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*The Salesian  
Family*

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Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco

*Edizione extra commerciale*

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## FOREWARD

No group that forms part of the Salesian Family can be indifferent to significant events or reflections that refer to a fellow-group, for all share the one common aspect in their Salesian vocation.

The monograph that follows treats of the project common to all the Salesian Family, even though it was actually a letter written directly to the Salesians SDB, who have the particular responsibility of being the centre of unity and stability for all the Family. This is part of their traditional vocation; it was so willed by Don Bosco; and it is a function recognised by all groups of the Family — as Father Viganò reminds us.

In recalling these responsibilities to the Congregation, the Rector Major (as Don Bosco's successor) authoritatively backs a whole series of identical appeals made to the Salesians by the various Family groups that they should implement these same responsibilities. Thus Father Viganò's exhortations unite with those of all present (and future) members of the Salesian Family and make them all the more authoritative.

The Rector Major's words are accepted by all, and his arguments are shared in common, and they impose, if possible, an even stronger obligation on the Salesians, since in loyalty to their very vocation they are answerable for the life of the Salesian Family.

Indeed the whole historical, theological and pastoral burden of the monograph is based on this fidelity to the Salesian vocation.

The Rector Major highlights the historical events relating to the Salesian charism and the founding of groups by Don Bosco to carry out his mission; he stresses too Don Bosco's desire that these groups (to be joined by others in the future) should carry out the Salesian project in close bonds of unity.

Father Viganò thus takes occasion to develop the concept of *Founder*, and to discuss the rich, fruitful and ecclesial aspects of Don Bosco's charism. He dilates on its central thrust, which is *pastoral charity* and is the uniting element.

“With the driving force” of his charism Don Bosco unifies into a single concordant and apostolic Family priests, layfolk, celibates, married and widowed, and religious, with all their various ways of witnessing to the Beatitudes. No one loses his or her specific spirituality, whether priestly, lay or religious. The charism of Don Bosco is a superior, overall and existential force: it accepts individual spiritualities with their special situations and functions, classifies them and impresses its special character on them without adding to or subtracting from anything in their nature; indeed it strengthens and enhances their own specific character (p. 16). This character we call *Salesianity* and it embraces both a mission and a spirituality that in practice combine to make up “Don Bosco’s Oratorian heart”, his “*Da mihi animas*”, and which must become the heart of every one of his disciples.

Having recalled Don Bosco’s special project, the Rector Major then speaks of the history of the renewal of the Salesian Family, the objectives it must strive for, and the problems it must solve in the immediate future. This latter task lies squarely on the shoulders of the Salesians, but it will only succeed if there are the “two complementary movements that renewal must pay heed to: a progressive *clarification of the identity of each individual group*, and a growing process of *integration and communion* with some kind of supporting and basic uniting principles” (p. 30).

Only thus shall we be able to “forge ahead together” in holiness, activity and communion.

The secret of putting all this into practice is a *lively loyalty to Don Bosco*; in other words, the fulfilment of the perennial Salesian vocation in today’s situations and with the creativeness and practicality of Don Bosco.

Our loyalty looks to the past and the future. It is derived from our past *Salesian history*: “Every confrere must realise that his religious profession introduces him into both the Congregation and the Salesian Family (and this refers equally to the members of the various groups); and in this extensive field he will find so much that will help him towards holiness and apostolic collaboration; it opens up horizons of work that would seem to border on temerity; it puts him in the vanguard of ecclesial and civic action” (p. 8).

Our loyalty is also forward-looking in its *renewal*. Time has demolished the kinds of relationships that Don Bosco had established according to the usage of the 19th century; but it has certainly not demolished our Founder's desire to gather together individuals and groups; nor the sense of mutual belonging so strong in these forces he founded and amalgamated. Today then new relationships must be devised so that our ecclesial renewal may revive our Family union in Salesian fidelity to the signs of the times we live in: we must give Don Bosco's charism to the modern world. "We are confronted with the profound cultural and social evolution of our times, the ecclesiological contributions of Vatican II, the revival of the laity within the People of God, the advancement of women in society and the Church, the changed youth situations, the ideological pluralism and political schemes of so many countries, the greater awareness and dynamism of nations, the problems of certain continents and their multitudes of young persons. When we reflect on these conditions we see them as further challenges to us to be loyal to our Salesian Family identity and promote its membership, activities and apostolic effectiveness" (p. 46).

Among the objectives proposed by the Rector Major there is one that seems particularly relevant and in keeping with the modern tendency to create vast spiritual renewal movements. He speaks of "giving priority to the specific formation of each group and *involving the laity*" — he has in mind a Salesian movement on a truly grand scale, a movement variegated and segmented but closely united of *Friends of Don Bosco*: this great army will draw its inspiration from the forces at work in the present (and future) groups within the Salesian sphere of influence.

*Rome*

*25 March 1982*

*Feast of the Annunciation*

Father GIOVANNI RAINERI  
*Councillor for the Salesian Family*

# THE SALESIAN FAMILY

**THE SALESIAN FAMILY:** Introduction - Fidelity to a precious heritage - Don Bosco belongs to the Church - Don Bosco father of a spiritual family - The unifying force of his charism - Renewal of SGS - Forging ahead together - Problems and prospects - Conclusion.

*Letter of the Rector Major - Acts of the Superior Council N. 304*

Rome, 24 February 1982

*Dear confreres,*

Today is Ash Wednesday and our Lenten preparation for Easter begins. Love of Christ, the Friend and Saviour of the young, and following in his footsteps, constitute the very soul of our vocation. In the sacrament of the Eucharist the Lord urges us daily to renew with joy our dedication and labours for the young and the working classes.

My travels through much of the Salesian world in the last few years have made one thing very clear to me: there is a colossal need everywhere of the Salesian vocation — in ever-increasing numbers and in greater efficiency, authenticity and generosity. *In every continent there are so many young people hungering and thirsting for truth and love; they are restlessly in search of friends like Don Bosco.*

I have just returned from my third visit to Africa: this time to the west of the continent. I was able to speak with our first missionaries in Senegal and the neighbouring countries. There is an urgent need in the missions of a *complete* Salesian presence: not just us Salesians, but also Daught-



ers of Mary Help of Christians, Co-operators and co-workers who are inspired with our Founder's project for youth and the working classes.

The urgent needs of the countless numbers of those for whom we work concern us deeply and make us realise that Don Bosco's mission demands not only our own consecrated presence but *all the Salesian Family* with its various groups.

In January, before leaving for Dakar, I was able to be present at the Salesian Family's *Week of Spirituality* held at the Generalate; the topic was *Vocations in the Salesian Family*. On my return I was able to take part in a *Symposium on the Salesian Family*<sup>1</sup> in which our specialists examined in depth its history and charism.

At the conclusion of the General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians I was particularly struck by an article in their new Constitutions that gave me much pleasure; *article 3* belongs to the section that describes the identity of the Institute: it says, "Our Institute is a living part of the Salesian Family that puts into practice the spirit and mission of Don Bosco in different ways and expresses its perennial freshness. The Rector Major of the Society of St Francis of Sales, as Don Bosco's successor, is its animator and centre of unity. In the Salesian Family we share the spiritual heritage of the Founder, and we offer, as happened at Mornese, the distinctive contribution of our vocation".<sup>2</sup>

Indeed after my letters to the *Don Bosco Volunteers*<sup>3</sup> and the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*,<sup>4</sup> and the recognition by all the groups of the Salesian Family that the Rector Major, successor of Don Bosco, is the centre of unity and animation

1. Symposium on the Salesian Family, 19-22 February 1982.

2. New Constitutions FMA, article 3.

3. ASC no. 295.

4. ASC no. 301.

of their mutual communion, and after the careful study made by the Councillor for the Salesian Family during the four years of his appointment, it seems that this is the proper time to discuss the topic of the *Salesian Family*. Father John Raineri too has often asked me to make it the subject of a circular letter so as to alert all confreres to the urgent importance of their acceptance of their responsibilities in this matter with greater awareness and effectiveness. For all these reasons I invite you to reflect on this facet of our vocation that is so relevant and fruitful. I refer to the Salesian Family as described in article 5 of our Constitutions and the corresponding text of the Special General Chapter.<sup>5</sup>

5. SGC 151-177.

I invite you, dear confreres, to meditate on this matter, to discuss it in community and to put it in your good prayers.

### **Fidelity to a precious heritage**

Don Bosco's *Salesian Family is an ecclesial fact*.

It means sharing in Don Bosco's spirit and mission with the resultant links between the various groups — Salesian confreres, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Co-operators and other later groups.

All together constitute within the Church a kind of spiritual kinship. Such a communion "has its origin in a complex historical fact. *In order to fulfil his vocation to save poor and abandoned youth, Don Bosco sought a wide-spread grouping of apostolic forces linked together in the unity and variety of a 'family'*."<sup>6</sup>

6. SGC 152.

The concept has been lived out and tested for more than a hundred years.

After Vatican II the People of God had the duty of clarifying their identities and re-establishing their various charisms, and this called for reflection and renewal. The result was that those who shared the same charism were moved to develop a more explicit awareness and a closer union and collaboration among themselves.

All this makes it clear that the *Salesian Family* is not something novel, imaginary or utopian. It is a concrete fact, a spiritual reality. It has its own proper history, its own deep truth; and it makes serious demands that must be met by our fidelity to Don Bosco and our mission today.

"The *Salesian Family*", we read in the SGC, "is an ecclesial reality which becomes in sign and witness of the vocation of its members through their special mission according to the spirit of Don Bosco.

"The *Salesian Family*, in line with the Church's teaching about herself, is an expression of communion consisting of different ways of serving the People of God and integrating various vocations, so as to show forth the richness of the Founder's charism.

"The *Salesian Family* develops a unique spirituality, charismatic by nature, which enriches the whole Body of the Church and constitutes an utterly distinctive Christian pedagogy."<sup>7</sup>

7. SGC 159.

Perhaps some of us have not yet made the effort to examine closely and objectively the providential steps that led to Don Bosco's becoming a *Founder*, and the total impact on the Church of his *Salesian Family*. We must gain greater insight into

the creativeness of Don Bosco and the apostolic perspective of his charism; he deserves our recognition and respect as one of the really great Founders in the Church.

Our Father knew he was called by God to undertake a vast mission on behalf of the young; to achieve this he saw clearly that he was called to be a *Founder* not simply of a Religious Institute but of a mighty spiritual and apostolic movement. The vast horizons he envisioned were inspired by God and the extensive and complex needs of those entrusted to his care.

He felt the clarion call to undertake a distinctive *salvation project*, and set about translating it into practice on a large and organised scale that was to involve all available forces. To quote him: "Once it was enough to unite in prayer; but today evil is so prevalent, especially affecting young boys and girls, that we need united action".<sup>8</sup> On another occasion he wrote, "We have initiated a series of projects that in the eyes of worldly people would appear impractical and crazy; however, God has blessed their beginnings and they are going ahead successfully. All the more reason for prayer, thanksgiving, hope and vigilance".<sup>9</sup> Don Bosco was a man of generous horizons and daring courage; to carry out his unique vocation he marshalled all his talents of intellect, creativity and courage, and was urged on too by the inspiration and graces of the Holy Spirit.

"At times he seemed to feel a kind of universal responsibility for abandoned youth; but he was well aware that the problems of the young were too vast for his works to cope with and must be referred to specific persons with civil and ecclesial

8. Conference to the Co-operators of Borgo San Martino, 1 July 1880.

9. Letter to John Cagliero, 27 April 1876.

responsibilities. In both cases it meant inviting people to interest themselves in the young when they were not officially members of his institutions and worked instead in parishes, in their families, in other cities districts".<sup>10</sup>

The problems of the multitudes of today's young people in need vastly outnumber those of Don Bosco's time; and there is obviously a far greater urgency to widen our horizons in our interpretation and promotion of the Salesian vocation.

The SGC had already seen the Salesian Family as *one of the main avenues of our renewal*: " 'Salesians', says Document I, no. 151, 'cannot fully rethink their vocation in the Church without reference to those who together with them carry out the will of the Founder; hence they seek a greater union of all whilst preserving the genuine diversity of each' ".<sup>11</sup>

This is a truth that demands our serious attention: our Salesian vocation, in its factual completeness, makes us participate vitally in *an experience of the Holy Spirit* lived and shared with so many others and in which there is mutual exchange of its wealth<sup>12</sup> and a more aware commitment to its tasks.<sup>13</sup> Every confrere must realise that his religious profession introduces him into both Congregation and the Salesian Family: in this extensive field he will find so much that will help him towards holiness and apostolic collaboration; it opens up horizons of work that would seem to border on temerity; it puts him in the vanguard of ecclesial and civil action.

My dear confreres, we must see the Salesian Family as a very real fact; we must have faith in its growth; we must come to know and love its

10. P. Baldo: Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana.

11. Letter of presentation of the Rector Major, Father Luigi Ricceri, no. 4, p. XVIII.

12. v. SGC 159.

13. v. SGC 160.

own special nature; we must realise its many requirements that will spur us on in fidelity to Don Bosco.

### Don Bosco belongs to the Church

To understand better the living heritage bequeathed us by Don Bosco and the responsibilities that flow from it, we would do well to reflect a little on the *importance in the Church* God gives to every Founder.

Perhaps we are accustomed to regard Don Bosco as the “private property” of our Congregation. This would be to unwittingly distort his personality and reduce his function and transcendency. Naturally we have a special affinity with him that helps us more easily to approach him, know him, understand him and have a truer and more objective appreciation of him; but by the same token we should be the more anxious to better grasp his importance to the *whole Church*; for to lessen his ecclesial stature would mean lessening his sphere of influence. A Founder has been granted a special charism for the good of all the People of God. The Church recognises this, rejoices in it, is enriched by its spiritual and apostolic contribution, blesses its particular values, promotes and sustains its distinctive character, demands that its peculiar identity be safeguarded and defends its integrity.<sup>14</sup>

Paul VI reminds us that Founders have been “raised up by God *in the Church*”; hence their disciples have the obligation to be faithful “to their evangelical intentions”.<sup>15</sup>

A Founder is a true *ecclesial point of reference* and must not be reduced in size by any fussy though

14. v. Mutuae Relationes.

15. Evangelica Testificatio, 11, 12.

well-intentioned parochialism that would only warp his special qualities and his real mission among men.

The Council speaks of Founders as gifted expressions of the vital reality of the Church.<sup>16</sup>

16. v. Lumen Gentium  
46, 46.

Unfortunately theologians have not yet made an adequate study of the specific significance of this aspect insofar as it actually expresses the Church. The personal action of a Founder is infused into the very mystery of the Church in its historical development: he is raised up in the Church and for the Church as *one of the characteristic expressions of its "life and holiness"*.<sup>17</sup>

17. Lumen Gentium 44.

Every Founder enjoys a kind of uniqueness in the Church insofar as he is an initiator and a model.

Last year in my letter to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians I pointed out three aspects of this distinctiveness in our Father.

— *He had a distinctive afflatus.* Don Bosco saw no other way to fulfil his calling except by being a Founder. He was practically obliged to embark on a brand new kind of sanctification and apostolate, a personal interpretation of the Gospel and the mystery of Christ with a special adaptation to the signs of the times. This originality meant a new "fusion" of the common elements of Christian holiness that was well balanced, congenial and regulated; the virtues and the means to holiness had their own proper place, quantity, symmetry and beauty that were characteristic.

— *He achieved an extraordinary form of holiness.* It is difficult to establish the level of this holiness, but it cannot be identified with the holiness of a saint who was not a Founder (e.g., St Joseph Cafasso). Don Bosco's extraordinary holiness

invested him with something of the novelty of a precursor. It drew people to him; it made him a referral point for agreements and differences; it made him a patriarch, a prophet. He was never a recluse, but rather a catalyst; he carried the future in his hands.

— *He worked indefatigably to increase his spiritual family.* If the “experience of the Holy Spirit” is not transmitted, received and then lived, cherished, perfected and developed by the Founder’s direct disciples and their adherents, there is no founding charism. This is of basic importance. Don Bosco possessed his own proper gifts and they remained with him until his death; through a divine disposition they made him a fruitful centre of radiation and attraction, a “giant of the spirit”, as Pius XI called him; and he bequeathed to us a rich and well-defined spiritual heritage.<sup>18</sup>

18. Egidio Viganò: *Rediscovering the spirit of Mornese*, 24 February 1981; v. ASC no. 301, pp. 25-26.

These specific marks of Don Bosco as a Founder were translated into his operational overall project, which is “substantially one and possesses its own special characteristics to which it is possible to reduce the many aims and actions of his busy and vigorous life”.<sup>19</sup>

19. P. Braido: *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana*.

In his well planned activities our Father has also given to the Church an educative method bearing the marks of genius, a system that has given rise to a set of pedagogical and pastoral principles accepted far and wide, a system that answers to the needs of the young and the working classes, a *Preventive System* that has made saints out of both educators and their charges.

Don Bosco’s overall project gathers together and organises a complex association made up of co-workers of all kinds: a *Family* that brings the



Gospel to the young through the Preventive System.

To be truly loyal to Don Bosco as our Founder it is plain that we must see him in an *ecclesial context*.

### **Don Bosco father of a spiritual Family**

To journey back to our origins, we find Don Bosco with a heart overflowing with pastoral charity and gifted with a love of predilection for the young. The first spark of the Salesian vocation is love, an intense love, well-defined and apostolic, a love dedicated in a special way to young people who are poor and abandoned. In his priestly heart is to be found the primordial and crystalline spring waters of the whole Salesian Family.

We are dealing here with a supernatural passion that immerses the whole person within the mystery of the God-Saviour; a charity that finds its realisation in a radical following of Christ whose anxious arms stretch forth to save the young, the lowly, the needy. It is in Don Bosco our Founder that we find the origins of the distinctiveness of the Salesian charism that emphasises through its twin fulcrums of *God* and *neighbour*, the *giving of oneself utterly to God in a mission for the young*. The context and thrust of this primordial force were graphically instanced in his *Oratory apostolate*. After all, for Don Bosco the *Oratory* meant what we call today the *Youth Apostolate*, that is, a factual commitment to the Gospel-education of confused and neglected young people in a critical period fraught with the explosive results of rapid structural and cultural changes.

Our origins are indeed centred in *an Oratorian heart*. In other words, we see a priest of the local Church of Turin possessed of an overwhelming apostolic passion for poor and abandoned youngsters. Such an apostolic zeal cannot be explained without the initiative of Christ the Saviour and the loving care of Mary, who both knew new life from the tomb and are the guides of salvation-history; and the definitive implementation of this *Oratorian predilection* is linked to the guidance of Pope Pius IX who directed Don Bosco in his founding efforts.

The Spirit of the Lord filled this zealous priest so well endowed with natural talents and special gifts. He perceived more and more how urgent and far-reaching his work was to be. He set about with realistic efficiency to gather together, inspire and organise the greatest possible number of co-workers he could get. Thus he instituted his *Oratory apostolate* in Turin. His collaborators were priests, mothers of families, layfolk in comfortable circumstances, young people and adults — all under his guiding hand. He sought far and wide for as many as possible; and above all, he wanted them *united*.

This variegated group of co-workers he organised and called *The Congregation of Saint Francis de Sales*, and then set about putting it on a stable basis. He received the official approval of Archbishop Fransoni in 1850; he obtained canonical recognition in 1852. One of the directives stated that it was the responsibility of the Superior "to preserve unity of spirit, discipline and direction".<sup>20</sup>

A few remarks are in order regarding this embryonic "Congregation for the Young".

First of all the word *congregation*: it was used

in its general and etymological sense of *congregating* or *bringing together*; it meant a group of persons united to work together for the same spiritual and apostolic purpose. In those days there was the wide-spread *Congregation of Christian Doctrine* (of the Council of Trent), and indeed other various *Congregations* and *Companies* that comprised both layfolk and priests. It is interesting to note that Don Bosco referred to his "congregated members" as workers, co-operators, collaborators, benefactors — that is, people dedicated to good works and committed in a practical way to the apostolate. Indeed we can gauge the mettle of his "congregated workers" by the fact that they belonged to the *Oratory apostolate*: in other words, their Christian and educative activities were in line with the Valdocco-type Oratory.

Why should his "Congregation" be under the patronage of Saint Francis de Sales? He wanted the spirit of Saint Francis to imbue the life and work of his collaborators among the young — kindness, gentleness, trust; a joyful outlook of healthy humanism with apostolic dialogue and friendliness that would all go to make up an integrated educational method.<sup>21</sup>

So far Don Bosco's work was on a diocesan scale only. Little by little and along the road of hardship and suffering it was to assume an ecclesial universality.

From 1850 onwards the Holy Spirit was to form Don Bosco slowly and carefully into the Founder of his definitive Salesian Family.

The idea of the kind of foundation his vocation demanded was not immediately clear to him: its details and juridical structure were still somewhat

21. V. Memorie Biografiche II, 252-254.

nebulous. The knowledge of God's special gift, even in a Founder, is generally not a sudden revelation but develops by stages and sometimes in a roundabout way. God sends prophets into his Church and expects them to find their way gradually and laboriously. Deep within himself Don Bosco was sure that Providence was leading him step by step to be a Founder. He was personally concerned to "let it be known that God himself guided all things at all times".<sup>22</sup> He said to his rectors on 2 February 1976, "The Congregation has not taken a single step without the backing of some supernatural happening; there has never been any change, any improvement, any development, that was not preceded by a command of the Lord".<sup>23</sup>

22. St John Bosco: Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, ed. SDB Rome, p. 16.

23. Memorie Biografiche XII 69.

Fairly soon, *at least by 1854*, he saw the need for distinguishing two categories of workers: "Those who were unattached and felt that this life was their true vocation: these lived in community in what they always considered the mother-house and centre of the pious association. The Supreme Pontiff advised that the association be called the *Pious Society of St Francis de Sales*, and it is still so-called. The other collaborators, that is, the 'externs', lived with their families in the world and continued to promote the *Oratory apostolate*: they still kept the names of *Union* or *Congregation of St Francis of Sales*, *promoters* and *co-operators*; they are dependent on the Society and united with its members in working for needy youth".<sup>24</sup>

24. Memorie Biografiche XI 85-86.

In December 1859 he gave a specific form to the *special central part* of the Association for the Oratories: it was to be the nucleus of promotion and the secure and stable bond of union. With this in mind he drew up Constitutions and Regula-

tions for this "intern" group that would also serve as a rule of life for all "extern" co-workers. These latter would be incorporated with the Pious Society either as "extern" members or members living and working completely in the world. All would draw their inspiration from the same Rule.

Up to this point only boys were envisaged.

But Providence was inspiring him with thoughts of doing similar things for girls. On Pius IX's advice he organised the women co-operators; and besides, in Mornese in the diocese of Acqui, Mary had in a wonderful way prepared for him a chosen group of apostolic young women inspired by Mary Domenica Mazzarello and under the guidance of Father Pestarino. With them he was able to found in 1872 the Institute of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, also incorporated with the Pious Society. Their first Constitutions were entitled *Rules for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians incorporated with the Salesian Society*. They lived in communion of spirit and mission under the guidance and direction of Don Bosco and his sons. Their work was to do for girls what Valdocco was doing for boys.

The work had now extended beyond the diocese, and consequently in 1864 the Holy See granted the *Decretum Laudis* for the Pious Society, and later (3 April 1874), the approval of the Constitutions. This development gave rise to certain grave difficulties and the need to rethink the Statutes for the "extern members".

Thus it came about that they were given a juridical form in the *Union of Salesian Co-operators* on 12 July 1876. Don Bosco drew up a set of Regulations for them: they were to have the same spirit

and mission as the Salesians and were also to be incorporated with the Salesian Society.

Thus we have an historical and documented fact: Don Bosco heard the call of the Spirit of the Lord to commit himself tirelessly to the salvation of the young; for this purpose he founded a large apostolic association, a spiritual family of different groups and categories closely united and systematically structured. The three basic groups of the Salesian Family were thus instituted personally by Don Bosco and are the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Co-operators. When the Past Pupils began visiting Don Bosco for the celebration of his name-day he used exhort them to be dedicated apostles and join the Co-operators.<sup>25</sup>

25. Memorie Biografiche XVIII 160-161.

*After the death of our Founder* in 1888 an unfortunate problem arose regarding the juridical aspect of the incorporation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with the Pious Society. In 1901 a decree of the Holy See *Normae secundum quas* demanded the juridical separation of women's Institutes with simple vows from the respective male Congregations. The separation was regretted, but it did not lessen the family links and the collaboration between the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Salesian Congregation.

Eventually in 1917, through the good offices of Cardinal Cagliero, a temporary new juridical link was granted. This link was stabilised by a decree of 24 April 1940 that appointed the Rector Major as Apostolic Delegate of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The painful events concerning the separation of the "extern members" and the Daughters of Mary

Help of Christians from the Pious Society actually served to prevent confusion about certain ecclesiastical structures: these links were variables and need to be adapted to suit new situations — hence they were quite distinct from the permanent and unchangeable charism that all the groups shared for the young and the working classes. In fact their common aims and responsibilities never waned; and after Vatican II they took on greater clarity and a new lease of life.

Since the death of our Founder the Spirit of the Lord has enriched the Salesian Family with other groups that have burgeoned forth from its vitality to meet new needs and different situations. These of course have all *been participants in the Salesian mission* and not those benefited by Salesian action.

To mention just some of these new groups:

— the *Association of Past Pupils* “by virtue of their Salesian education”;

— the *Don Bosco Volunteers*, founded by Father Philip Rinaldi at Turin in the context of Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Co-operators and Past Pupils. (Father Rinaldi thus intended to implement Don Bosco’s project regarding the “extern members” who would be an effective means for taking his spirit into the heart of the world.)

— the *Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary*, founded by Father Luigi Variara in Lombardia;

— the *Sisters of Charity of Miyasaki*, founded by Mgr Vincenzo Cimatti and Father Antonio Cavoli in Japan;

— *The Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart*, founded by Bishop Giuseppe Cognata in Calabria;

— and various other groups.<sup>26</sup>

These groups, especially the first three instituted by Don Bosco himself, *cannot be considered as isolated entities*; they were born and have always lived in mutual interchange of spiritual and apostolic values; and in this they have all been the beneficiaries. The invaluable heritage of Don Bosco was left to all of them together as one single family.

### The unifying force of his charism

The Salesian Family of Don Bosco is therefore a charismatic reality; in other words, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, destined to grow and extend itself among the People of God; it has a determined and constant scope that transcends the changing circumstances of time and place.<sup>27</sup>

The secret of its unified energy and life is the *charism of the Founder*, which is a manifestation both supernatural (not of flesh and blood) and created (hence human) — a manifestation of the same uncreated Gift, the Holy Spirit, in the Church.

The expression *charism of the Founder* has taken on the significant meaning of an *experience of the Holy Spirit* that is singular, rich and transmissible.<sup>28</sup> The Vatican II documents had not yet used the expression *charism of the Founder*: they referred to the *spirit of the Founder* in the general sense of his spiritual, apostolic and distinctive ethos; or even to his *primordial inspiration, particular vocation, distinctive character* or *particular pur-*

26. For a more complete list of the various groups, v. Boll. Salesiano, 1 September 1981, p. 11.

27. Evangelii Nuntandi 11, 12.

28. Mutuae Relationes 11.



pose.<sup>29</sup> Hence these terms are used with a certain amount of elasticity to signify the Founder's common heritage.

29. v. Lumen Gentium 45; Perfectæ Caritatis 2, 20, 22; Christus Dominus 33, 35 I & II.

\* It may help to understand the uniqueness of the charism of our Founder if we set it up beside the founding charisms of other spiritual Families in the Church such as the Augustinians, Benedictines, Carmelites, Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits, and so on.

The spiritual Family of Don Bosco seeks its inspiration in the positive humanism of St Francis of Sales, though it has its own special methods, its own distinctive character. In a sense Don Bosco wears the garb of our true mentor and source of a unique charismatic experience; he is the necessary point of reference for all those called by the Spirit to share his destiny and mission at this point in history, each according to the particular circumstances of his state in life.

There is a living force that binds the members of a charismatic family together. It is something held in common and it creates a kind of consanguinity, a spiritual kinship, between them; it becomes the very soul of their life-style, their special way of viewing their activities, the source of their mutual communion.

Don Bosco was eminently practical and a patient organiser and constantly worked out practical ways to ensure that his *experience of the Holy Spirit* (his *charism*, his *spirit of the Founder*) should be passed on and perpetuated in a *systematic communion* with stable structure and harmonious operation. For this reason he had to research, intuit, revise, experiment and adapt in accordance with the suggestions and possibilities of the times. Today we

would betray his charism if we limited ourselves to the juridical and ecclesiastical methods for an association: for (as has been noted) these are subject to change, being dependent on social needs and ecclesiastical dispositions. Still we must admit that his practical concern for internal coherence in communion and activity was an integrating influence on his foundation plan. Indeed this concern is constantly in evidence in the lengthy founding process by which he set about translating his *experience of the Spirit* into reality. However, let us now reflect on the intimate nature of the *charism of the Founder*.

30. Lumen Gentium 42.

\* The source and driving force of this charism is *charity*, that "first and most necessary gift"<sup>30</sup> of life and holiness in the Church.

Charity is in the very heart of a Founder and directs everything — his ideals, his anxieties, his plans, his concerns, his quest of ways and means; it gives them their special form and guides them to their goal. It is the projection of his charity that draws people to him, co-ordinates and harmonises the different functions, the many gifts, the various states and ministries; it sublimates differences into a well organised and fruitful unity.

However, in each Founder charity manifests a uniqueness with specific characteristics. In other words, the vital force of the charism of a Founder is, after all, *a type of charity* that flows from his heart into a vast and congruent field of action.

Every Founder living out and developing his charity to the full emphasises certain aspects and thus gives rise to different spiritual styles and characteristics. Hence it is that Founders manifest distinctive ways of practising charity that indeed

proclaim the amazing depths of this virtue: "the Church is beautified with the manifold gifts of her children, like a bride adorned for her husband (v. Rev. XXI 2), and manifests in herself the multi-form wisdom of God (v. Eph. III 10)".<sup>31</sup>

31. *Perfectae Caritatis* 1.

\* At this point we should take special note of the unifying force that carries within itself the type of charity lived out by the Founder. It is vitally real, it has a fascinating power of attraction, and it is capable of gathering people together in ever-growing numbers and uniting them into a mystical kinship. It cannot be identified with the spiritual characteristics of a ministry (such as priesthood or diaconate, etc.); nor with a particular state of life (such as celibacy, marriage, widowhood). It is a divine force that permeates the vital tissue of life and makes possible the gathering and unifying of different characters, different functions and different situations.

In the Church, the Holy Spirit (who is uncreated Charity) unites, vivifies and inspires all the various structures and functions of the Body of Christ: and by analogy (though to an infinitely lesser degree) the charism or distinctive type of charity of the Founder (which is a created gift of the same Holy Spirit) unites, develops and orients the different persons and values that are assembled together to make up a *spiritual Family*.

Here we see different temperaments and tastes, diverse talents and personal gifts, fused into a single communion; and even different spiritualities that go with the various ministries, states of life or inspirations in the Church — all are subordinated to the essential membership of the same Family.

Indeed *charism* and *spirituality* are not the

same thing. In practice, various spiritualities of different ministries or states of life can live harmoniously within the same *charism*. Thus in a spiritual Family there can be gathered together in complete compatibility and in various quantities the spirituality of the priest, the lay person, the religious, the married, the single, the oblate, the victim, and so on.<sup>32</sup>

It is surely a fine and enriching experience to be a member of a *spiritual Family* where the variegated differences help towards a clearer self-identification and a greater harmony — not by blurring or smoothing out the differences but by giving a fillip to the individual identity of each.

\* The kind of charity that gave life to Don Bosco's *charism* is a *pastoral charity* distinguished by its special quality we call *Salesian*. This means that we must find the unifying force of our Family in that kind of priestly love characterised in Don Bosco by an overwhelming passion to help the young and by his special way of perceiving, living and communicating the values of the Gospel and translating them into his plan of operation. He himself summed up this way of charity as a kind of motto on a coat of arms: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*.

At this point we must clear up a misunderstanding that could cause spiritual deviations.

In every truly apostolic life *pastoral charity* permeates the very being of the person: before becoming *action* it is a *way of life*; it is a participation in the very love of God, a uniting with him, a self-donation and self-annihilation so as to belong utterly to him and be totally available for working for his Kingdom. *Pastoral charity* must not be

superficially identified with altruism. First and foremost it is an intrinsic change of life through which a person lives in intimate union with the God-Saviour and totally at his beck and call for action.

It would be well to ponder this concept, for it gets to the very root of a genuinely apostolic spirit. Reflection makes it obvious that the famous dictum *agere sequitur esse* (action follows existence) should never be taken to mean a division, or a belittling of action in favour of existence. Sertillange writes with great acuity, "Action is only a form of existence. When I act I *am* the agent. In other words, I take on a form of activity which is by this very fact a form of being. The conditions of my being therefore are also the conditions of my action".<sup>33</sup>

The activity of pastoral charity is not separate or inferior to its being: rather it accompanies it, reveals it, sheds lustre on it, fulfils it and expresses its genuine verity. It does not come *after* but resides *within* as an element of its dynamic identity. It is radically interior insofar as it is a participation of the love of God.

Thus it is that in the depths of an apostolic experience of the Holy Spirit (St Francis de Sales' "ecstasy in action") we find after all a form of the interior life.

This is indeed an illuminating reflection for us. It makes it ever more clear why pastoral charity is the very heart of the charism and spirit of Don Bosco.<sup>34</sup> Thence flows that supernatural and interior energy that unites us, gives us our distinctive character, nourishes and enthuses us, brings us together in communion, invites us to self-donation and

33. Sertillange: *Il cristianesimo e la filosofia*.

34. v. Const. 40.

holiness, and gives us that spiritual and instinctive urge for work, inventiveness and sacrifice.

\* From this *centre* or primary spring there flow the *specifically Salesian traits* of the pastoral charity of Don Bosco as the elements of his charism. We already know these various elements well, but it is worthwhile recalling them briefly: they help to better grasp the nature of the unifying force that moulds us into a spiritual Family.<sup>35</sup>

The traits of the *Salesian communion* shared by the sons and daughters of Don Bosco are as follows:

- first of all, as a living spring, *the special covenant with God* according to the kind of pastoral charity described above; this means firstly an intimate union with God the kind Father concerned to implement a merciful and pedagogical design for salvation, and secondly a love for our neighbour poor and needy, with a predilection for the young.

- then the *Salesian spirit*: it dominates our thinking, our conduct, our attitudes, our tastes, preferences, priorities, our very way of reading the Gospel.

- *our mission for the young*: it is our specific participation in the manifold works of the Church for the salvation of the world.

- the *Preventive System*: this is our practical and distinctive way of pastoral action that takes all the above three characteristics (charity, the Salesian spirit and our mission of salvation) and translates them in concrete form among the young.

- *a practical merger-plan*: this means a life-style and action that can accept the different community structures of the various groups and trans-

35. v. Egidio Viganò: Non secondo la carne ma nello spirito, 1978, pp. 90-99.

form them into a certain *communion of forces* of all the Salesian Family.

These elements of the *charism of Don Bosco* equip the Salesian Family for a specialised activity, making it ready and able to share work together in the “everyday apostolate of the Oratories”.

With the driving force of his charism Don Bosco unifies into a single concordant and apostolic Family priests, layfolk, celibates, married, widowed and religious, with all their various ways of witnessing to the Beatitudes. No one loses his specific spirituality, whether priestly, lay or religious. The charism of Don Bosco is a superior, overall and existential force: it accepts individual spiritualities with their special situations and functions, classifies them and impresses its special character on them without adding to or subtracting from anything in their natures; indeed it strengthens and enhances their own special character.

\* Just as in the Church everybody possesses all, each in his own way, so in our Salesian Family everybody possesses all of the charism of the Founder, each participating and expressing it in his own way according to his vocation and the measure of the Spirit's gift. The wealth of a spiritual Family that flows from the unifying force of the Founder's charism is immense: it extends to such proportions that it is not possible for each member to live all its elements to the full. All can implement them up to a point, but each concentrates on certain specific elements for his own sanctification and the service of others. When all the members join forces the Family is able to live to the full every one of its values.

Thus it is that in our Salesian Family we are

36. v. Lumen Gentium  
31.

37. v. Presbyterorum Or-  
dinis 8.

able to share a veritable wealth of values, enhearten one another, and benefit from the example of others: and each becomes more staunch and enthusiastic in his vocation. We see the consecrated groups emphasising the energy and drive of the radical Gospel message. The non-consecrated groups proclaim the centrality of man, the importance of temporal values and the close and indispensable link between the consecrated life and the task of transforming the world.<sup>36</sup> The priestly members live pastoral charity in a special way by the exercise of their sacerdotal ministry;<sup>37</sup> other members, in their many life-styles and lay commitments at all levels, are able to perform many specialised services in our vast and complex mission to the young. Furthermore there is a wide range of spiritual aspects in the different groups: these should be present in every Salesian heart, but they are more characteristic and more in evidence in certain individual groups. The Salesian Family as a whole is able to put these special facets at the disposition of all. The following list is very incomplete but serves to exemplify this.

The *Salesians*: kindness and happiness, educational initiative, untiring animation, research into the common Salesian heritage, missionary courage.

The *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*: feminine Salesian perspective and delicacy, loyalty and sacrifice after the example of Mary, service of motherly and sisterly intuition, profound prayerfulness.

The *Co-operators*: realistic view of life (ability to use daily tasks and professions as a means of apostolic commitment, active contribution to mankind and society).



The *Don Bosco Volunteers*: profound significance of secularity, importance of creature values, quiet enleavening of the masses, individual personal witness.

The *Past Pupils*: binding force of Salesian education, cultural area a central element for us, importance of an updated and adequate pedagogy to suit the changing times, pressing need of special care for the Christian family.

Other Institutes of Salesian Sisters (such as Fr Variara's *Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary*, and Bishop Cognata's *Oblates of the Sacred Heart*): special spirituality of suffering and oblation as already instanced in Father Andrew Beltrami. These Sisters remind all the other members of the Salesian Family that self-oblation and patient suffering are indispensable for all in life's vicissitudes, misunderstandings, illnesses, forced inactivity and old age.

*Other groups*: all have their own specific characterisations.

The unifying force of Don Bosco's charism has indeed given rise to a spiritual family that is unique, variegated and possessing many branches; it constitutes a kind of atmosphere of spiritual serenity from which no one is excluded; it is open to all races, nationalities and pluralistic cultures; no continent is excluded. Each one with his own temperament, his own talents, his own Christian vocation, can cry out, "In this spiritual Family I am at home".

Every quality, every ecclesial spirituality and every ministry is respected and promoted. The spirit of the Founder does not change or suppress the differences: rather does it accept them and further

them so that they can be lived with more enthusiasm and in accordance with their particular way of holiness and activity in the harmonious union of the same kind of charity.

Praised be the Lord and our Mother Mary for raising up the charism of Don Bosco as a great and wonderful gift for the Church. All together we, the various groups of the Salesian Family, are the heirs and the bearers of this gift.

### **The renewal of SGC**

With Vatican II came a new awakening in the Church and an in-depth rethinking of its mystery. It renewed its mission in conformity with the times; it completely refurbished its doctrine of charisms and invited the spiritual families to reactuate their gifts of the Spirit by journeying to their origins in quest of the crystalline waters of their true vocation, renewing it in answer to the needs of the times.

The General Chapters and Assemblies of the various groups of our Salesian Family have now spent some years of serious study and painstaking work to implement this exacting task. To us Salesians first of all by virtue of our vocation and our traditional responsibility<sup>38</sup> fell the task of researching Don Bosco and the common experience of the first century of our existence.

I have already noted how our Special General Chapter and 21st General Chapter gave careful attention to our vocation with reference to the Salesian Family. The SGC set out in Document I,<sup>39</sup>

38. v. Constitutions 5.

39. SGC: Salesians of Don Bosco in the Church; vocation and identity of the Salesian Society today.

Chapter 6,<sup>40</sup> the directives and basic doctrine for the direction renewal should take. GC21 appointed a *Coucillor for the Salesian Family*: the modified article in the Constitutions reads, "The Coucillor for the Salesian Family has the task of sensitising and animating the Congregation for the role entrusted to it in the Salesian Family in accordance with article 5"<sup>41</sup>

40. SGC: The Salesian Family today.

By the appointment of this special Councillor the Congregation has renewed and boosted Don Bosco's desire that the Salesian spirit should make the greatest possible impact on the world. He himself had used practical means such as the media for this purpose, and in a special way he made use of dedicated people who sympathised with his mission for the young and the masses — and these were the members of his Salesian Family.

41. GC 21: 402-403.

It would be greatly helpful, dear confreres, to study again, privately and in community, this Chapter of the SGC: it is still the basic guiding text for the regenerating of our Salesian Family.

*A careful perusal of the capitular document will highlight two complementary movements that renewal must pay heed to: a progressive clarification of the identity of each individual group, and a growing process of integration and communion with some kind of supporting basic uniting principles.*

The first of these movements calls for each group to spell out more accurately its own distinctive characteristics as members of a Family that does not seek uniformity but a harmonious co-ordination with *one single spirit*. This will make for a clearer awareness of individual autonomy<sup>42</sup> and the need for a common frame of reference.<sup>43</sup>

42. SGC: 166-170: Differences.

43. SGC: 161-165: Elements in common.

The second movement calls urgently for greater communication and collaboration.<sup>44</sup> It also demands the recognition, defence and *renewal of a common basic structure* that is regulated by a statute of practical principles — even if reduced to an indispensable minimum. This statute would adequately preserve and promote unity in our charismatic communion.

Nowadays relationships multiply daily between man and man; the need for communication and united effort becomes more necessary; and it would seem more urgent than ever to unite all the sons and daughters of Don Bosco together and *regenerate our Salesian Family*. In this way “the riches of each group will become the riches of all”, and our common mission to youth will increase in strength and effectiveness. “We shall be enlightened on the *relevance for today* and the *authenticity of the gift of the Spirit* made to Don Bosco and of the gifts that the same Spirit in like manner bestows on us. We shall have a better appreciation of the force and *apostolic fruitfulness* of our mission and of the method to be adopted. Through sharing and collaboration we shall live the Gospel to our mutual enrichment. Dynamic fidelity to Don Bosco through this sharing and collaboration will extend the influence of his pastoral insight and fatherliness. This will shine all the more brightly, because every increase in brotherliness, unity and commitment on the part of those who consider themselves his sons adds to his stature”.<sup>45</sup>

From the preparations for the SGC up to today there have been nearly twenty years of work put into initiating and developing what we could call the *renewal plan* for the *Salesian Family*. Anyone

examining this period would be struck by the obvious presence of the Holy Spirit. The "project" had its beginnings when the Salesians set about the renewal and updating programme required by Vatican II. The first step was to explore the will of the Father. The efforts of Don Bosco to unite the forces of good for the benefit of the Church and society became more obvious, more pressing, more relevant than ever. It was also clear that although cultural and evolutionary changes have modified the mode and structure of the union between the Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Co-operators of Don Bosco's day, the deep-down values have remained unchanged. Factors today make that union even more necessary and relevant: modern ecclesiology favours communion, the requirements of evangelisation call for it, the new problems of youth and the masses need it. From the two sessions of Special Provincial Chapters the pre-capitular commissions received the proposal to renew the Salesian Family. The request came from the grassroots, i.e., individual confreres and communities, and it became one of the projects of the capitulars.

The SGC went into the various facets of this project with great thoroughness. It finally came up with the formula we all know.

Between SGC and GC21 several Institutes spontaneously embraced the Salesian Family. It was clear that far from considering the project as a possible intrusion into their lives or a diminution of their autonomy (by the role played by the SDBs) they considered both project and SDB role as a grace that would help them be more faithful to Don Bosco. These sentiments were more than mere words:

the "incorporation" found its way into quite a few Constitutions and Regulations and there were many requests to join the Family. There were meetings and live-ins at all levels, and bulletins of communication and fellowship. Practically everywhere enthusiasm and definite spiritual fervour abounded. Whatever shadows there were were due rather to the novelty of the venture and its lack of structures — but they were weak repercussions and in no way comparable to the positive reactions.

This was the state of affairs when GC21 was convoked. Its agenda made no reference to the Salesian Family, but the matter came up automatically: first there was the assessment of how SGC's directives had been implemented, and secondly there had been specific requests by some fifteen Provincial Chapters. A novelty to be noted was the intervention of various groups whom the SGC had accepted as members of the Family. They sent messages which all had one common denominator: the request that the Congregation take steps to fulfil its animating and pastoral role towards them and carry out its liaison duties; and consequently to create the necessary apparatus therefor. In fact they had their representatives in certain commissions and in the Chapter Assembly.

GC21 made some extremely important decisions for the Salesian Family: it instituted a Councillor to animate the Congregation at world level and to link together the various groups; it reaffirmed the validity of the project agreed on at the SGC; it called for a vocation apostolate for the Salesian Family; it included the Salesian Family in formation programmes; it re-emphasised that preference be given to lay-helpers who had had adequate forma-

tion; it committed itself to the training of good animators for all the groups — this was stressed as one of the priority tasks of all Provincials in the closing address of the Chapter.<sup>46</sup>

46. GC21 588.

During these last four years, in meetings and joint visits of the Rector Major with the Provincials throughout the different cultural areas of the world, animation of the Salesian Family was always one of the essential matters discussed.

There is proof in plenty that there is no longer any lack of conviction or acceptance in the Congregation and that great progress has been made in putting theory into practice. Studies have been undertaken, and there have been many initiatives involving animation, collaboration, communion and communication. Important events involving the Salesian Family have increased in number: the *Salesian Missions Centenary*, the *Centenary of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, the *Centenary of the death of St Mary Mazzarello*, and various other anniversaries with the Rector Major present. Furthermore there are ever-increasing requests for his spiritual direction for the various groups. There has been greater collaboration in studying and researching the Salesian vocation and in seeking common areas of commitment such as Project Africa. All this is clear proof that the Salesian Family with its glorious past holds fascinating promises for the future.

My dear confreres, we are all called (especially we Salesians) to work with energy to achieve a genuine and creative reinstatement of the Salesian Family in the Church. It was Don Bosco's wish that the binding influence, the stabilising factor, the driving force in the Salesian Family, should be

the Salesians themselves, and hence we must dedicate ourselves in all seriousness “to arranging fraternal exchanges and studying together in the context of the joint pastoral plan of the local Church the best ways of carrying out a practical and effective evangelisation and catechesis”.<sup>47</sup>

47. SGC 189.

This responsibility should be assumed and carried out in the first place at world level and by the Provincial Conferences and particularly by Provincials and their Councils. More than anyone else these latter have “the capacity to manifest this unity in mission and Salesian spirit in its plurality of forms and the creativity of each group for the general benefit of the others”. These are indispensable elements that will “make us more acceptable in the communion of salvation (the Church), more effective in our apostolic work, and richer in personal fulfilment”.<sup>48</sup>

48. SGC 177.

This renewal will grow and progress only if we are faithful to the origins of our vocation; these we must cherish deeply, viewing them historically and objectively and with the insight of Don Bosco's sons.

### **Forging ahead together**

These two concepts, *forging ahead* and *together*, aptly describe the way we should tackle the task of re-establishing the Salesian Family. This is a challenge to us to boost our communion and our mission, and we must heed it. *Forging ahead* refers to our mission; *together* indicates our communion. So let us *forge ahead together* in our communion to achieve a more effective mission.



Our *mission* among poor youth and the masses must expand in undertakings, in new foundations, in apostolic creativeness.

Our *communion as a Family* must develop in authenticity and organisation. Certainly every group has its own identity and corresponding autonomy; but for us today, the accent is on communion. We have our historical origins to salvage, that union Don Bosco wanted, and we must revive it, increase it, renew it.

My contacts with the various groups in the different continents prompt me to suggest that we *forge ahead together* with the four practical objectives that follow:

- OBJECTIVE I: *Stepping up our knowledge of Don Bosco and consequently our pastoral charity.*

This is a valid and holy objective. Together with the whole Salesian Family we must promote a better understanding of our common charism; and every person in every group must intensify the kind of charity practised so heroically by Don Bosco and that characterises and defines exactly what we mean by his "Oratorian heart".

We must bear in mind that *charity is never out of date or subject to individual will or judgement: it is a living and ecclesial reality.*

It is *living* because it is a real gift of the Holy Spirit for the present and the future. Like the Holy Spirit its author, it is essentially creative; it loves and serves the persons of today: the *three Persons* of the Trinity whose loving embrace enfolds the end of the century in which we live, and today's *young persons who* will greet the third millennium.

It is *ecclesial* because it shares and expresses the life and holiness of the Church; and this close-knit Body of Christ is under the vital influence of the Holy Spirit who lives within it to help it grow as a living and united organism.

Thus this charity is not only *real* but also *guided* by the Church through her bishops and in the light of the ecclesiality of Don Bosco (who belongs to the whole Church and not just to Salesians).

It is a charity vitally linked with two reference points in the Church: the bishops and the Founder.

Boosting our pastoral charity is not a matter of mere words and recalling the past: it means really loving; making an in-depth study of pastoral charity under the guidance of the Pope, the bishops and the successors of Don Bosco; responding creatively to the demands of persons and times just as our Founder did in the 19th century. This is only possible if we take our holiness seriously, giving priority (as I wrote in my last letter to you)<sup>49</sup> to our daily and sincere *encounter with Christ* and our zealous *commitment to holiness*.

49. ASC no. 303.

Dear confreres, to reinvigorate our Salesian charism means nothing other than **REPLANNING OUR SALESIAN HOLINESS TOGETHER**. As Don Bosco once said, "Salesians must be holy or they are not Salesians".<sup>50</sup>

50. Memorie Biografiche X 1078.

This then is the first objective that will prosper the Salesian Family: *forging ahead together* to develop that kind of pastoral charity that overwhelms us with Don Bosco's passionate call, *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*.

• **OBJECTIVE II: *Evangelisation of the young.***

Salesian charity implies a special apostolic sensitivity to the needs of the young. This work should

be chosen today, as it was yesteryear in Valdocco, because of a deep understanding of the crying needs of the moment. If our "Oratorian charity" is to be a practical response to the challenge of the very real needs of the young, it follows that a Family wishing to centre its evangelising apostolate among the young will never limit its educative initiative. Our action should resemble the soil in Spring from which fresh flowers continually burgeon forth.

Here indeed is an enormous task for all the Family.

— We must present the Gospel so that the young see it as a genuine and indispensable *message for them*.

— We must study together how to *reinstate the faith* at the centre of the culture we are trying to sort out with the young so that they may rediscover the true meaning of human life.

— We must help each other to *find out ways of communicating* by speaking a language they understand.

— We must courageously and perseveringly join forces and *renew our ways and means of being mediators* for the young, for we know we have profound problems in this area on account of the cultural transition that has been going on for some years now.

This is a complex objective of vast proportions, and it has already obliged us to make a fresh start with our Preventive System by formulating with patience and understanding a revised *educative and pastoral project*; and we have also for the same reason proposed an updated scheme for *youth spirituality*. Let us get together in our Family's various groups and share our ideas. It is thus that we shall

make greater progress together as specialists in the evangelisation of the young.

It should be noted that since the Salesian Family belongs to the Church, its youth apostolate should be conceived and programmed within the structure of the local Church (national, regional, diocesan). To care for a section of the youthful flock using one's own style of action is not being a splinter-group with no interest in the coordination or apostolic aims promoted by the bishops. Unfortunately, however, there are difficulties of this kind here and there, even among us, that smack of certain attitudes that belong to the past and should be overcome with courage.

• OBJECTIVE III: *Giving priority to the specific formation of each group, and involving the laity.*

It is fundamental for all the Family that each group foster its own identity and see to its specific formation and our common relationship. This is absolutely necessary for the well-being and growth of communion. Each group must have clear ideas about its own identity so that it can make its practical contribution to the general communion of the Family.

We have already seen clearly that the unity of Don Bosco's charism does not suppress these differences but rather welcomes them, enleavens them and enhances their apostolic output.

In addition to fostering the identity of each group there is another pressing aim that we all need to join forces to implement: we must publicise and share our Salesian values with as many layfolk as possible. Here I refer to the laity in the sense defined by Vatican II.

In the Salesian Family there is an enormous

area for layfolk: among the Co-operators, Past Pupils and (even further afield) among the co-workers in our various undertakings and among the many well-wishers who are happy to consider themselves as "Friends of Don Bosco". We would do well not to underrate the importance of these innumerable "Friends of Don Bosco": they are a kind of extension of the Salesian Family in the broad sense and become our friends through common interests, interior impulses, sympathies, movements and joint efforts.

Associations of Co-operators and Past Pupils could be divided into smaller groups with the aim of perfecting and stimulating their Salesian character. In fact there are some of these sub-groups already in existence: the *Young Co-operators* (very wide-spread), the *Don Bosco "Focolari"* (for married groups in Spain), small groups of *Past Pupils* with special commitment to cultural or scholastic initiatives, and *various Marian and similar associations*. Furthermore, the well-wishers and "Friends of Don Bosco" open up possibilities for doing good in many urgent ways (such as, for instance, the mass media).

In all this area special attention should be paid to the formation of these layfolk in the light of Vatican II's abundant teachings and the post-conciliar documents of the Magisterium; and of course we must add our own special Salesian touch from Don Bosco's charism, remembering that he would have us guide these good people into an apostolate of a practical nature. He was often heard to stress that works of charity should be directed into practical channels.

Involving the laity in this way widens the

horizons of every group in our family and is a spur to hasten and improve such coordination and collaboration. We are a Family of apostles and not enclosed exclusively within the exigencies of a here-and-now enterprise or group.

• OBJECTIVE IV: *A united pastoral vocation.*

Lastly let us remember that the Salesian vocation is characterised by that kind of charity that is the source of all the spiritual heritage of Don Bosco. It is basic and common to all the members of the Family, but is implemented in different ways by each group, category and person. This variegated communion offers considerable advantages in collaboration, especially in the vocation apostolate.

When we remember that Don Bosco was quite exceptional in seeking out innumerable vocations for the Church, it is a natural conclusion that *his Family should also distinguish itself in the fostering of vocations among the young as a part of the Salesian Youth Apostolate.* Let us never forget that the duty of guiding and educating the young in the discernment of their individual vocations "is born of the young person's right to be guided: this right comes before the particular vocation situation in the Church. This guidance is basic to a vocation, which is a divine call asking for a positive response that is linked to psychological and religious forces; and these forces call for the appropriate educative and pastoral guidance".<sup>51</sup>

51. v. p. 68 In these Acts.

Then of course it is urgent to do something to better the worrying vocation situation of each group of the Salesian Family, and we can effect far more if we work together. Helpful activities are the organisation of groups for prayer, study, information, planning, exchanges of experiences; also meetings

in guidance centres, youth movements and so on.

The smaller sub-groups of Young Co-operators and Past Pupils should receive special care. It is presumed that there will always be good animation in both of these areas for their proper growth and development; and it is common experience that they are fruitful sources of vocations for the other groups in the Salesian Family. In the last seven years, for instance, 70 Young Co-operators have become SDB novices and 52 FMA novices; 18 have entered diocesan seminaries and 20 have applied to other Congregations.

I invite all to ponder on the vocation-findings of the *9th Salesian Family Spirituality Week* held last January. They are reprinted in these *Acts* on page 65.

### **Problems and prospects**

Obviously the Salesian Family has its problems, and not all of them minor and easily solved. Don Bosco himself was confronted with many and tackled them with patience, hope and infinite perseverance, buoyed up always by his great love of the Christ-Saviour of the young and always ready to meet the challenge of the new and ever-increasing needs of youth.

Our Superior Council has dedicated many meetings to solving problems where possible and seeking out guidelines for dealing with the many facets of a process still evolving and necessarily conditioned by today's outlook. They are wide-spread difficulties experienced by both men and women in our Family and they have been brought to our attention

mainly by the Coucillor for the Salesian Family.

Before mentioning some of the genuine problems I should like to point out that many of the difficulties one hears of from time to time are only problems because people have not perfected their knowledge of the true meaning of the Salesian Family; and maybe this could really be our first problem to solve: at all levels of the Congregation we need to check on our mental outlook. Besides the contents of SGC and GC21 we need to read up what the other groups have said regarding the Salesian Family and the way they feel about belonging to it.

At any rate, it could be useful to refer briefly to some of the more significant problems. They are of a practical nature and may help us reflect and find ways and means to open up new prospectives.

• *The first problem*: How can the Congregation better realise and implement its special duties towards the Family? "The members of the Society have the special responsibility in the Salesian Family of preserving unity of spirit and encouraging those friendly contacts which lead to mutual enrichment and to a more fruitful apostolate".<sup>52</sup> This implies being able to give adequate encouragement to the various groups both as autonomous and specific identities and especially as belonging to the same communion having the same spirituality and the same mission. This is not an easy task and there is much to be done: still, some progress has been made. Fortunately an in-depth study of the history of the Salesian Family is already in progress and the genuine thinking of Don Bosco is being researched. This month there was a *Symposium* et the Generalate on this very matter.

52. Const. 5; v. also  
SGC 189; GC21 75,  
402, 403.



The main groups of the Salesian Family have a century of helpful matter to cull from: reports, enterprises, statements of the Holy See, directives from Superiors and numerous meaningful events. All this heritage is being studied, and this is history that will illumine us and help us to be more accurate and courageous in our animation.

For this reason the recent *Ratio* has given importance to the study of the Salesian Family in the formation curriculum of our confreres.<sup>53</sup>

53. FSDB (= Ratio) 54, 57; 175, 182, 234; 272; 368, 375; 399.

• *Another problem: to establish what degree of responsibility and relationship the Congregation has or should have in regard to each group.*

In the communion of the Family each group has its own distinctive link with the Congregation. Our animation must be suited to the idiom of each, although there will be a large area of animation that will be common ground for all members of the Family. For a right insistence on communion it is necessary to know and respect the autonomy and juridical status of each group, and also the different needs and requirements expected of the animation of the Congregation, so that we can render a service that is appropriate and in keeping with our practical capabilities. All this makes it necessary that structures be set up at Provincial level for formation, animation, communication, etc., for the Salesian Family.

• *A particularly sensitive problem is to decide on the criteria for belonging to the Salesian Family.* Article 5 of the Constitutions includes the *Salesians*, the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, the *Co-operators* (by virtue of their history and foundation) and the *Past Pupils* (by virtue of their Salesian

education). The *Don Bosco Volunteers* also belong officially.<sup>54</sup> These groups have confirmed their membership in official declarations, in General Chapters, in Assemblies, in Statutes, Rules, Constitutions and Regulations, and also by their practical actions.

Other groups of a later vintage are related by foundation ties to the Salesians of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and consider themselves as belonging to the Salesian Family in practice: they have modified their Constitutions and official documents to express their desire to belong in their own distinctive way to the communion of the charism of Don Bosco.<sup>55</sup>

55. The Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, founded by Fr. Variara, have requested to belong officially to the Salesian Family. Their request has been granted -- v. p. 74 of these Acts.

It was considered timely to come to an agreement on what the *criteria of Salesianity* should be and to draw up the lines of procedure according to which the Rector Major and his Council, in agreement with the Superiors of other groups, could accept them officially into the Salesian Family.

The Councillor for the Salesian Family discussed this matter with the Superiors of the principal groups and some of our researchers. They put together a number of observations and criteria that were then studied and approved "ad experimentum" by the Superior Council: these will be taken into account in such a procedure. In this issue of the *Acts*, page 61, will be found the *Guidelines adopted by the Superior Council for acceptance into the Salesian Family*.

• *Another problem frequently aired: How exactly do the Past Pupils belong to the Salesian Family?*

The SGC set the ball rolling by declaring that "they belonged to the Salesian Family by virtue of their Salesian education that could express itself in

various apostolic commitments". I would seem that to answer the question regarding the nature of their membership and solve the resulting problems we should examine their apostolic commitments in the context of their culture and especially in the educational field (which is the natural area of the Salesian mission); also we would need to check on the values of the Preventive System, which is one of the elements of the charism of Don Bosco.

Meanwhile in many places the Association of Past Pupils is flourishing and full of energy and deserves our generous help in the way of animation.

Finally we are confronted with the *profound cultural and social evolution* of our times, the *ecclesiological contributions of Vaticano II*, the renewal of religious life, the revival of the laity's role in the People of God, the advancement of women in society and the Church, the changed youth situations, the ideological pluralism and political schemes of so many countries, the greater awareness and dynamism of nations, and the problems of certain continents with their multitudes of young persons. When we reflect on these conditions we see them as further challenges to us to be loyal to our Salesian Family identity and promote its membership, activities and apostolic effectiveness.

I have noted the above problems to help all to understand that we have much researching and assessing to carry out in an evolving process that has barely begun.

One thing however is clear: the Salesian Family is becoming ever more important with the passage of time.

## Of vital importance for our future

In the 40s and 50s of the 19th century God inspired Don Bosco with the embryo of a vast project. It grew and evolved true to its nature even during the life of the Founder. Don Bosco was a diocesan priest in the local Church of Turin when he took the first steps to develop the embryo. He united various forces to help poor and abandoned youth, and began his Oratory apostolate. Thus, gradually and providentially, there developed the more organised, varied and stable structure of a true *spiritual Family* in the universal Church. In Don Bosco's mind there was a growing and ever clearer awareness that he was called to be a Founder in the Church. (In 1859 he founded the Salesians, in 1872 the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, in 1876 the Co-operators). He thus became the initiator of a new charism within the People of God, a new source of distinctive holiness and apostolate.

Already in 1899 the February *Salesian Bulletin* described the heritage of Don Bosco as a Founder: "We are happy to seize every occasion possible to point out to our Co-operators that they form with us and the Sisters of Don Bosco one large Family animated by the same spirit in the bonds of a wonderful Christian fellowship".<sup>56</sup>

This Family now, with its distinct basic groups, in progressing and developing "in harmony with the Body of Christ, itself in continual growth".<sup>57</sup>

After Vatican II the Family has enjoyed a much clearer awareness of its charismatic nature.

Now it is up to all sons and daughters of Don Bosco to unite and foster its identity and vitality.

56. Bollettino salesiano, February 1899, p. 29.  
57. Mutuae Relationes

In this all members are co-responsible; and we, dear confreres, have the specific task (in virtue of our vocation and tradition) of rendering the service of animation. It is our very special responsibility.

To prove our love for Don Bosco let us make every effort to have a better knowledge of the Salesian Family; let us sacrifice ourselves and with courage and understanding promote and reinvigorate its communion and its mission. Let us delve into its history and origins and do all we can to increase its fidelity and membership.

May Mary Help of Christians who guided Don Bosco in all things enlighten us too and help us.

Every blessing for a happy Easter.

Sincerely yours in the "Oratorian heart" of Don Bosco,

FATHER EGIDIO VIGANÒ

*Rector Major*