put into practice through contacts with those responsible and with the respective commissions.”⁴ All this is also attributed to the PS – in addition to the Provincial Councillors – as a member of the Provincial Council.⁵

³ Art. 164: *“The council assists the provincial in everything that concerns the animation and government of the province. It is convoked and presided over by the provincial and is made up of the vice-provincial, economer and ordinarily three or five other councillors.”* CONSTITUTIONS OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES, Editrice S.D.B., Edizione extra commerciale, Rome, April 2015.

⁴ R. 155.

⁵ C. 164.

Therefore, reviewing the functions of the PS contained in the General Regulations, we see that he is specifically:

- 1) At the service of the Provincial and his Council
- 2) Works as a secretary
- 3) Is assigned the function of notary in the Province/Vice-Province
- 4) Is present at meetings of the Provincial Council⁶
- 5) Is in charge of the Provincial archives
- 6) Collects and records the statistical data of the Province

It is now possible to say a few words by way of commentary on the functions listed above, making direct reference to the content of the “red book” and canon law, so as not to risk misinterpreting the modes of action specific to the PS.

To understand what it means to say that the PS is “*at the service of the Provincial and his Council*” and “*works as a secretary*”, we need to refer to all the constitutions and regulations cited thus far, in order not to mistakenly infer that he is the personal secretary of the Provincial and/or members of his Council. In fact, while the PS is described in the “red book” as a “*close collaborator of the Provincial and his Council*”, and is therefore at their service, it is immediately specified that “*through them, [he is] at the service of the Province*”⁷ as a whole. This latter detail entrusts the role of the PS with his public profile.

Then, when we deal with his material activity as “secretary” which the regulations entrust him with, we must refer mainly to activity that concerns the drafting of the minutes during meetings of the Provincial Council. This activity is of fundamental importance for everything related to the work of

⁶ It is important to report what is specified in this regard in R. 159: the PS is “*without the right to vote, unless he is one of the councillors.*” Therefore it is possible that the PS has the additional function of Provincial Councillor. Clearly, since he is appointed *ad nutum*, his role does not expire with the eventual expiry of his function as a Councillor.

⁷ *Juridical Elements...* p. 41.

the Council and the implementation of its decisions, as it is a body that holds significance not only in the ecclesiastical realm but also in civil matters in many regions around the world.

Among the functions assigned to the PS is the one where is he "*in charge of the Provincial archives*": this points to an activity of custody and supervision of great importance not only for the Province but for the entire Congregation. Father Peter Ricaldone, Don Bosco's fourth successor, "in a circular on the Archives of the Houses of 24 October 1943 had previously written: *"Our Archives, if they are well organised and kept up to date, will provide invaluable, in fact fundamental data for the chronicles of our Society. By means of their documentation, our members will not only have before them, as an incentive for new initiatives of zeal, the magnificent panorama of the multi-form Salesian activity, but they will arrive, as if led by hand, at the purest springs of the spirit and of the industriousness of the Salesian Family."*⁸ These words would then be taken up in similar ways by other Rectors Major throughout Salesian history.⁹

The activity of preserving the historical memory of activities and people who have brought the Salesian charism and work to the Church and throughout the world, is one of the most important aspects of the PS's assignment.

In this respect, it is important to strongly emphasise that the preservation of historical memory found in the provincial archives is largely due to the collaboration of Salesian confreres who have documented significant events, and charismatic individuals who have contributed to the success of the Salesian Works, the Province, and the Salesian Congregation over time.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid. p. 173. Cf. also AGC 363, p. 279.

⁹ Cf. Fr Egidio Viganò in AGC 314, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰ The main documents that must never be lacking in the House Archives are, in addition to those of the foundation and erection of the work the appointment forms of the Rectors who have succeeded one another in the House; the complete annual list of the confreres of the House, with the positions held; the minutes of the community Council; the House Chronicle; the mortuary letters of confreres of the Province; the observations left by the

But the Archives which the PS is in charge of are not only a record of the historical memory of the Congregation (“historical archives”), but also, and no less important, of current memory: the so-called “current archives”.

These Archives “comprises all those documents which are still being frequently consulted and updated, either because they are documents of living people (for example, folders with the documents of confreres) or they concern business which has not been definitively closed.”¹¹

The Congregation’s practice then refers to the provisions of canon 489 of Canon Law currently in force, referring to Diocesan Curias, adopting it as internal legislation which can also be applied to Provincial Secretaries, requiring “*a secret archive, or at least in the ordinary archive there is to be a safe or cabinet, which is securely closed and bolted and which cannot be removed. In this archive documents which are to be kept under secrecy are to be most carefully guarded.*”

A final function that also takes on particular importance in relation to the planning of activities and the “movement of personnel in the province”, is the one relating to the recording and collection of statistical data. This activity becomes absolutely necessary and fundamental at two moments in the life and history of a Province: at the end of each year, when the so-called “flash” data is requested¹² and at the end of the six-year term when the “state of the Congregation” needs to be drawn up in view of the General Chapter.

Provincial (or by the Extraordinary Visitor) at the conclusion of the Provincial Visitation; the correspondence of the Rector Major or Provincial which is of particular interest to the House. It is also good that Provincial circulars be preserved; the updated list of the House’s Past Pupils and Salesian Cooperators; the updated list of the House’s benefactors.

¹¹ *Juridical Elements...* p. 174.

¹² The overall picture of the Province as on 31 December of the year just passed.

2. Reference to Canon law

Of a completely different nature compared to those previously discussed, among the functions attributed to the PS the one made clear by R. 159, referring to his “*function as notary*”, stands out for its importance, responsibility and complexity.

The notarial function, as our “red book” points out, refers to the role of “notary” or “chancellor” in the provincial community.¹³

With great intuition the superiors general have associated the role of the PS with that of the (episcopal) *chancellor of the curia*, which we can therefore say is his counterpart in the Diocese. This association is not without foundation, considering that the 1983 Code of Canon Law (henceforth CIC83) dedicates five canons to this role (can. 474; 482-485 CIC83).

Thus making a textual analysis of the rule taken from the General Regulations (R. 159) in conjunction with those contained in the Code of Canon Law, we can see the clear conformity of the two roles (PS/Episcopal Chancellor), both of which belong to a precise ecclesiastical office according to the provisions of Canon 145 CIC83.

The summary of the two regulations mentioned earlier provides us with clear evidence that certain terms such as **notary**, **secretary**, and **archive** have equivalent meanings, while other terms suggest a similar *modus operandi* (taking care of and compiling records).

The presence of these terms, subsequently referred to and regulated by the CIC83 canons for the role of the chancellor of the curia, holds clear interpretative value also for R. 159; as can be seen, in fact, the same article of the General Regulations does not specify the meaning of the ‘notarial function’ attributed to the PS, thus delegating the entire discipline, *without further explanation*, to the CIC83 canons.

¹³ *Juridical Elements...* p. 41-42.

| R. 159 | Can. 482 CIC 1983 |
|--|---|
| <p>The provincial and his council have at their service a secretary who has the role of a notary. He is present at the meetings of the council without the right to vote, unless he is one of the councillors; he <i>records the minutes</i>. He is in charge of the provincial archives and <i>sees to the collecting and recording of statistics</i>. He is appointed by the provincial after hearing the opinion of his council and remains <i>ad nutum</i>.</p> | <p>§ 1. In every curia a chancellor is to be appointed whose principal function, unless particular law establishes otherwise, <i>is to take care that acts of the curia are gathered, arranged, and safeguarded in the archive</i> of the curia</p> <p>§ 2. If it seems necessary, the chancellor can be given an assistant whose title is to be vice-chancellor.</p> <p>§ 3. By reason of being chancellor and vice-chancellor they are notaries and secretaries of the curia.</p> |

2.1. The Provincial Secretary and juridical acts

The question that is often asked regarding the PS's function as notary is whether this is merely linked to the compilation, safeguarding and dispatch of juridical acts of the province, or whether it also relates to the production of other acts which cannot properly be described as being of a juridical nature.

To answer the question, let us first try to clarify what is meant by a juridical act of the province.

The definition of an act might in itself seem somewhat generic were it not correlated by a further qualifier. Nevertheless it is possible to describe it in the light of the CIC83 which rules an act as "... a reality concerning man's doing and operating (his *agere*) and can designate either the very fact of the performance of an action by a subject (e.g., 'human act', can. 171; 'liturgical act', can. 382 and 904; 'act of contrition', can. 962), or the manner in which an action is produced (e.g., 'collegial act', can. 337), or the documentary expression of a given action. *The notion of act understood here is primarily*

the latter, that is, the documentary kind."¹⁴

And it is precisely from the nature of a documentary act, properly defined as such, that it is possible to establish what are all the other acts that characterise the activity of the "notarial function" to which R. 159 refers.

First of all there are the "juridical acts" identified by can. 474 CIC83 as acts which "*by their nature have juridic effect*",¹⁵ and by provision of the same canon must be signed by the notary as well as the Ordinary;¹⁶ the notary's signature (and we know that the General Regulations identify the notary as being the PS), we are reminded, is necessary *ad liceitatem*, or in other words to guarantee the integrity and completion of the juridical act.¹⁷

Then there are other acts which can be described as ancillary ones that are not strictly juridical, but are part of the PS's work and must be verified by him as to their reliability and provenance, with the necessary signature of 'authenticity'.

Let us now deal with the first category of acts, the juridical ones. These include the singular administrative acts that the Ordinary (Provincial/Superior of the Vice-Province) has the power to impose. Belonging to these are:

- **The singular decree**, which is defined by can 48 CIC83 as: '*an administrative act issued by a competent executive au-*

¹⁴ M. MOSCONI, *Gli atti di curia: dall'istanza alla notifica; protocollo e archiviazione*, in *Quaderni di Diritto Ecclesiale*, 23 (2010), p. 101-125.

¹⁵ In fact, the Latin text of can. 474 is more significant in giving a definition of a juridical act than the official translation into other languages; in fact, the canon defines legal acts as "*quae effectum iuridicum habere nata sunt*", that is, those acts, which were "born" to have a juridical effect.

¹⁶ "*For validity, acts of the curia which are to have juridic effect must be signed by the ordinary from whom they emanate; they must also be signed by the chancellor of the curia or a notary. The chancellor, moreover, is bound to inform the moderator of the curia concerning such acts*", can. 474 CIC83.

¹⁷ Cf. comm. 5 [1973], p. 226; 14 [1982], p. 213: "*Claritatis et certitudinis iuridicae causa, dicatur an subsignatio cancellarii vel notarii Curiae eorumque qui vices ipsorum agunt, sit ad validitatem. R. Textus mutandus non videtur, quia patet solummodo Ordinarii subsignationem requiri ad validitatem.*"

thority in which a decision is given or a provision is made for a particular case according to the norms of law. Of their nature, these decisions or provisions do not presuppose a petition made by someone.'

This type of document refers generally to the acts of appointment, removals, canonical erections, extinctions, confirmations, revocations, replacements, authorisations, etc., related to the decision-making possibilities that the Constitutions entrust to the Provincial/Superior of the Vice-Province with his Council.

- The **singular precept**, defined by can. 49 CIC83 as: "*a decree which directly and legitimately enjoins a specific person or persons to do or omit something, especially in order to urge the observance of law.*"

This type of act refers to orders to follow, or prohibitions to follow, imposed on a specific individual or on several people.

- The **dispensation**: a juridical term defined by can. 85 CIC83 as "*the relaxation of a merely ecclesiastical law in a particular case*", which by instruction of the canonical legislator "*can be granted by those who possess executive power within the limits of their competence, as well as by those who have the power to dispense explicitly or implicitly either by the law itself or by legitimate delegation.*"

The Superior placed at the head of the territorial circumscription as a religious Ordinary,¹⁸ can therefore dispense from some merely ecclesiastical norms related to religious life,¹⁹ but not from procedural or penal norms nor from those whose dispensation is specially reserved.

¹⁸ To find out who the Ordinaries are, according to Canon Law, it is necessary to refer to the definition contained in can. 134 CIC83; can. 134 can also be read together with can. 596§2 CIC8, which deals with the power of government in Institutes of Consecrated Life.

¹⁹ For example, the granting of *absentia a domo*, as a dispensation *ad tempus* of the obligation to live in community; or the dispensation (*pro-tempore*) from the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, etc.

Among the acts we called ancillary ones, and that while not juridical in any *stricto sensu*, are an integral part of the activity of PS's secretarial and notarial work, are:

- acts of the Provincial's or Superior of the Vice-Province's magisterium (letters to the confreres of the Province, pastoral plans, speeches, etc.)
- acts of the Provincial Chapter such as the OPP, SEPP
- acts of consultation aimed at government of the Circumscription
- requests made to the Rector Major and General Council
- official correspondence with ecclesiastical and civil authorities
- etc.

With regard to all these kinds of acts, it is good that the PS always exercises his function of checking their authenticity and certifying their compliance with procedural rules that guide their constitution; the PS's signature on the acts is sufficient proof of this.

To complete the discussion, an aspect that still needs to be dwelt on in the context we are analysing is the one relating to the provision of canon 482§1, which states that the chancellor's main task (we should interpret this always as the PS) is to '*take care that acts of the curia are gathered, arranged, and safeguarded in the archive of the curia*' (*redigantur et expeditantur*).

First of all, it should be noted that here we are talking about "acts" in general and not specifically about juridical acts: we can therefore include in the number of the acts in question, all the documentary acts relevant to the activity of the Provincial Secretariat.

The aspect that concerns us most directly in this discipline is the one relating to the care of the "accuracy" of acts: the function of the PS is properly to take care of the drafting and preparation of the documentary act itself, whether juridical or otherwise.

We can now summarise below, in three different ways, the actions and acts whose drafting and preparation the PS must

directly provide care for, in reference to the duty entrusted to him by can. 482 §1 CIC83.

- a. **acts that involve the whole Province:** the PS must verify and guarantee that the drafting of such acts is conducted in accordance with the rules and practices laid down by the Congregation.²⁰
- b. **acts to be decided on in the Provincial Council:** they must be prepared by the PS who checks that no essential and expected documents have been omitted.
completeness and legality of the acts: an operation we looked at previously, for which the PS has the task of verifying that the contents (substance) of every kind of act produced by the various institutional subjects of the Province, such as the way they are constituted (formality), is always respected.

2.2. “Public trust” (“authenticity”)

Lastly, we would like to comment briefly on an expression that recurs frequently in regulatory texts, as it is inseparably linked to the identity of the PS as notary; this expression is found in the “red book” when it states that: *“his signature, on acts that require it, provides public proof of the regularity of procedures.”*; so can. 482§1 CIC83, states in parallel that the writing or signature of the chancellor establishes “authenticity”.²¹

The juridical expression “*public trust*” or authenticity, is to be regarded as applicable when the establishment of certain juridical effects is attributed,²² through the execution of certain

²⁰ An example of such acts are consultations in view of appointments (Provincial, Rectors, Councillors, etc.): the PS has the duty to certify that such consultations: A) first of all have been carried out; B) that the results obtained are in accordance with the data contained in the (consultation) sheets scrutinised.

²¹ *Juridical Elements... p. 41.*

²² But it must also be made clear that all acts written or signed by the PS have direct or indirect juridical effects. By indirect juridical effects I mean those acts (e.g. consultations for appointments) that do not in themselves *tout court* produce juridical consequences but which, subject to further drafting (e.g. approval of the superiors general), give rise to other acts of a regulatory nature (e.g. decrees of appointment).

acts by the PS. Authenticity or public trust, therefore, takes the form of a requirement that everything contained in an act be authentic and truthful. Only the PS in his function as notary has the possibility of guaranteeing this.

Can. 1437§2 CIC83, explicitly states: “*Acts which notaries prepare warrant public trust*”, and consequently, ensuring public trust is a precise function of the PS “*when, in appropriate ways and with respect to the acts he officially carries out [...], he certifies the authenticity of a writing or act, his attestation establishes full proof, provided that the trust given falls directly on acts performed in his presence.*”²³

3. The Provincial Secretary’s Code of Ethics

Having carried out an examination of the specific functions of the PS, it is still necessary to recall two aspects inherent to his role, as they define his moral and ethical identity: while the first aspect is directly taken from canonical legislation, the second is taken from “best practice”.

We read in can. 483§2 CIC83 that “*The chancellor and notaries must be of unimpaired reputation and above all suspicion.*”; and this is echoed in our “red book”, recalling that “*being the right-hand man of the Provincial and his Council (he is “their hand and their memory” as has been said) it is necessary that the Secretary be distinguished by his faithful and loyal collaboration, humble dedication, prudence and equilibrium. As the name itself shows (“a secretis”) he must be a man of discretion, capable of keeping secrets, and at the same time pleasant and able to deal with people. It is important to emphasise that, since he takes part in the meetings of the Council, he must be very discreet regarding matters discussed in the Council and discernment procedures carried out there.*”²⁴

²³ L. DEL AMO, Commento al can. 1437, in Codice di Diritto Canonico, Coletti a San Oietro – LEV, VIII ed. 2022, p. 976.

²⁴ *Juridical Elements...* p. 44.

The second point that the “red book” offers, and that makes reference to the specific preparation of the PS, is that “*for his function of “notary” it is indispensable that the Secretary has a good knowledge of Canon Law and of the law proper to our Society: he is in fact often called upon to make people aware of what is required by the law for the validity of the acts; for some juridical practices, in particular, the role of the “actuary” ordinarily lies within his competence.*”²⁵

Summing up the discipline relating to the PS’s role, which is made evident by the canonical norms and the norms proper to the Salesian Congregation that we have examined, we can indicate the following characteristics:

- The appointment of the PS is the responsibility of the Provincial and his Council and remains *ad nutum*.
- PSs have competence regarding (i.e. they see to) all acts of the Province that have the value of being a “*public act*”.
- It is the task of the PS, in particular, to record the acts, prepare the decrees, the ordinances, and all the documents issued by the Superior and his Council.
- What the PS draws up or signs establishes public trust (authenticity).
- The PS is responsible for the accurate safeguarding of the records and documents of the Province contained in the various archives.
- PSs must be of sound reputation and above suspicion, and possess a good knowledge of Canon Law.

²⁵ *Juridical Elements... p. 43.*

4. Conclusion

It is evident that, due to the complex of highly qualified activities entrusted to him, the Provincial Secretary will be able to acquire the awareness and practice of his activity over time, because his legal preparation (which is desirable and which he cannot do without) is not in itself fully sufficient to fully consolidate his functions.

Having therefore reached the end of this presentation, and wanting to draw an overall conclusion in considering the importance of the role of the PS, we can rightly say that he *“should not only be a notary and archivist, but should take on the role of the usual and single point of reference for all the tasks that together constitute the procedure to be observed in preparation of the acts”*²⁶ of the Province/Vice-Province in particular, and in general he should also be a reference point for the correct and orderly functioning of administration in the Circumscription.

Rome, 8 December 2024

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

²⁶ M. MOSCONI, op. cit., p. 109

4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

4.1 Chronicle of the Vicar of the RM

On 16 August, during the closing Eucharistic celebration of the Synod of Young People at Colle Don Bosco, the Vicar of the Rector Major began his service as acting coordinator of the government of the Congregation, at the end of the mandate of Fr Angel Fernandez Artime until the celebration of the 29th General Chapter that will begin on 16 February 2025.

From that day on, he returned to Rome Sacred Heart to coordinate some meetings and preside over events to accompany the journey of the Congregation.

At the end of August, the Vicar went to Fatima to participate in the ADMA world congress. It was a very well prepared and well organised moment in which, together with many members of the Salesian Family in that magnificent Marian Shrine, he experienced this graced event.

Returning to Rome on 3 September, he left on 5 September for the celebration of the centenary of the Salesian presence in Slovakia. The days of the celebration for this centenary of the Slo-

vak province were a valuable opportunity to head into the future in fidelity to God and Don Bosco. Fr Stefano saw first hand how alive the charism is in that land and the capacity for inculturation of the Salesians who were called, a century ago, by the entire episcopal conference of Slovakia.

The Vicar stayed in Slovakia until 8 September, returned to Rome and then left for Mexico City on 10 September. Fr Stefano remained in Mexico, MEM Province, until 18 September. This animation visit had a specific reason: to undertake the consultation for the appointment of the new MEM Provincial.

This task had been taken on by the Vicar prior to the decisions related to the creation of Fr Angel as Cardinal, so this too was became part of a very busy calendar. It was a good opportunity for Fr Stefano to get to know this important province, its history, the future challenges that the Salesian charism has in Mexico at this time.

The consultation for the new provincial took place between

meetings, assemblies of confreres, visits to houses and various celebrations until 18 September, the day of the vicar's return to Italy.

On returning to Rome, Fr Stefano spent about ten days at Sacred Heart where he was also able to meet the Pre-Chapter Juridical Commission, and the Pre-Chapter Commission, to listen to the valuable work that the confreres were doing in preparation for GC29.

From 27 September to early October, the vicar went to Turin, both to Valdocco and Colle, for a series of meetings. The focus of these days was the meeting with the departing Missionaries, in preparation for the handing of the Crucifix, together with Mother Chiara, and the very well-attended Sunday liturgical celebration. The handing over of the Crucifixes and the departing missionaries is always a great sign of hope and vitality, in fidelity to God and to Don Bosco, for the Congregation and the entire Salesian family.

Starting from 30 September, after the Sunday handing over of the Crucifixes, Fr Stefano had meetings with the communities animating the Salesian Places at

Mary Help of Christians Valdocco and Colle Don Bosco. It was an opportunity to evaluate, accompany and help in the very important animation service to the Salesian Places that these confreres offer.

In the first days of October, the Vicar was able to participate in the World Congress of Past Pupils held in Valdocco during those days. At was a moment of communion in the spirit of the Salesian Family in a very well-prepared congress, celebrated in the best possible place, in the spirit of Carlo Gastini: at Valdocco.

On 6 October Fr Stefano returned to Sacred Heart in Rome and participated in the coordination meeting of Sector Councilors in the days that followed. Two days of work, reflection and planning, handling many ordinary administrative practices for the Congregation's provinces.

In the days from 17 and 20 October, the Vicar was a guest of the IVE Province taking part in the celebration of two centenaries: the house at Pordenone and the house at Belluno. Each centenary is always an opportunity to give thanks to God for his fidelity and continue the path of

fruitfulness of the works in the territorial contexts in which they are found. Both these centenaries highlighted the vitality of the two houses, given how the two celebrations were prepared and attended.

On 23 October Fr Stefano was able to participate in the opening of the UPS academic year, presiding over the Eucharist and giving the main address for the academic year, at the end of which he officially declared the academic year open.

In the first ten days of November Fr Stefano was able to share a meeting with the group of confreres who were working on the revision of the Ratio, then take three days off from Sacred Heart in Rome to think about and write documents for the Congregation.

During this period the Vicar had a meeting with the two courses for provincial secretaries, organised by the Secretary General at UPS.

On 17 November the Vicar took part in the formation meeting for novice directors that took place in Genzano. It was a very well-attended and very useful meeting. It was also an opportunity to thank all the novice directors

there for this important and difficult task.

From 20 to 22 November Fr Stefano took part in the assembly of major superiors (USG) to discuss the path of religious life within the life of the Church, listening to and receiving interesting updates on the Synod that has just ended.

On 26 November the Vicar presided over the consultation for the Salesian Places, in Valdocco, together with the Councillor for Youth Ministry and the Regional Councillor for the Mediterranean, to work on the drafting of a new version of the "guidelines on Salesian places", which expired in recent months. The meeting was attended, together with the General Councillors, by the ICP Provincial and confreres belonging to the communities at Colle don Bosco, Chieri and Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco.

On the first day of December, Fr Stefano participated in a Eucharistic celebration for the 90th birthday of His Eminence Card. Tarcisio Bertone. The winter session of the General Council, the last of the six-year period, began on 2 December.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Councillor

The General Councillor for Formation

During the 2024 summer session of the General Council, the Councillor Fr Ivo Coelho, with his team, held sessions during the course for new provincials, and chaired the meeting of the curatorium at the Z. Namuncurá community – Rome (15 June). He also took part in the UPS curatorium and a staff meeting (22 June).

During the summer session of the General Council, the decision was taken not to promulgate the Ratio during the current six-year period, mainly due to the lack of sufficient time to study it.

From 19 to 21 July 2024, Fr Ivo participated, together with the Rector Major and his Council in 4 days of Retreat in San Biagio, Subiaco, where the FMA have a house of spirituality.

On 3 August, the Councillor left for Jakarta - Indonesia to attend the Salesian Brothers Congress for the East Asia - Oceania region (5-8 August 2024). He also took the opportunity to visit the Tigaraksa novitiate and the post-novitiate Wisma community in

Jakarta, belonging to the INA Vice-Province. On 10 August he left for Mumbai to spend some time in the INB Province and with his family. During this period he visited the Interprovincial Novitiate and Postnovitiate (INB-INP) in Nashik, and took part in the interprovincial Prenovitiate Curatorium (INP-INB) meeting in Loutolim, Goa (21 September).

Back in Rome on 23 August 2024, Fr Coelho resumed the work of revising the Ratio, also finding time to visit the School of Salesian Accompaniment (SSA) (Italian version) at Colle Don Bosco from 6 to 9 September.

From 16 to 22 September Fr Coelho was in Mexico. During this time he visited the houses of formation (the novitiate at Coacalco, MEM; the prenovitiate at Irapuato and the theologate at Tlaquepaque; CRESCO in its new headquarters in Tlaquepaque) and had meetings with the two Provincial Councils and Provincial Formation Commissions. On 22 September he went to Bogotá, where he visited Mosquera's interprovincial prenovitiate (COB-COM), before going to Fusagasugá for the Interamerica Region Formation Commission, where he was joined by Fr Guido Errico, who was coming from the America South Cone

Region Formation Commission meeting in Campo Grande (18-21 September).

From 9 to 10 October, the Councillor attended the meeting between the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Stefano Martoglio, and other Sector Councillors. On 8 October he had a meeting with the Formation Sector team. A visit by Fr Coelho to Jerusalem was scheduled to begin on 11 October, but was cancelled due to the war situation in the Holy Land and the lack of flights.

From 18 October to 3 November 2024, a group of 14 Salesians from all regions and from UPS, together with the Councillor and some members of the Formation Sector, worked on the draft of the *Ratio*, with the aim of improving the text, which will then be presented in two languages, Italian and English, to the new Rector Major during GC29.

From 4 to 6 November together with Fr Guido Errico, Fr Coelho took part in the annual Formation Commission meeting for the Central and North Europe Region, which was held in Munich.

During this period he was represented by other members of the Sector at the Regional Formation Commission meetings in Kolkata - India (31 July – 3 August), in

Ivato - Madagascar (19-22 October) and Dili-Comoro - Timor-Leste (9-12 November); they also visited various formation communities.

The novice directors course was held in Genzano, Rome (Italy), from 17 November to 7 December 2024, with 33 participants. The Councillor attended from 17 to 24 November, meeting the novice directors personally and addressing them on some occasions.

On 7 December the Councillor chaired the curatorium meeting for the theology students Z. Namuncurá community in Rome.

The General Councillor for the Missions

In June and August, meetings and coordination meetings of the Salesian Synod of Young People continued regularly (9-16 August, Valdocco and Colle Don Bosco): preparation of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, logistics, financing, registration with payments. At the same time, ten coordination meetings were held with the Sector team. As a team, a comprehensive written review of the 2020-2025 period for the Sector was commenced as also a satisfaction questionnaire sent to all youth min-

istry delegates around the world. At the same time, some interviews were conducted with lay people and Salesians for the configuration of the Youth Ministry Sector team.

Fr Miguel Angel had several meetings for the coordination of DB Tech Europe. He also convened a meeting of managers of the Mobility Projects of Salesian Works in Europe that took place in Malta (16-18 October) and the meeting of Salesians responsible for schools in Europe that took place in Warsaw (29-30 November).

The Youth Ministry Councillor took part in the Team Visit to UPS (1-2). He also made the Extraordinary Visitation to ten houses in the ICP Province from September to November. In addition, it is important to mention the meetings with the Council, rectors, young people from the SYM and the ICP University and, lastly, the commission responsible for the Salesian Place convened by the Vicar of the Rector Major.

On the occasion of the coordination meeting of the IUS Board of Directors (22 June), Fr Miguel Angel presented a reflection on the challenges of this sector and coordination at Headquarters. Some publications have been concluded with the Sector team

at Headquarters: research on the emotional well-being of teachers and students in Europe (by the psychology department of the CES D. Bosco and the YM Sector); a map and conclusions of provincial policies on Child Safeguarding; the Hidden Diamonds book with the dreams of 212 young people; the Flash booklet 6 (Where God wants us. Accompanying the first vocational dream) and 7 (Reshaping and revitalising Salesian presences. Guidelines for Provincial Accompaniment).

He then coordinated a regional online meeting for youth ministry delegates from different regions: Europe (4 to 5 December) and America (7 to 9 September). But he held face-to-face held meetings with the Africa-Madagascar Region (Laos, 17 to 22 October), South Asia (Panjim, 1 to 4 November) and East Asia-Oceania (Korea, 10 to 13 November). It is important to highlight the numerous meetings with provincials and youth ministry delegates that he has promoted in person and online.

At the level of travel outside Italy, his involvement took place in the following events: animation visit to the URU province (6-8 September); participation in the

meeting of the Salesian Social Network America (Aparecida, 9-13 September). The General Councillor for Youth Ministry gave the keynote address at the Salesian Youth Movement Fest 2024 (December 29).

The Councillor for Youth Ministry held some coordination meetings with the Rector Major and then with the other Sector Councillors (7 June) and with VIS (10 June).

Fr Miguel Angel offered formation talks to the following groups: new provincials (13 June and 13 December); pastoral care team in BRE (3 June) Salesians and lay people in POR (25 June), PER (25 July and 9 October) and COB (17 October); SUO provincial council (7 November), directors of SMX schools (20 November) and the regional coordinators and National Committee of the AGESCI (14 December). The Councillor, with regard to Formation, offered two mornings of formation to the novice directors group (Genzano, 3 and 5 December).

The Councillor participated in the coordination meetings of the Advanced Formation course for managers of Salesian works in Europe, promoted by the Youth Ministry Sector and UPS.

Over these months Fr Miguel

Angel coordinated the preparation of the document: The Salesian School; University Residences and “Suggestions for an ecological conversion in Salesian Works” At the same time he sought out and involved experts in revision of the mental health manual: “Recognising and accompanying the mental health of young people”.

The General Councillor for the Missions

The General Councillor for the Missions, Fr Alfred Maravilla, after the summer session of the General Council was in Sao Paulo, Brazil from 29 July – 1 August 2024 for the inter-regional meeting of the Province Delegates for Missionary Animation (PDMA) of the South Cone and Interamerican regions. From 3-7 August he was in Myanmar where he visited some places and celebrated the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Vice-Province. During his homily he encouraged the confreres to be bearers of hope in a difficult socio-political situation. From 7 to 10 August, he was in Hua Hin, Thailand, for the inter-regional meeting of the PDMA for South Asia and East Asia-

Oceania regions. He then moved to Laos on 10-11 August where he visited the sole presence, a training centre much appreciated by the government. From 12-18 August he visited the Delegation of Sudan. Unable to go to Sudan he visited all the presences in South Sudan. Fr Maravilla then presided over the Regional meeting for PDMA's from Africa-Madagascar which took place at Upper Hill, Nairobi on 18-21 August.

From 25 August he joined the Missions Sector team to animate the 'Germoglio Course' for new missionaries. From 28 August -1 September he visited the confreres and presences in Senegal, accompanied by the Provincial, Fr Jésus-Benoît Badji. There he was able to appreciate the work of the Salesians in building fraternal coexistence among Christians and Muslims especially through the training centres and oratories. On 1-2 September he visited the new presence in Gambia. From 4- 9 September he was in Madagascar for an missionary animation visit. On 8 September he presided at the first profession of 14 novices. From 15 September he joined the Mission Sector Team in animating the Germoglio Course as well as opening the Respiro Course (11

September-26 October), a missionary renewal course with 24 participants from 5 continents and several groups of the Salesian Family.

After the sendoff of the 155th Missionary expedition members, the General Councillor for Missions made an informal visit to the Province of Croatia from 1-4 October to visit the family of the 4 departing Croatian missionaries. On 6 October he officially opened the presence in Greece with a Eucharist with the first two Salesians who arrived to study modern Greek while residing with the Marist brothers. After participating in the meeting of General Councillors of Sectors at the Generalate, the General Councillor for the Missions was in Krakow, Poland for the interregional meeting of PDMA's from the regions of Europe-Central North and Mediterranean. From 25-27 October he was in Georgia where the first Salesians arrived 36 years ago.

From 4 to 7 November Fr Maravilla visited the confreres in Mauritius where they are in the final phases of constructing a Technical college. He presided over the meeting of the directors of Missions Offices at the Congregational level from 12-14 Novem-

ber at New Rochelle. From there he proceeded to Guadeloupe Island from 15-17 November where he was able to appreciate the work of the first group of Salesians who arrived in 2020. He then proceeded to Uruguay from 19-22 November. There he met the novices at the interprovincial novitiate, young adults who had done missionary volunteering service abroad and other youth leaders. He then proceeded to Chile from 23 to 29 November on a pilgrimage to the places linked to the first missionaries in Tierra del Fuego and Punta Arenas. Fr. Maravilla arrived in Rome on December 2 to participate in the winter session of the General Council.

The General Councillor for Social Communication

At the end of the Plenary Session of the General Council (June-July 2024), the Councillor for Social Communication, Fr Gildasio Mendes dos Santos, participated in the World Conference on Social Communication, from 1 to 7 August, on the theme “Shaping Tomorrow”, at the Pontifical Salesian University (UPS), together with the Delegates for Social Communication from Salesian

Provinces around the world. From 8 to 10 August, the Councillor met with the Regional Delegates for Communication at Sacred Heart General House, for a review of the Conference and the sharing of some projects taking place in their Regions.

On 14 August Fr Gildasio went to Turin and from there to Colle Don Bosco to participate in the Salesian Synod of Young People and in the celebrations for the feast of Don Bosco and the farewell Mass of the Rector Major, Card. Ángel Fernández Artime.

Fr Gildasio then returned to Rome, to the House.

On 3 September, at the General House, he met with the committee revising the new Social Communication document. From 8-9 September he participated in an online meeting with Sector members and Communication coordinators for the Regions for the review of the first semester 2024 and to plan the second semester. On 14 September, the Councillor travelled to Sao Paulo, Brazil, to visit his family. He returned to Rome on 2 October.

On 3 October, the Councillor participated in an online meeting with the International Commission on Artificial Intelligence (IS-CAI) to draft the paper on AI for

the Salesian Congregation.

On 4 October the Councillor participated in an administrative meeting of the General Council at the Sacred Heart.

On 14 October Fr Gildasio left for Bangalore, India, on behalf of the Rector Major, to begin the Extraordinary Visitation from 16 October to 27 November, visiting the Formation Houses of the Sacred Heart Province of Bangalore, India, INK: Kristu Jyoti College, Theologate, Bangalore; Visvadeep, Bangalore; Don Bosco Renewal Centre, Bangalore; Don Bosco Prenovitate, Mysore; Mount Don Bosco, Novitiate, Padivayal; Don Bosco Philosopate Aluva.

On 24 November, at the St John College Bangalore, he participated in the opening of the National Conference on Catholic Media, "Illuminaire 2024", organised by the Communication Sector of the Salesian Congregation and the Vatican Dicastery for Communications.

On 27 November Fr Gildasio returned to Sacred Heart. On 30 November he attended an administrative meeting of the General Council. From 2 to 20 December he took part in the winter session of the General Council at the General House. The

Councillor spent Christmas and New Year's Eve at the General House in Rome.

The Economer General

At the beginning of August, the Economer General participated in the opening of the Social Communications Congress at the Salesian University in Rome and in the supervisory board of the Pro Universitate foundation.

On 4 August he was invited to the East Asia-Oceania Region Brothers Congress in Jakarta/Indonesia, where he gave a conference to present his vision of the vocation of the laity in the Church and in the Congregation. Later, he visited the Salesian centres on the islands of Java and Flores and also made a stop in Bali. The contrast between the tourist-rich places and the still structurally poor areas represents a challenge for the educational work and vocational training of young people in Indonesia.

From 14 to 16 August he was at Colle Don Bosco for the conclusion of the Synod of Young People, where he also participated in the farewell ceremony for the Rector Major who resigned on 16 August.

At the end of the month, in

Rome, he would meet the confreres who work in special circumstances.

On 10 September he went to Bonn, where a new Supervisory Board was appointed and a change in structural management occurred. Back in Rome, he met the different sectors in the Vatican to discuss some geopolitical issues. From 24 to 27 September he was in Luxembourg to accompany the visit of Pope Francis. The rest of September was characterised by numerous meetings of the Board of Directors, active participation in a conference on artificial intelligence in France, visits to different construction sites for the restoration of buildings, meetings with benefactors of the Congregation, etc. On 30 September he attended the funeral of Brother Tarcisio Gazzola from the Catacombs community in Rome. At the beginning of October he was first in Bonn and then in Switzerland to meet fundraising experts. In Turin he chaired a meeting with architects and experts for the development of the former SEI building in Corso Regina Margherita.

At the beginning of November he was in New Rochelle for the meeting of Mission Offices who report directly to the Rector Ma-

yor. He then went directly to Addis Ababa to visit all the communities of the Ethiopian Province and to take stock of the current situation after the war and other challenges with the confreres and local leaders.

The Councillor for the Africa and Madagascar Region

In early August, Fr Alphonse Owoudou, Regional for Africa, went to his adoptive family in La Spezia (Vezzano Ligure). From 13 to 16 August, he participated in the Synod of Young People and visited the Novitiate at Colle Don Bosco, concelebrating the concluding Mass of the Rector Major, Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime's mandate, at the Church of Don Bosco in Colle.

From 1 to 10 September, he accompanied the Pre-Chapter Juridical Commission in its study of the preparatory material for the General Chapter. From 17 to 28 September, he chaired the Pre-Chapter Commission session which began with a retreat and was enriched by the visit to Subiaco, in the footsteps of Saint Benedict, and by a meeting with the FMA Salesian Sisters in San Biagio. The Commission, comprising 11 members, benefited

from the support of Frs Stefano Vanoli, Andrea Bozzolo and Luca Barone, who collaborated in the drafting of the Working Document. Due to the critical situation in Haiti, the Provincial, Fr Morachel, was unable to participate and was replaced by Fr Manolo Jiménez.

From 3 to 5 October, the Regional Councillor for Africa visited the St Thomas Theologate in Messina, presiding at the Eucharistic celebration on 5 October, during which he received the perpetual profession of 11 young confreres. On 18 October he participated in the conclusion of the African Cultural Week at the Zeffirino Namuncurà community in Rome. Between 28 October and 5 November, together with his Secretary, Fr Michael Karikunnel, he went to Madagascar for the plenary session of CIVAM, which involved 15 Provincial Superiors and the Delegates elected for the 29th General Chapter. On this occasion, he met with the confreres and organised specific times for discussion with the Delegates. The session was also attended by Fr Joan Lluís Playà, in charge of the Salesian Family Secretariat, and there was an online contribution from Fr Andrea Bozzolo, Rector Magnificus of UPS, on Africa's

collaboration in the preparation of human resources for the Salesian university.

On 15 November the Councillor took part in the second seminar on the Sacred Heart in view of GC29, with contributions from Fr Andrea Bozzolo, Zini, Bolis without forgetting Sister Katia Roncalli, on topics such as the grammar of spiritual life, contemporary challenges, affections and ties in the accompaniment of young people. On 16 November he visited the Testaccio community, participating in the African Festival and offering a reflection on the theme of the 29th General Chapter.

During the period he worked intensively at Headquarters with members of the Technical Commission, as Moderator of the General Chapter, dealing with the logistical and liturgical organisation, communication and preparation of the translation and digital management system, in collaboration with the *Protocolli Creativi* Company and many confreres strongly committed to the GC29. Together with the Vicar and the Secretariat, he kept in touch with Chapter members, authorities and external collaborators, including Fr Pascual Chávez and Fr Amedeo Cencini, as well as with

the Salesian Biblicists (ABS) who have offered and will still offer a valuable spiritual and formative contribution to the process of discernment.

In December, together with the other Councillors, Fr Alphonse prepared to enter the final session of the General Council.

The General Councillor for the East Asia-Oceania Region

At the end of the summer session, on 29-30 July, the Regional went to Indonesia to preside over the Mass for the installation of the new Superior of the Vice-Province of Indonesia (Fr Vincent Prastowo) and then returned to the Province of Vietnam to accompany the new Council of the North Vietnam Delegation to implement the decision of the Rector Major (1-3 August).

This decision was taken by the Rector Major after the Extraordinary Visitation to the Province of Vietnam in 2023, as he and the Council recognised the current and potential growth of the Salesian charism in the Delegation in terms of vocations and works for young people.

He then participated in the Salesian Brothers Congress held

in Jakarta, Indonesia (5-9 August), together with some General Councillors and members of the Generalate: Br Jean Paul Muller, Fr Ivo, Br Mon and Br Dominic. It was a wonderful experience for more or less a hundred Salesian confreres, many of them young, who gathered to study the life and testimonies of the exemplary confreres, Saint Artemides Zatti, Blessed Stefan Sandor and Venerable Simon Srugi. The Vice-Province of Indonesia, despite being small (only 55 Salesians), has 15 lay confreres. The Congress was an event coordinated by the entire Salesian Family in Indonesia, the FMA, the Salesian Cooperators and Past Pupils, and ADMA. They affirmed that the Congress was not only for the Brothers, for the Salesians, but also for the entire Salesian Family, since the Vocation of the Brothers is also for the Salesian Family. After this experience, many Provinces thought they could organise such a large number of meetings as the one held in Indonesia. Congress has also decided that the host Province for the 2028 Brothers Congress will be Korea.

Then, apart from a week reserved for the two meetings of the Curatorium in the Northern

Philippines and the Consultation for the new Superior of the Philippines North Province (FIN) (21-28 October), from 10 August to 30 November 2024, the EAO Regional carried out the Extraordinary Visitation to two Provinces: the Philippines South (FIS) and Thailand (which includes the Delegation of Cambodia and Laos). There are many good things happening in these two Provinces: the generosity of the Provinces in hosting many regional meetings, the large schools and many works for poor young people. At the same time, these countries also face a series of challenges to consolidate and expand Salesian missions, given that the needs of young people are increasing.

The multiple trips between these countries and the direct meetings with the confreres and with many groups of the Salesian Family meant that the Regional took in the entire situation of the Region to prepare for the next General Chapter with hopes and promising progress in the Region.

The Councillor for the South Asia Region

After the conclusion of the Summer Session of the General Council, the Regional Councillor

for South Asia, Fr Biju Michael returned to India and participated in a meeting at Bangalore on 31 July and 1 August to plan the “Poverty Reduction” programme for the South Asia Region. On 2 August he travelled to Dimapur for the installation of the new Provincial of Dimapur on 3 August. On the same day he travelled back to Guwahati and on 4 August to Trichy to take part in the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Trichy Province on 5 August, in the presence of Fr Stefano Martoglio, the Vicar of the Rector Major. On the evening of 5 August, the SPCSA Council meeting began and in the first session the “Poverty Reduction” programme was officially launched by Fr Martoglio in the presence of all the SPCSA Provincials. The SPCSA Council meetings were held from 5-7 August at Trichy Provincial House.

On 29 August the Regional reached the Hyderabad Province to initiate the Extraordinary Visitation of the Province. It began with a meeting with the Provincial Council on 30 August and the official inaugural assembly of confreres on 31 August. He also animated the meeting of Rectors and Leaders of the Province. He began the visits to the communities

starting with Chandur aspirantate and Junior College (1-3 September) and continued with Nalgonda Don Bosco Academy (3-5 September), Karunapuram Post novitiate (5-7 September), Don Bosco Parish, School and Navajeevan Mariapuram (8-10 September), Navajeevan Ramanthapur (10-12 September), and Provincial House (12-14 September). He then travelled to Mumbai for the meeting of all Provincial Secretaries of the South Asia Region (16-18 September). On 18 September he travelled to Vizag and on 19 September, on the way to Muniguda in Orissa, visited the works at Parvathipuram, a sector of the Vizag community. He then conducted the Extraordinary Visitation of the only Salesian presence of the Hyderabad Province in Orissa at Muniguda (19-22 September). He continued the visitation at St John's Regional Seminary Kondadaba philosophate (22-24 September), Don Bosco Mission Narsipatnam (24-26 September), and Navajeevan Vizag (26-28 September). On 28 September he travelled to Hyderabad and held the visitation at BIRDY Hyderabad (29-30 September).

On 1 October, the Regional travelled to Rome for meetings in

Rome and Spain and returned to the Provincial house on 9 October and reached on 10 October. He then continued the Extraordinary Visitation beginning with the Parish at Sanathnagar (12-14 October). On 14 October evening he flew to Rajmundry and reached Ravulapalam and conducted the visitation at Ravulapalam parish and school (15-16 October). He then continued to PARA – People's Action for Rural Awakening (17-18 October), Nuzvid St Paul's Reginal Seminary (19-20 October), Wyra school and parish (20-22 October), Don Bosco Guntupalli (23-24 October), Navajeevan Vijayawada (25-26 October), Assumption Church Pezzonipet (27-28 October), Don Bosco Gunadala (29-30 October), Don Bosco Premnivas Mangalagiri (31 October – 1 November), St Michael's Boys Home Guntur (2-3 November), Don Bosco Mission P.T. Parru (4-5 November), Don Bosco Ashram Ponnur (6-7 November), Don Bosco ITI Ongole (8-9 November), and St Anthony's Industrial Institute Kadapa (10-12 November). On 12 November the Regional travelled to Bangalore to hold a meeting of all Province representatives for the Poverty Reduction Programme of the South Asia Region and after addressing the

group on the morning of 13 November, travelled to Punganur to continue the visitation (13-14 November), Don Bosco Mission Raptadu (15-16 November), Don Bosco Technical School Kurnool (17-18 November), Sacred Heart Prenovitiate (19-20 November), Don Bosco Motinagar Parish and School (21-23 November), and reached the Provincial House on 24 November. He held a meeting with the representatives of the "Disciples" Sisters on 24 November at the Salesian Provincial House. On 26 November he animated the Rectors and Leaders of the Province of Hyderabad on the Poverty Reduction programme. On 27 November the Regional presented the highlights of the visitation findings to the Provincial Council and on 28 November he presented the summary report to the Assembly of Confreres with the presence of the Rectors and Leaders of communities. On 29 November the Regional travelled to Guwahati by air and then by road to Dimapur to join the meeting of the Economers of the South Asia Region together with the Executive Directors of the PDOs and Mission Offices of all the Provinces of the Region held on 30 November - 3 December. On the evening of 1 November, the Regional trav-

elled from Dimapur via Kolkata to Rome and reached Rome on 2 November in time for the General Council meeting that started in the afternoon on 2 November.

The General Councillor for the America South Cone Region

On the same day as the end of the General Council summer session in Italy, the Councillor left for Paraguay for the installation of the new Provincial, Fr Néstor Ledesma, in the city of Asunción on 29 July.

From 1 August to 23 September he made the Extraordinary Visitation to the St Dominic Savio Province of **Manaus, Brazil (BMA), in the name of the Rector Major**. During this time he spoke with all the Salesians of the Province (80); he visited the 10 canonical houses. He learned about the situation in the missionary areas, the two schools, the parishes and public churches, social works and youth centres, the work with indigenous communities and young people at risk, the festive oratories and the vocational training institutes.

He met three times with the Provincial Council and once with

all the Salesian rectors gathered at the retreat. He also spoke with the Provincial of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In the communities, he also met with the Salesian Family Groups and spoke with the coordinators and provincial leaders of all the groups. He met with the Salesian Family Advisory Council.

On 24 September he left for Campo Grande to begin the **Extraordinary Visitation** on the following day to the St Alphonsus Liguori Province of **Campo Grande, Brazil (BCG)** in the name of the Rector Major, which ended on 28 November. He learned about the situation in the missionary areas, schools, parishes and public churches, social works and youth centres, work with indigenous communities and young people at risk, festive oratories and vocational training institutes.

He met once with the Provincial Council and once with all the Salesian rectors gathered for the Provincial Assembly and the Provincial Feast day in Cuiabá, on the occasion of the 130th anniversary of the arrival of the first Salesians in Mato Grosso. He also spoke with the Provincial of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In the communities, he also

met with the Salesian Family Groups and spoke with the coordinators and provincial leaders of all the groups. He met with the Salesian Family Advisory Council.

From 21 to 24 October he participated in the Meeting of Provincials from the region in Santiago de Chile. (Lo Cañas). On 29 December he returned to Turin to attend the winter session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the Central and Northern Europe Region

On 26 July 2024, after the conclusion of the summer session of the General Council, Fr Roman Jachimowicz, Regional Councillor for the Central and North Europe Region, went for a few days of holiday with his family. During this period he also visited various Salesian communities in his Region.

It should be remembered that on 25 May, still during the Summer Session of the General Council, he went to Slovenia to the St Cyril and Methodius (SLO) Province for the installation of the new Provincial Fr Peter Končan. Subsequently, on 15 June he was in Croatia for the installation of the new Provincial of the St John Bosco Province

(CRO), Fr Milan Ivančević. Then, on 6 July the new Superior of the Mary Help of Christians Vice-Province of Malta (MLT), Fr Eric Cachia, was installed.

During this period, the Regional Councillor, Fr Roman Jachimowicz, made three Extraordinary Visitations to the Provinces of the Central and North Europe Region.

In the days from 2 to 20 September he made the Extraordinary Visitation to the St John Bosco Province with its Provincial Headquarters in Prague, Czech Republic (CEP).

Subsequently, on 29 September - 30 October he made the Extraordinary Visitation to the Mary Help of Christians Province of Slovakia (SLK). From 18 - 21 March he went to the Salesian community of Baku in Azerbaijan, which is part of the Slovak Province, and on 6 - 10 August to Yakutsk and Aldan in Siberia (Russia), where the confreres belonging to the Slovak Province carry out their mission.

Finally, on 6 - 12 November he made the Extraordinary Visitation to the Guardian Angels Province of Austria (AUS).

In addition, during this time the Regional Councillor Fr Roman held four Consultations for the

appointment of new Provincials.

On 26 - 27 September he held the Consultation in the St Stanislaus Kostka Province, Warsaw, Poland (PLE) with its Provincial Headquarters in Warsaw. Three meetings were planned for the consultation, which took place in the following order, in three different communities: in Warsaw in 53 Kawęczyńska Street, in Łódź in Wodna Street and in Ełk.

From 24 - 26 October he held the Consultation for the appointment of the Provincials of the St Francis de Sales Province of France - South Belgium (FRB), with its Provincial Headquarters in Paris - Pyrénées, in three different Salesian communities: Brussels (Belgium), Paris, Lyon.

From November 18 - 19, he carried out the Consultation for the appointment of the Provincial in the St Hyacinth Province of Kraków Poland (PLS) with its Provincial Headquarters in Krakow, in four different Salesian communities: Oświęcim, Kraków, Przemyśl, Bóbrka (Ukraine).

Finally, on 13 November he held the Consultation for the appointment of the Provincial for the St Stephen King Province, with its headquarters in Budapest, Hungary (UNG), in the Péliföldszentkereszt community.

One of the significant celebrations in the Central and North Europe Region was the Centenary of the Salesians in Slovakia (1924 - 2024). The celebrations took place from 6 - 8 September, which represented the culmination of the entire festive year. They were enriched by the presence of the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Stefano Martoglio and the Councillor for the Region Fr Roman Jachimowicz and Provincials from the Region.

In conclusion, it is worth stressing that this entire period, before the General Council's Winter session, was very intense with many significant meetings which resulted in a deeper understanding of the situation of the Central and North Europe Region, an opportunity of great fraternity and first of all an opportunity to recognise God's great gift for Don Bosco's Salesian charism in the Church and in today's world.

The General Councillor for the Interamerica Region

Following the last summer session of the General Council, on Saturday 27 July I went to Medellin. On Sunday 28 July we celebrated the beginning of the service of Fr Ariel Guerrero as

Provincial of the Salesian Province of Colombia Medellin. From 30 July to 8 August I went to Mexico to spend a few days with my family.

On 9 August I arrived in Santa Cruz Bolivia and on Saturday 10 August we began the Extraordinary Visitation to Our Lady of Copacabana Province in Bolivia, which ended on Saturday, 28 September 2024. I spent 49 days visiting and meeting the confreres in 16 communities. I spoke to 79 confreres. On behalf of the Rector Major, I greeted three bishops: Archbishop Tito Solari Capellari SDB Archbishop emeritus of Cochabamba, Archbishop Jesús Juárez Párraga SDB Archbishop Emeritus of Sucre, Bishop Fernando Bascope Muller SDB, auxiliary bishop of the diocese of San Ignacio de Velasco.

From 25-26 October we held the annual meeting of provincials from the Interamerica Region. On this occasion we decided a year ago to hold the meeting online. We spent two days and addressed the most important issues in the context of preparation for the 29th General Chapter.

On Monday 30 September I travelled from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, to New York. On Tuesday, 1 October we officially opened the

Extraordinary Visit to the Province of St Philip the Apostle in the Eastern United States and Canada, SUE, which lasted almost two months and ended on 23 November 2025. I spent 54 days visiting the Province, and spoke with 120 Salesian confreres in 15 communities.

On Sunday 24 November 2024, I travelled from New York to Bogotá, Colombia, to accompany the consultation days for discernment of the new Provincial for the Province of St Francis Xavier in Colombia Bogotá, spending time with Fr John Jairo Gomez and his council and with an assembly of most of the confreres.

On Thursday 28 November I travelled from Bogotá to Rome, preparing for the winter session of the General Council.

The General Councillor for the Mediterranean Region

After the sessions of the General Council in June-July, the Councillor for the Mediterranean Region had the opportunity to attend the opening of the Communication Conference in Rome on 1 August. On 3 August he participated in the Campobosco for young people from Spain and Portugal at Colle, celebrating the Eu-

charist in the Don Bosco Church. On the 8th he went to Mestre until the 10th where he spoke at the course for the newly appointed rectors in Italy. After a few days of rest in Monteortone he went back to Colle to take part in the last two days of the Synod of Young People and on 16 August at the Rector Major's farewell, celebrating at the Eucharist during which he signed his letter of resignation as Rector Major. After that, he took the opportunity to spend a few days with the family.

On 28 August he returned to Rome for the installation of the new provincial of the ICC Province, Fr Roberto Colameo, on 29 August in the Don Bosco Church at Cinecittà, Rome. At the end of the celebration, he left for airport to take the flight to Lisbon to participate in the International Congress of Mary Help of Christians in Fatima. Returning to Rome on 2 September, he moved to Turin on 3 September, where the Extraordinary Visitation to the Mary Help of Christians ICP Province began on 4 September. That day he met with the Provincial in the morning and in the afternoon with the Provincial Council.

From 5 September to 2 October he made the Extraordinary Visi-

tation to some Houses: Turin-Andrea Beltrami, Turin-Rinaldi, Valdocco-Don Bosco, Valdocco-Maria Ausiliatrice, Chieri, Rivoli, Venaria, Vigliano Biellese and the houses in Lithuania: Vilnius, Telsiai and Ketranga. On 14 September he presided over the celebration of the perpetual profession of six confreres from the ICP Province and on 15 September in Milan the perpetual profession of three SDB confreres and three FMA sisters. From 3 to 6 October he celebrated the feast of the Rosary in his family village. He then resumed the Extraordinary Visitation on 8-9 October to the house at Cumiana, from where he went to Madrid to the New Don Bosco House to participate from 11 to 13 October in the Regional Seminar on "First announcement and interreligious dialogue", and taking advantage of his presence to carry out the opening and blessing of the new Don Bosco House. He then re-

sumed the Extraordinary Visitation on behalf of the Rector Major to the following ICP houses until 29 November: Valdocco-Saint Francis de Sales, Agnelli, Fossano, Savigliano, Saluzzo, Vercelli, Alessandria, Serravalle, Turin-Bra, Casale Monferrato, Turin-San Paolo, Cuneo, Lombriasco, Châtillon and Turin-San Giovanni Evangelista. During this time he also participated one evening, celebrating the Eucharist, in the Promise of a group of 36 Salesian Cooperators in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, and in the meeting on Salesian Places convened by the Vicar of the Rector Major. After meeting with the Provincial Provincial Council and Rectors to share an overview of the Province after the Extraordinary Visitation in Avigliana, Italy, on 30 November he returned to Rome to begin the General Council sessions for December 2024 - January 2025.

5.1 The Mission office at Congregational level

Prot 24/0591

THE MISSION OFFICE AT CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL

Identity and Mission

1. The Identity of the Mission Office at Congregational Level ¹

The Mission Office is an expression of the Salesian Congregation's missionary spirit at the service of Don Bosco's charism. "To support missionary activity, the Rector Major with the consent of his Council and in agreement with the local provincial, may set up mission offices to serve the whole Congregation. Their organisation and method of functioning will depend on the provincial or provincials in whose territory the offices operate, in the light of a statutory agreement made previously with the Rector Major, and in agreement with the General Councillor for the Missions and with the Economer General." (*R.* 24; cf. *R.* 106, § 2).

2. The Purpose of the Mission Office at Congregational Level

Each Mission Office at Congregational level has its own historical development in response to the needs of the Congregation. However, its main purpose is to be at the service of the Rector Major to support the missionary commitment of the whole Congregation through initiatives of information and animation to stir up interest in the Church and society on the missionary activities of the Salesians of Don Bosco, to support the formation of Salesians, new missionary presences and other indications of the Rector Major.

The contribution of the Mission Offices makes possible the start and growth of many missionary projects and continues to be a sign of the involvement of many people in the missionary commitment of the Congregation.

¹ These are currently *Don Bosco Mission* (Bonn, Germany), *Missioni Don Bosco* (Turin, Italy), *Misiones Salesianas* (Madrid, Spain), *Salesian Missions* (New Rochelle, USA).

The Mission Office maintains a strong sense of communion with the Salesian Congregation by supporting its worldwide mission, in particular through activities and projects to foster integral evangelisation and integral human development, especially of poor and marginalised young people (C. 6, 30).

The Mission Office at congregational level always functions in accordance with the guidelines established by the Rector Major and his Council and the directives provided by him through his authorised representative.

3. The Statutes

The Mission Office at Congregational level is regulated by its Statutes, which guarantee the Salesian values, Salesian spirituality and Don Bosco's Preventive System. They are approved by the Rector Major with the consent of his Council. Any revision of the Statutes requires the approval of the Rector Major and his Council.

4. The Governing Board

The Mission Office has a Governing Board that meets at least twice a year and as often as deemed necessary.

Being a Mission Office at Congregational level, the Councillor General for Missions (C. 138), the Economist General (C. 139) and the Regional Councillor responsible for the territory (C. 140) are *ex-officio* members of the Board. The Local Provincial or his representative is also an *ex-officio* member (R. 18).

5. The Director

The Rector Major with the consent of his Council, after hearing the opinion of the local Provincial and/or the Provincials concerned, appoints the Director of the Mission Office at Congregational level, Salesian or lay, for a period of three years, renewable but for no more than three consecutive terms.

The Director oversees the day-to-day management, operation and development of the Mission Office in accordance with its Statutes and in line with the guidelines of the Rector Major, personally or through his representative.

The Director, with the consent of his Board of Management, presents to the Governing Board the annual budget and final balance sheet or statement. It is the Director's task to implement the decisions of the Governing Board.

The Director, with the Board of Management, has autonomous decision-making discretion for requests according to the limit set by its Statutes or by the Rector Major. Above this limit the Governing Board, to which the director will send requests for authorisation, is competent for control and operation.

6. Board of Management

A Board of Management supports the Director in the effective fulfilment of the goal of the Mission Office. Its composition and members are determined by the Statutes. The Director regularly convenes the Board of Management.

The Chairperson of the Board of Management, the members and their term of office are determined by the Statutes.

7. Funding

The Mission Office at Congregational level gives priority to the financing of projects indicated by the Rector Major. Adequate documentation of the prior authorisation of the Rector Major and his Council, required by the Salesian Constitutions, must be presented for requests to finance buildings, open and close houses or change the scope of existing works, construct new buildings, demolish existing ones or make substantial modifications, acquire, alienate, exchange, mortgage or rent property (C. 132 §2, 12; 165 §5; 188 §1, 5).

Funding requests are submitted exclusively by the Provincial, who also certifies that the funding request is in line with the Overall Province Plan (OPP) with the support of his Province Mission Office or Province Planning and Development Office (PDO). Likewise he ensures transparency and administrative accountability.

Funds received for the formation of Salesians and projects must be accounted for according to international accounting standards. Without this accountability, requests for funding of new projects will not be possible.

8. Pastoral Care

For many people, the Mission Office is the only experience of Christianity or the church. Hence, it provides pastoral care so that people who share their resources, regardless of their religious affiliation, have a spiritual perspective, draw closer to God and are in a new spiritual communion with the wider human family.

It also promotes the Christian attitude of *stewardship* of God's gifts (Mt 25:14-30) among all stakeholders: donors, missionaries and beneficiaries, and a vision of development that involves the whole person and encompasses all aspects of our humanity, including evangelisation and defence of the integrity of creation.²

The recognition and close relationship with donors is an expression of our gratitude for their commitment, demonstrated through donations and gestures of solidarity.

9. The Missions Sector

Although every Mission Office at congregational level is independent, the Missions Sector, through a contact person of the Sector, coordinates and promotes networking, builds synergies and solidarity in view of a more effective realisation of its identity and mission.

These guidelines were approved by the Vicar (ex. SDB C. art. 143) and the General Council at its 10 December 2024 session. They come into force on 6 January 2025.



Josep Manuel Casca

Fr Alfred MARAVILLA, sdb
General Councillor for Missions

² Cf. "The Province Mission Office. Guidelines and Orientations", in AGC 443, p.44-45.

5.2 Profile of New Provincials

1. *SARANITI Domenico, Provincial of the St Paul Province of Sicily, Italy (ISI). He succeeds Fr Giovanni D'Andrea.*

On 6 December 2024 the Vicar with the consent of the General Council appointed Fr Domenico Saraniti as Provincial of the St Paul Province of Sicily Italy (ISI), for the six-year period from 2025 – 2031.

Born in Paternò on 14 December 1979, he grew up at the oratory run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Cesarò. After studying at the Capizzi Liceo Classico in Bronte, he entered the novitiate on 8 September 1999, at Monteoliveto, Pinerolo, and professed his first Salesian vows At Valdocco, Turin, on 8 September 2000. He completed his philosophical studies at the San Tarcisio community in Rome, attending courses at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome from 2000 to 2002. He did his practical training in Palermo at the Jesus the Adolescent school from 2002 to 2004.

He completed theological studies at the St Thomas Theological Institute in Messina from 2004 to 2007, finally professing his perpetual vows on 16 September 2007. He was ordained a priest by Bishop Ig-

nazio Zambito, Bishop of Patti (ME), in Cesarò on 10 May 2008.

During his diaconate year and in his first year of priesthood, he lived in the St Thomas Aquinas community at the Pontifical Salesian University, for his studies. He holds a degree in Pedagogy from the University of Palermo and a degree in Philosophy from the Roma Tre University.

Always with young people and for young people, his first obedience, after the years of formation, was in charge of the oratory at Ranchibile and teacher of History and Philosophy at the local high school. In 2017 he was appointed Rector of the same House.

From 28 April 2018 to date he has been a Provincial Councillor, and was Delegate of the Salesian Cooperators at the Ranchibile centre until last October.

2. *JARECKI Tadeusz, Provincial of the St Stanislaus Kostka Province, East Poland (PLE).*

On 6 December 2024, the Vicar with the consent of the General Council appoint Fr Tadeusz Jarecki as the Provincial of the St Stanislaus Kostka Province of Poland (PLE) for the six-year period from 2025-2031.

Born on 5 December 1962 in

Zwolen, Poland, he attended the Salesian novitiate at Czerwinsk from 1982-1983, he professed perpetual vows on 10 September 1989 in Rome, and was ordained a priest on 22 June 1991 at Wozniaków, Kutno.

After being Rector of the Theological Studentate in Łódź from 1999 to 2006, he then served for many years, from 2009 to 2019, in the Salesian community at Elk, as Rector and Parish Priest.

He was the Formation Delegate for PLE between 2003 and 2007 and again between 2010 and 2013, as well as Vice-Provincial and Delegate for the Salesian Family from 2006 to 2007.

He was appointed Provincial of PLE for the first time on 14 December 2018.

3. *VITÁLIS Gábor, Provincial of the St Stephen the King Province of Hungary (UNG). He succeeds Fr János Andrásfalvy.*

On 10 December 2024 the Vicar with the consent of the General Council appointed Fr Gabor Vitális as Provincial of the St Stephen the King Province of Hungary (UNG) for the six-year period from 2025 - 2031.

He was born on 3 February 1981, in Eger, Hungary. Entering the Salesian novitiate located in the

Hungarian capital Obuda, Budapest on 1 September 2000, he professed his first vows on 2 September the following year, then completed his initial formation with stages also in Italy, in Pordenone and in Rome, where he studied at the Pontifical Salesian University. After professing perpetual vows on 25 October 2007 in Budapest, he was ordained a priest in the same city on 25 April 2009.

After priestly ordination he was appointed Economer of the House at Obuda, Budapest (2009-11), and later Parish Priest (2011-20) and Rector (2013-20) in Kazincbarcika. In 2020 he was sent to Péliföld-szentkereszt where he was parish priest in Nyergesujfalu and, since 2023, Rector of the same Salesian community.

Immediately after his ordination he held various positions in the Province, being Delegate, between 2009 and 2013 for Altar servers, the Salesian Youth Movement and Vocations, Oratories, and Parishes. He was also Delegate for Formation in 2011 and on several occasions Delegate for Youth Ministry, either as coordinator at a general level (2010-13) or with reference to specific areas, such as schools (2016-20) or parishes (2018-20).

Since 2020, he has held the position of Provincial Economer.

4. *ERNST Xavier, Provincial of the St Francis de Sales Province of France Belgium South (FRB). He succeeds Fr Daniel Federspiel.*

On 10 December 2024 the Vicar with the consent of the General Council appointed Fr Ernst Xavier as Provincial of the St Francis de Sales Province of France Belgium South (FRB), for the six-year period from 2025 – 2031.

Born on 30 October 1981 in Verviers, near Liège, Belgium, Fr Xavier Ernst made his Salesian novitiate in Spain, in Cartuja, Granada, between 2004 and 2005, professing his first vows on 16 August 2005. He completed part of his initial formation at the Pontifical Salesian University (UPS) in Rome and professed perpetual vows in Liège, on 8 October 2011. He received priestly ordination in the same city on 20 May 2013.

After ordination he remained for four years in the Salesian community in Liège, then, from 2016 to today, working in France, in the Pyrénées and Monte Cristo communities in Paris, where he has worked since 2019 and where he is currently Vice-Rector and Parish Priest.

After graduating in the Science of Social Service, he has been a Provincial Councillor continuously from 2016 to date. He was also

Delegate for Formation from 2018 to 2020, and in 2017 he became Delegate for Youth Ministry, a role he still maintains.

5. *CEREZO HUERTA Juan Aarón, Provincial of Our Lady of Guadalupe Province of Mexico (MEM). He succeeds Fr Ocampo Uribe Ignacio.*

On 10 December 2024 the Vicar with the consent of the General Council appointed Fr Juan Aarón Cerezo Huerta as Provincial of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Province of Mexico (MEM), for the six-year period from 2025 – 2031.

Born on 29 June 1968 in Mexico City, after entering the Salesian novitiate in Coacalco in 1987, he made his first profession on 16 June 1988, then professed perpetual vows on 25 June 1994 in Mexico City. He received priestly ordination on 3 February 1996, again in Mexico City.

He was appointed Rector of the Marciano Tinajero y Estrada Institute (IMTE) in Querétaro in 2002 and subsequently he was sent to complete his studies in Rome at the Pontifical Salesian University (UPS). Returning to the Province in 2008, he was assigned to the community at Mérida, where, starting the following year, he was

Rector for three years, until 2012. From 2013 to 2019 he was Vice-Rector and Parish Priest at the Salesian Youth Centre in Coacalco, then for three years, from 2021 to 2024, he was Rector and Economer of the Maria Auxiliadora House in Puebla. Since last September he has been Rector of the MEM Province Centre.

Formerly the Province's Delegate for Schools, between 2004 and 2006, in September 2023 he became Delegate for Youth Ministry, and for the Salesian Family, directly accompanying the various groups of Past Pupils, Salesian Cooperators, the Association of Mary Help of Christians and the Damas Salesianas. He is also Regional Assistant for the Don Bosco Volunteers.

6. *JARAMILLO DUQUE Rubén Dario, Provincial of the St Peter Claver Province of Colombia (COB). He succeeds Fr John Jairo Gómez Rúa.*

On 16 December 2024 the Vicar with the consent of the General Council appointed Fr Dario Jaramillo Duque Rubén as Provincial of the St Peter Claver Province of Colombia (COB), for the six-year period from 2025 – 2031.

Born on 9 April 1965 in Granada, Colombia, Fr Jaramillo Duque

made his Salesian novitiate at La Ceja between 1986 and 1987, and professed his first vows there on 24 January 1987. He made his perpetual profession in Bogotá on 31 January 1993 and was ordained priest on 21 October 1995, in his hometown.

He was appointed Rector of several houses of the Province: the Theological Studentate in Bogotá (2005-07), Fusagasugá (2009-14), the León XIII institute, also in Bogotá (2017-18) and also in Mosquera (2018-19). From 2019 he returned to work at the Theological Studentate in Bogotá, first as Vice-Rector, and then as Economer, Parish Priest and finally also Rector.

He was Delegate for Formation in the Province from 2019 to 2021 and again from last February; he also worked as Delegate for the Salesian Family (2021-22), as Delegate for Salesian Cooperators (2024-in-progress) and from June 2023 he was appointed Vice-Provincial.

7. *BARTOCHA Dariusz, Provincial of the St Hyacinth Province of Poland South (PLS). He succeeds Fr Kaznowski Marcin.*

On 18 September the Vicar, with the consent of the General Council appointed Fr Dariusz Bartocha as Provincial of the St Hyacinth

Province of Poland South for the six-year period from 2026 – 2032.

Born on 6 March 1965 in Kielce, Poland, he met the Salesians right in his hometown. He entered the novitiate at Kopiec in 1985, and professed his his first vows on 30 August 1986 and his perpetual vows in Krakow on 1 August 1992. He was ordained a priest on 11 June 1994, in Krakow.

He was in charge of the Kielce oratory from 1994 to 1998. Then for nine years he worked at the Salesian Education and Youth Ministry Centre in Krakow (1998–2007), holding the position of Rector of the community for six years (2000-06). He was Vice-Rector of the Province Centre in Krakow for four years from 2007 to 2011, and later, he was Rector of the Jagielly community in Oświęcim from 2017 to 2023. Since last September he has been living in the Salesian Theological Studentate "Seminarium" community in Krakow.

He was first a Councillor (1997-2006) for the St Hyacinth Province, then Delegate for Youth Ministry (2005-07), then Vice-Provincial (2007-11) and has already held the role of Provincial in the six-year period from 2011-2017. He is currently the Delegate for Social Communication.

8. FIN - JAVINES (Aguilar) Ronilo, *Provincial of the St John Bosco Province of the Philippines North (FIN)*. *He succeeds Fr Martin Gerardo [Naguit]*.

On 17 December 2024, the Vicar with the consent of the General Council appointed Fr Ronilo Javines [Aguilar] as Provincial of the St John Bosco Province of the Philippines North (FIN) for the six-year period from 2025 – 2031.

Born on 14 June 1967 in Makati Rizal, in the Philippines, Fr Ronilo Javines Aguilar entered the Salesian novitiate in Canlubang on 1 April 1986 and professed his first vows there on 1 April 1987. He professed perpetual vows on 24 March 1993 in Parañaque, where he would also be ordained priest on 8 December 1995.

In his Salesian life he has served in the St John Bosco parish communities at Makati (1996-2007), later in Legazpi, at the Banquerohan Centre where he was also Economist (2015-16) and Rector (2016-20), and finally in Mandaluyong, where he has currently been Rector since 2020.

He has always worked in the Youth Ministry field for the FIN Province, being part of the provincial delegation team with various tasks and on several occasions (2005-07; 2017- ongoing).

5.3 Deceased confreres (2nd list July-December 2024)

"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" (C. 94).

| SURNAME AND NAME | PLACE of death | DATE | AGE | PROV |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|-----|------|
| P Thazhathette, Josin | Aluva, Kerala (India) | 03/07/2024 | 69 | INK |
| L Juarros Manero, José Pedro | Avila (Spagna) | 04/07/2024 | 88 | SSM |
| P Kudiyarippl, James | Karunapuram, Telangana (India) | 05/07/2024 | 79 | INH |
| S Tchekpo, Houegnon Giscard Amour | Cotonou (Benin) | 11/07/2024 | 29 | AON |
| P Carraro Bacchin, Giovanni | Santiago (Cile) | 15/07/2024 | 83 | CIL |
| P Brea Pazos, Francisco | León (Spagna) | 18/07/2024 | 90 | SSM |
| L Robusti, Angelo | Guayaquil (Ecuador) | 18/07/2024 | 92 | ECU |
| P Merino Vicente, Fiorentino | Arévalo - Ávila (Spagna) | 20/07/2024 | 86 | SSM |
| P Garay Marín, Francisco Javier | México (Messico) | 23/07/2024 | 69 | MEM |
| P Donovan, Dennis | New York (Stati Uniti) | 25/07/2024 | 70 | SUE |
| P Fung Tin Chun, John Bosco | Hong Kong (Cina) | 25/07/2024 | 90 | CIN |
| P Iraheta Guzman, Alonso | Contratación - Santander (Colombia) | 27/07/2024 | 93 | COB |
| P Kuruvachira, John Joseph | Madras (India) | 29/07/2024 | 84 | INM |
| P Urizar Meckler, Manuel Alejandro | San José (Costa Rica) | 30/07/2024 | 41 | CAM |
| P Buttol, Vittorio | Templeuve (Belgio) | 01/08/2024 | 83 | FRB |
| P Vandecandelaere, Frans Louls | Vilvoorde (Belgio) | 01/08/2024 | 78 | BEN |
| P Zamora González, Miguel Angel | San José (Costa Rica) | 02/08/2024 | 85 | CAM |
| P Tirkey, Mukht Kumar | Shillong, Meghalaya (India) | 04/08/2024 | 56 | INS |
| S Sac Barreno, José Augusto | Guatemala (Guatemala) | 12/08/2024 | 24 | CAM |
| P Samala, John | Mumbai (India) | 12/08/2024 | 86 | INB |
| P Gallagher, James | Surrey (Gran Bretagna) | 20/08/2024 | 86 | GBR |
| P Pryputniewicz, Jan | Wrocław (Polonia) | 21/08/2024 | 84 | PLO |
| P Kezhakkekara, Joseph | New Delhi (India) | 22/08/2024 | 87 | INN |
| P Mokrzycki, Józef | Lubin (Polonia) | 22/08/2024 | 63 | PLO |
| P Jeren, Ivan | Zagreb (Croazia) | 24/08/2024 | 83 | CRO |
| P Dumrauf, Martín | Buenos Aires (Argentina) | 26/08/2024 | 87 | ARS |
| P Bihlmayer, Herbert | Soyen (Germania) | 27/08/2024 | 89 | GER |
| P Lannoo, Jozef | Zwijnaarde - Gent (Belgio) | 29/08/2024 | 94 | BEN |
| L Lourenço, Manuel | Évora (Portogallo) | 30/08/2024 | 82 | POR |
| P Caruana, Anthony | Victoria (Malta) | 01/09/2024 | 80 | MLT |
| P Appadan, Raphael | Tirupattur (India) | 04/09/2024 | 83 | INM |
| P Filippi (Cervo), Marlo | Torino (Italia) | 05/09/2024 | 87 | ICP |
| P Palomo, Aguedo | Iloilo (Filippine) | 05/09/2024 | 77 | FIS |
| P Cuadrado Sendino, Arcadio | Bilbao-Deusto (Spagna) | 09/09/2024 | 88 | SSM |
| P Madurga García, Antonio | Barcelona (Spagna) | 09/09/2024 | 93 | SMX |
| P Body Flores, Sergio | Punta Arenas (Cile) | 10/09/2024 | 89 | CIL |
| P Pinet, Alain | Roma (Italia) | 10/09/2024 | 65 | RMG |

| SURNAME AND NAME | PLACE of death | DATE | AGE | PROV |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|-----|------|
| L Zaramella, Vittorio | Roma (Italia) | 10/09/2024 | 89 | ICC |
| P Marquès Calafat, Joan | Barcelona (Spagna) | 12/09/2024 | 62 | SMX |
| P Fontana (Zorteo), Umberto | Mestre - VE (Italia) | 14/09/2024 | 88 | INE |
| P Fernando, Anuth | Belo Horizonte - MG (Brasile) | 17/09/2024 | 91 | BBH |
| P Lau Tsing-Hung, Joseph | Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong (Cina) | 18/09/2024 | 95 | CIN |
| P Gutiérrez Andérez, Francisco | Arévalo - Ávila (Spagna) | 25/09/2024 | 81 | SSM |
| P García Velasco, Félix | León (Spagna) | 01/10/2024 | 85 | SSM |
| L Vitulas Ajahuana, Agustín | Lima (Perù) | 01/10/2024 | 88 | PER |
| P Rossoni, Giovanni | Spirano - BG (Italia) | 02/10/2024 | 86 | ILE |
| P Meloni, Aldo | Monserrato - CA (Italia) | 04/10/2024 | 82 | ICC |
| P Vivas Rivero, Manuel | Caracas (Venezuela) | 05/10/2024 | 87 | VEN |
| P Apicella, Ferruccio | Salerno (Italia) | 06/10/2024 | 96 | IME |
| P Zanonì (Marzani), Guido | Bologna (Italia) | 06/10/2024 | 94 | ILE |
| P Calleja Del Barrio, Victoriano | Macas, Morona Santiago (Ecuador) | 08/10/2024 | 95 | ECU |
| P Astan-Gnacke, Thomas | Soyen (Germania) | 11/10/2024 | 82 | GER |
| P Mbayani, Frederic | Lubumbashi (Rep.Dem.Congo) | 12/10/2024 | 54 | ACC |
| P Rodríguez Villares, Julián | Caracas (Venezuela) | 16/10/2024 | 77 | VEN |
| P Surový, Vojtech | Nitra (Slovacchia) | 18/10/2024 | 86 | SLK |
| P Pedron, Tito | Hat Yai (Thailandia) | 19/10/2024 | 88 | THA |
| L Akabae, Antonio Fumio | Chofu, Tokyo (Giappone) | 20/10/2024 | 95 | GIA |
| P Morgando, Giacomo | Torino (Italia) | 22/10/2024 | 96 | ICP |
| L Rabelo de Mesquita, Raymundo | Belo Horizonte - MG (Brasile) | 22/10/2024 | 91 | BBH |
| P Oliveras i Janer, Josep Oriol | Barcelona (Spagna) | 23/10/2024 | 90 | SMX |
| L Gazzola, Tarcisio | Roma (Italia) | 26/10/2024 | 88 | RMG |
| L Kuttamplackal, Thomas | Calcutta (India) | 29/10/2024 | 89 | INC |
| P Gruen, Wolfgang | Belo Horizonte (Brasile) | 30/10/2024 | 97 | BBH |
| P Lopes, Lino | Hubli (India) | 30/10/2024 | 60 | INP |
| P Bordignon, Guerrino | Castello di Godego - TV (Italia) | 05/11/2024 | 82 | INE |
| P Di Mauro, Rodolfo | Catania (Italia) | 06/11/2024 | ## | ISI |
| P Caroppoli, Antonio | Salerno (Italia) | 07/11/2024 | 76 | ICC |
| P Alberti, Ercole Salvino | Paderno Dugnano - MI (Italia) | 08/11/2024 | 80 | ILE |
| P Boldetti, Giuseppe | Ferrara (Italia) | 14/11/2024 | 96 | ILE |
| P Campion, Desmond | Cork (Irlanda) | 16/11/2024 | 80 | IRL |
| P Emmers, Jan | Peer (Belgio) | 18/11/2024 | 90 | BEN |
| L Kostecki, Witold Tadeusz | Warszawa (Polonia) | 22/11/2024 | 71 | PLE |
| P Oberosler, Roberto | Mestre - VE (Italia) | 25/11/2024 | 94 | INE |
| P Gandini, Vittorio | Castano Primo - MI (Italia) | 28/11/2024 | 92 | ILE |
| P Harlender, Jerzy | Przemyśl (Polonia) | 28/11/2024 | 87 | PLS |
| P San Pablo Riobó, Lorenzo | Madrid (Spagna) | 29/11/2024 | 85 | SSM |
| P Rasquinha, Vincent | Mumbai (India) | 30/11/2024 | 78 | INB |
| L Zampieron, Francesco | Torino (Italia) | 30/11/2024 | 95 | ICP |
| P Araíz Churlo, Luis | Barcelona (Spagna) | 01/12/2024 | 93 | SMX |
| L Panetta, Carlo | Castano Primo - MI (Italia) | 01/12/2024 | 104 | ILE |
| P Baclay, Leonides | Cebu (Filippine) | 05/12/2024 | 60 | FIS |
| L Wiegand, James | Paramus, New Jersey (Stati Uniti) | 08/12/2024 | 91 | SUE |
| P Boldrini, Riccardo | Nizza (Francia) | 12/12/2024 | 85 | FRB |

| SURNAME AND NAME | PLACE of death | DATE | AGE | PROV |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------|-----|------------|
| P Doff-Sotta, Giovanni | Brescia (Italia) | 13/12/2024 | 86 | ILE |
| P Orío Alsasua, Amallo | Barcelona (Spagna) | 13/12/2024 | 84 | SMX |
| P Budziński, Tadeusz | Ottignies (Belgio) | 14/12/2024 | 89 | PLO |
| P Aracil Gosalvez, Javier | New York (Stati Uniti) | 18/12/2024 | 90 | SUE |
| P Schops, Jozef | Bolderberg (Belgio) | 20/12/2024 | 101 | BEN |
| P Sendino Ortega, Rosendo | Vigo (Spagna) | 30/12/2024 | 93 | SSM |



