

Youth Pastoral Document No. **9**

THE SALESIAN PLAN
FOR
GROUP ACTIVITY

A progress report on an ongoing experiment

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Youth Pastoral Document No. 9

DEPARTMENT FOR YOUTH PASTORAL WORK – ROME

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Translated by F r. George Williams SDB

PRESENTATION

1. *The present document has its origin in a practical directive made by the GC22: "Every province and every community ... shall provide for ... the promotion of group activity in such a way that it provides the opportunity for a true spiritual experience and apostolic commitment" (GC22, 7).*

Its purpose therefore is:

- *to invite the provinces to examine the consistency of experiments in group movements and activities at the level of the local and provincial communities;*
 - *to stimulate, deepen and widen such group experiences; to emphasize certain key elements in the Salesian plan for group activity;*
 - *to draw attention to some problems which call for clarification;*
 - *to success in the growth of a youth movement drawing its inspiration from Don Bosco and nourished by a concrete spiritual way of life.*
2. *In line with the documents previously issued by the Department for Youth Pastoral Work*
 - *it is an aid to facilitate the study called for by the variety of local situations;*
 - *It sets out again and further develops an essential part of the educative pastoral plan described in the "Indications" already issued*
 - *it develops the norms given in official texts;*
 - *it is based on the convergent opinions expressed in the Congregation;*
 - *it gathers together the results of wide-ranging experiences;*
 - *it therefore provides authentic guidelines based on the competence given by the Constitutions to the Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work (cf C 136).*

3. *The document consists of three sections.*

- *In the first, entitled THE PRESENT SITUATION, are gathered some elements which emerge from the youth situation at the present day, from the practice of the Church, and from the history of the Congregation. These indications lead to the general choice of group movements and activities as a plan for growing in humanity and faith.*
- *In the second, which bears the title DEVELOPMENT OF EXPERIENCE IN GROUP MOVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES,*
 - *There are defined the basic choices we consider essential*
 - *The various activities are restated around which the reflections on spirituality is developed,*
 - *Some aspects of follow up pedagogy are summarized again*
 - *And some organizational indications are given.*
- *In the third section, under the heading LINES OF ACTION, are indicated some of the steps to which a province must give priority if it is to succeed in gathering young people into groups and movements with some guarantee of continuity*

4. *This document or aid is meant to be a helpful working instrument. It is not intended to be a simple communication of information. It is addressed in the first instance to provincials and their councils, who are the ones chiefly responsible for pastoral options, both as regards the activities to which priority shall be given and the manner in which it shall be done; through them its addressed also to their delegates and teams concerned with youth pastoral work.*

To them we make the request:

- *that the document be distributed among all the confreres and communities, so that they may have clear ideas about the lines the Congregation is following at the present day;*
- *that it be used for common study at provincial level in communities, animating teams, and rectors' meetings;*

- *that they restate their own plan concerning group movements, in line with the present situation of the province;*
- *that they send to the Department comments and contributions on the present document and on group movements and activities in general, with a view to continuing the dialogue now begun.*

Fr. JUAN E. VECCHI

*Councillor General for
Youth Pastoral Work*

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First Part

THE PRESENT SITUATION

1. WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ASKING FOR

- **They want to be members of a group.** And it is important for them that there should be an organized group, as well as the kind of unstructured group that springs up spontaneously

Sociological analysis

reveals the **importance** of variety among group movements so as to acquire a deeper understanding of the behaviour and choices of young people.

Highlights the **motivations** which lead young people to come together in groups.

makes evident the **different kinds** of the movements and the risks connected with each of them.

helps to determine by means of the group phenomenon the dynamics and **tendencies** which permeate today's society.

- The importance of this variety for the life of the young person is further emphasized by the historical and social situation in which we are living: he needs in fact a preparatory period before entering fully into a society which is

complex in its relationships and linkages,

pluralist in its concepts and life choices,

fragmented in its messages and scale of values.

This social complexity

on the one hand accounts for some of the characteristics of the present-day tendency to form groups, e.g. the multiplicity in form of such groups, the contradictions sometimes associated with that pluralism, and the example they provide of possible and even frequent disintegration and fragmentation

and on the other hand it drives the young person once again to create around himself some elbow room, a kind of 'vital space', in which he can feel a sense of growth and maturing without too many traumas, and can become aware of his own fundamental needs.

- We have to approach the realities of the situation from the point of view of the obligations of education, i.e. we have to be able to discern and pick out what youngsters are trying to say about their development as it appears from their general tendencies.

Young people want to be members of a group because:

through a process of identification and autonomy, the group completes the active insertion into society that was begun in the family, and continued in the school and in meeting other people

the group develops and matures the personal identity of the young person through self-acceptance and the need for recognition by others;

in the group, through the progressive assumption of different roles, the youngster is led to try out his various talents, his responsibilities, his confidence in his own abilities and in the reaction of others to them;

through its unconditional acceptance, the group offers an environment which is warm and friendly, involving, reassuring and rich in the sense of shared interpersonal relationships;

and hence the group becomes the place where the members can try out new roles and new identities.

- The youngster wants to belong to a group; its organized form is probably what helps him at the present day to consolidate

the sense of belonging,

the possibility of dialogue and comparison, vital experiences of shared responsibility,

the building up of a frame of reference for his life,

participation in the drawing up and carrying out of social, cultural and religious projects.

2. GROUP ACTIVITY IN THE CHURCH

- The **Church** is a communion which in the reality of history becomes a community. The universal Church is **made** concrete and visible in the particular Churches and the latter find expression in smaller communities with human dimensions. In this way the communion of life and love which stems from Christ follows a double path under the guidance of the Spirit

from the universal Church to the particular Church and from this to its various communities;

from the communities to the local Church and from this to the universal Church

This is how it was in the beginning, as we are told in the Acts of the Apostles.

Every kind of meeting, group movement and community has found support, not only for strategic motives but as an expression of the mystery of the Church. Pastors, within the limits imposed by orthodoxy and praxis, helped the communities to mature; so as to realize their communion in Christ and in the Church. It is still possible at the present day to find ecclesiastical documents and criteria with the same objective.

- Groups, youth movements and associations have been to importance both for their multiplicity of forms, according to the age and experience of the members, and for their total membership. A careful historical analysis could bring to light their more salient and characteristic aspects, with the different suggestions either coming down from above or rising up from the members themselves especially since the last century.

Never the less a further evolution can be detected in the present day appraisal of group movements.

Religious group movements, after a noteworthy decline at the end of the sixties and throughout the seventies, are now displaying a singular vitality which is rendered more striking by a concomitant crisis of similar movements in other sectors.

Side by side with organized groups there are to be found numerous religious groups which provide opportunities for human and Christian maturing but are not formally linked with any particular movement or association. This has led to the coining of the term 'invisible group activity'. Although without any formal bonds between them, they have a common 'culture' which stems from modern values and the way of living the Gospel set out by the Council.

A purely functional use of group movements for the purpose of a better transmission of the contents of the faith, or of a missionary commitment in the world, has given way to the recognition of the validity of the group experience itself for the maturing and growth of young people.

The consideration of an ecclesial group as a preparatory stage preceding the insertion into a wider community (parish or diocese) · has been replaced by recognition of the group itself as providing a typical experience of community and of ecclesial life. Without prejudice to certain ecclesial criteria, it can be said that the group is already Church.

From this aspect of religious reawakening of groups, other elements need to

be assessed in addition to the number of members or the impact of their presence in the ecclesial and social fields.

Careful analysis highlights

the functional character of such religious groups with respect to the growth and maturing of the individual;

the importance of the themes and their content of a personal and relational nature;

the vitality of those groups which are at least not opposed to the Church, but still more of those in communion with the great Church community

the ability to aggregate movements which exist to meet the needs of formation of the young, i.e. which are largely educative in scope;

the significance of groups which exhibit a definite and precise identity, i.e. which offer themselves as sure points of reference, able to stand apart and present themselves as an environment in which disintegration and fragmentation are steadfastly resisted, and in which is offered the possibility of acquiring a sense of one's own life and of finding one's own identity

3. GROUPS AND GROUP MOVEMENTS IN SALESIAN PRACTICE

From the happy moment of the birth of our charism right down to our own days there has been a succession of facts and declarations which mark out an unbroken path.

3.1 Don Bosco

- A spontaneous inclination

"The tendency to live and work in groups and the desire for community life was almost a spontaneous experience in the life of our Founder, Don Bosco. He had a natural inclination to be sociable and to make friends. He was industrious and creative in his dealings with the boys from the hamlet of the Becchi and the nearby towns. He organized the 'Società dell'allegria' at school in Chieri. He appreciated the experience of community life and valued the friendships he made at the seminary. Later this experience was to find its concrete expression in the Salesian 'sodalities'.

Already were appearing the first educative and apostolic options of John Bosco in his service of charity:

to gather around him not the 'best' boys but those most in need;
to be in tune with their simplest needs, e.g. elementary schooling;
to open them to the ideals of solidarity and of growth in human and
Christian life, rendered concrete in shared experiences.

- The maturing of a criterion

“In his commitment to Christian education Don Bosco wanted to reach large numbers of youngsters. There was no way he could reach the individual boys without their active and well organized participation. Hence the need for youth associations that would have an educational and religious thrust.”²

Led by his intuitive knowledge of the youthful mind and heart, Don Bosco discovered the practical advantage of groups and associations, which he adapted to the widely differing needs of his boys by creating for them a whole variety of groups, all having the same ultimate purpose.

¹ *Group Movements and Youth Communities (Fr E. Vigano)* , ASC 294, 1979, p. 7

² *Group Movements and Youth Communities (Fr E. Vigano)*, ASC 294, 1979, p. 10.

In fact, these groups or associations were based on natural interests of young people, provided a response to real-life situations, followed the gradual maturing process of the youngsters. developed in a fertile atmosphere as forms of shared responsibility and promoters of growth, and made the most, therefore, of relationships between adults and younger people, between educators and those being educated, between the individual and his environment.

- The realization of the experience

In this way the 'sodalities' matured at Valdocco with characteristics of various kinds:

a) educational characteristics:

they presupposed a complete freedom to take part or not, they were meant to be authentic activities of the boys themselves, they had a precise pedagogical purpose: to help in the growth of the boys, they emphasized the linkage between educational environment and service to companions;

b) pastoral characteristics:

they developed a catechesis which aimed at permeating with faith the daily life of the boy: they linked human development with Christian growth, they encouraged a more active participation in the life of the Church, they fostered the discernment and maturing of vocations among the members, they prompted witness to christian life, especially in the members' own surroundings;

c) spiritual characteristics:

Don Bosco 's youth associations entered into the overall spirituality of the preventive system; they did not form a kind of spirituality apart but put forward the one which was common for the entire educational environment, even though each people or association had its own aims and objectives, with particular aspects to concentrate upon.

The sodalities therefore gave much attention to reflection on faith (in their meetings); were centred on the mystery of Christ the friend of the young, and on the figure of Mary Immaculate, Help of Christians; proposed holiness according to a particular model, chosen to suit the situation in which the youngsters lived; led to a deeper and more continuous sacramental experience; suggested an ascetical path through creative generosity in the fulfilment of one's daily duty; led to a broader outlook as regards future responsibilities in Church and society;

d) organizational characteristics:

they manifested a preference for the group, rather than for large scale highly structured movements;

they called for a relationship between all the groups and the immediate surroundings of which they formed part and parcel;

they brought about an automatic linkage through their ultimate aims, overall plan, pedagogical method and the contributions they made to their surroundings;

they had an internal set of regulations which ensured their normal and continuous functioning;

they were animated by 'assistants' who drew their inspiration from a common pedagogical and spiritual mentality.

3.2 The experience of the Salesians of Don Bosco

Without overlooking the fact that there have been periods when it flourished and others when it appeared to be stagnant, it can be safely said that group activity was never abandoned in the Congregation. The educative and pastoral communities have always used it as a means of animation in their own areas.

A whole era of the Congregation enjoyed the experience of the group movement of the 'sodalities', born of Don Bosco's intuitive initiative. One can trace its history through a series of authoritative texts and vital documents.

A careful study reveals the fact that the sodalities did not have the same identical characteristics throughout their existence. Various factors had an influence on them and led to modifications in their mode 'of action, their linkages and what they actually did, e.g .

- evolution of the world of youth,
- different modes of structure of the surroundings of which they formed part,
- new conclusions that had matured in the pedagogical and pastoral fields,
- the directives and options of the Church in connection with group movements and activity.

Moreover, the sodalities, although considered the most original and appropriate, were not the only group activity. The Salesians have always promoted with clearly pastoral objectives

- sporting and recreational groups,
- groups with cultural or formative aims (Scouts, theatrical groups, et c.),
- catechetical groups and parish associations, ,
- groups for deeper religious study and apostolic commitment, linked with movements and organizations of the local and universal Church (YCW, Legion of Mary, etc.).

In this way four typical tendencies of our group methodology came in practice to maturity:

- The **extension** of the group experience to the greatest possible number of youngsters. They were not 'restricted groups' for certain chosen people, but offered with a certain variety to all. The sodalities themselves, although they had a certain common structure, were multiple and diverse, to such an extent that although they were coordinated at the level of the surroundings, they seemed to be separate groups rather than part of a single association. This allowed some of them to make a beginning, others to progress, still others to reach a high standard, but to all it gave the possibility of growth;
- **pluralism** therefore at the level of what is called for from the members, in what keeps them together, in the name and the form of linkage between groups
- **the educative and pastoral objective** of all the groups; the group or movement is at the service of the individual and the

- surroundings for a maturing in faith;
- **the mode of operation and Salesian inspiration.** This includes the methods used for personal contacts, the process for human and christian maturing, the relationships of members of the group to each other and to those out side, and the service of the animator, all of which take their inspiration from the preventive system

The seventies were a waster shed for a Salesian rethinking of group activity. Previous experience had not been the same everywhere, neither had evolution followed the same rhythm nor had the same results been achieved. It would be an over- simplification to speak of crisis and recovery. It is better to take note of some elements which are determining factors in the reformulation of group activity

They are:

- **the importance of the local Church** as a point of reference for the liturgical, community and apostolic life of the christian community, and its territory as its area of expression. The insertion of every group into the local Church seems indispensable. Some Churches are afraid that 'movements' which have their coordinating headquarters in some far distant place will bring about divisions in local pastoral work,because of a vision and consequent interventions based on a purely theoretical idea of the realities which have to be faced by the christian community;

the **path** to be proposed to young people for the maturing of their christian identity: this centres more on a consideration of the researches of the youngsters themselves and the challenges of the prevailing situation rather than on 'manuals'. Without therefore entirely disregarding an objective framework of values and import, more attention has to be given to the ' processes 'which may be going on in the individuals themselves;

the life of the group is centred more on the sharing of values and the elaboration of an outlook on life than on internal discipline and commitments arising from membership. Various group movements have come to birth which have a 'base', a ' personality ',an 'import' as a common reference point but with a great variety of group expressions.

And so the functions of linkage and organization in the wide sense have undergone a change

- The present - day reality, as it appears from a survey carried out by the Department in 1984-8 5, can be expressed as follows:

the **extension and quantity** of Salesian group movements are obvious at the present day and they are expanding amicably in the sectors of boys and young adults.

there is a plurality and **variety of groups** and movements in every region and province. But among them there is a closeness between prevalent interests, and 'a similarity in management and in style of life

Survey on group movements in the Salesian provinces.

- the **basic reason** which determines membership of the group in both sectors (boys and young adults) is religious formation;
- in addition to the **number of Salesians** involved, the number of lay animators (young or older) working with the groups is quite considerable;
- among the groups, associations and movements, there are some with an explicitly **Salesian denomination and rationale**, e.g. Friends of Dominic Savio, Salesian Youth Movement, etc.;
- small scale **linkages** are common but large scale ones less frequent. Some provinces have drawn up a plan for formation curriculum which they are using for the preparation of animators

3.3 Some reflections: Associations - Groups - the Movement

Practice has been constantly accompanied by evaluation and assessment by encouragement and by the provision of guidelines of particular importance for us are the study made with the moral participation of the whole Congregation (the General Chapter) during and since Vatican II. They are closer to our own experience.

3.3.1 ASSOCIATIONS OF SALESIAN YOUTH (GC19)

The GC19 produced a document on the 'formation of the young', on the basis of the challenges observable at that time in values and institutions.

Chapter VII of this document deals with 'Salesian Associations for Youth', considered still as something internal to our own settings and based on a single unified programme. "They are a community experience of both natural and supernatural values. They permeate the whole life of the young community in which they act as the living leaven, at the service of all the boys to help them in all their problems under the guidance of wise educators" (G09, p.200). "They prepare the boy for a life of convinced and spontaneous piety, for the gradual assuming of responsibilities and for apostolic work wherever he is... , to the sense of working as one of a group , and in this way they help to form the kind of christian layman that the Church wants today" (Ibid).

- From this some significant points can be stressed:
 - the urgency for renewed contact with young people,
 - the need for overall concentration on education and formation,

- creativity in the forms of youth group movements,
- the need for a strongly organized structure which will go beyond spontaneous efforts and provide a permanent and continued service to young people: "National and interprovincial centres. should draw up a programme of group activity and a list of aids for the entire zone" (ibid).

3.3.2 THE GROUP AND THE GROUPS (GC20)

- The GC20 gave more attention to the 'group' as a customized form for evangelization and community, rather than to the aspect of an organized youth movement. No further reference was made to the associations of Salesian youth referred to in the previous General Chapter, and only the sodality of St Aloysius got occasional mention, for the purpose however of emphasizing the creative spirit of Don Bosco (cf. GC20, 135).

The group as a context, as a ' place ' better fitted for the living of a christian experience in the reality of the local Church and territory, was the focal point for the GC20, which considered natural groups, catechetical groups ' piccole comunita '.

- From this the following significant points emerge:
 - The group as an occasion and plan for an educational service to the young: "Our service should be offered to the young in the context of their natural groupings in life and work. We should seek to develop all their potentialities from the inside, from their interests, according to their rhythm and through the action of the whole group which works on itself and holds on the exterior" (GC20, 357).
 - The group as a method for evangelization and catechesis: "But if communities are to become truly apostolic and if each individual is to become integrated into the christian community, there is need today more than in former times of the right method: the 'group 'method. In the ' group 'each individual feels himself to be a responsible member and one who is listened to. In the 'group 'common attitudes help faith to mature. In the 'group' living examples are accepted as authentic values, and the reality of salvation becomes an experience of life. Don Bosco and the Salesian

system have always educated by the' group method ... They are indications of our tradition for a discovery of the group as a new way of evangelizing " (GC20, 321)

- The group as a setting for the maturing of vocations: " Providing hat a young man finds in them the right conditions and assistance, the following can be suitable and sufficient environments to foster the attainment 'of the level of vocational maturity. associations and youth groups of a formative and apostolic character" (GC20, 662).
- The group as a way of building the visible Church and living the Gospel: "If the Church we wish to build is a mystery of communion, it is very necessary that small christian communities be formed which, like 'signs and instruments ', will foreshadow this mystery" (GC20, 417).

" In these small ecclesial groups .. youth groups and spontaneous associations of various kinds, it is easier for people to get to know, love and help each other, as well as to deepen their understanding of the faith and the Gospel in a true brotherly spirit and finally to come to realize the urgent need there is of bringing the good news to all their brethren" (GC20, 418).

- Also offered are some indications of the path to be followed with groups
 - The work to be done on youth leaders and qualified animators: " Without neglecting larger place s and groups, we must have a special care for the format ion of the most promising young people. This task should be assigned to confreres well qualified in the knowledge of the present values of youth, but above all who have a great spirit of faith" (GC20, 3 74, 50, 418).
 - Linkages between groups: "Contact and even integration with existing christian movements will be very helpful. This gives the young a great sense of effectiveness, a progressive awareness of the Church and a greater guarantee of continuity" (GC20, 373).
 - The experience of the youth group as part of the content of the pastoral formation of the young Salesian: "A gradual and well prepared participation in youth work, · preferably under our own auspices, is to be favoured. · This is necessary to give the young confreres an idea of the problems of youth today and of their evangelisation. But its main purpose is to strengthen their own '

Salesian spirituality and give a pastoral slant to their studies" (GC20, 679d).

3.3.3 GROUPS IN A PLAN FOR EVANGELIZATION AND EDUCATION (GC21)

- The GC21 organized its pastoral reflections around three nuclei:
 - Don Bosco's preventive system as the synthesis from which content and method were taken,
 - the present youth condition as the explanatory key to its practical application,
 - the pastoral and educative plan as the practical and complete expression of such application

The group and groups are situated in the context of these realities: they emphasize the connection between group experience and the more characteristic expressions of the preventive system; everything begins from the needs and requests of the young, and is inserted into a plan which is the concentration point for the various proposals made.

- From this some priority guidelines can be deduced
 - "The ample settings by means of which Salesians try to evangelize the young can be divided up into groups with objectives of leaven, service and personalization:
 - for the youth centre organization in groups is a fundamental choice, with a preference for those which are formative and apostolic in character and offer an explicit education to the faith (cf. GC21, 126),
 - in the school it is one of the characteristic traits of the Salesian identity: the school "aims at creating a youth community... The students can group together for purposes which are formative and pastoral" (GC21, 131, 2.3.4);
 - in the parish the Salesians aim at setting up a parish community (cf. GC21, 138). This leads them to envisage the parish as a communion of communities or groups (cf. GC20, 418), among which particular importance attaches to youth groups and communities.
 - The group therefore appertains to both the objective and the style of Salesian work

- One of the educational goals that the Salesian plan aims at achieving is the social growth of the youngsters (cf. GC21, 90). The immediate objective is a 'group experience' (ibid).
- The style of education we choose calls for a community method of human and christian growth. It therefore favours forms of group life, which serve also as a concrete initiation to community commitments of both a civil and ecclesial nature (cf. GC21, 102).
- The animation of groups and group movements can provide a possibility for intervention, a kind of 'new presence' for Salesians, independently of other structures (cf. GC21, 158).

3.3.4 TOWARDS A MOVEMENT CHARACTERIZED BY A SPIRITUALITY (GC22)

- The period between 1977 and 1983 was rich in stimulate and initiatives, and the GC22 was therefore able to make an assessment of the group phenomenon and press on to new goals. •

The assessment of the existing state of affairs can be found in the report of the Rector Major (nn . 180-181) and lists:

- a notable progress in the quantity, variety and wide-ranging organization of group movements;
- a deep bond between different groups which on the surface do not appear to be linked: a spirituality already apparent in invisible form but in need of further deepening to make it visible;
- the birth of back-up publications;
- the felt need for a plan which will cover different ages and so give continuity to the group experience;
- the urgent need to prepare the Salesian as a group animator and supporter of the group movement.

The Salesian educational project, Letter of the Rector Major, ASC 290, 1978

"Group Movements and Youth Communities", ASC 294, 1979, pp. 3-24.

Youth Pastoral Department - Dossier: "Gruppi, Movimentie Comunita giovanili", 1979.

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Youth Pastoral Department - Dossier n. 4: "Outlines for a provincial vocation plan", 1981

- In the practical directives for the future the provinces were asked to prepare a plan for the promotion of group activity "in such a way that it provides the opportunity for a true spiritual experience and apostolic commitment" (GC22, 7);
 - widen group experience among young people: "It is important not to stop at the age of adolescence where promise is already shown, but to continue with older age groups where at the present day some very interesting religious and cultural phenomena are observable" (GC22, 71);
 - give life to a "youth movement, not understood necessarily as a provincial or national organization but rather as a spiritual powerhouse with a nucleus of gospel values which stimulate apostolic dynamism and enthusiasm in life" (GC22, 71);
 - elaborate a spirituality for youth groups which takes its rise from gospel inspiration and looks to Don Bosco as its father and teacher (cf. GC22, 71);
 - encourage volunteers from the Salesian youth sector in association with initiatives in the youth pastoral field (GC22, 10).

3.4 The goal: the text of the Constitutions and Regulations.

- Experience and reflection have been concentrated on the institutional directive for our work contained in article 35

"We introduce the young to the experience of ecclesial life by bringing them into a faith community and helping them to take part in it. To this end we promote and animate groups and movements for formation and apostolic and social action. In these the young people grow in the awareness of their own responsibilities and learn to give their irreplaceable contribution to the transformation of the world and to the life of the Church, and so become themselves the first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them."

The article expresses:

- the choice of groups and group movements as a 'method' and field of intervention;
- an indication of a preference: for groups aiming all formation and apostolic and social action";

- the purpose: "that the young people grow in the awareness of their own responsibilities"; they are therefore educational groups;
- the immediate objectives: the experience of ecclesial life by becoming part of a faith community. These are groups therefore which feel themselves involved in the life of their own Church.
- The realization of this norm is the purpose of the provincial and local pastoral plan. With it and in it the formation of groups and associations according to the age and interests of the youngsters should be encouraged and their continuity ensured. Special care shall be taken of groups having a Christian commitment and of those which share the Salesian mission and live in its spirit (cf. Reg. 8).
- Moreover groups are indicated as
 - the basic units in the organization of youth centres (R 12);
 - a characteristic of the programme for hostels and boarding schools (R 15);
 - a specifically vocational pastoral service (R 16).

4. CONCLUSIONS

At the end of these reflections on the progress made by the Congregation, it would seem that certain conclusions can be drawn before passing on to other more demanding options.

4.1 Multiplicity of groups

The youth condition, the educational character of the groups, and the diversity of context between them (even in the case of groups close to one another), have led in tendency and practice to plurality.

The pluralism in group movements focuses on three aspects of the situation which give rise to reasons for stimulus but also to the need for verifying that the educative and pastoral practice is a correct one.

- The first is the 'religious' resurgence which appears today as the prevailing concern of every group and which is (though not exclusively) an expression of a reaction to the situation of depersonalization which is widely diffused in the industrialized society:

- its deep importance is the underlying demand for meaning and for formation;
- the risk is the exclusion of other educative interests, a reduction of the religious element and the development of an emotional, uncommitted and self-centred mentality.

In some contexts, groups have been classified significantly under the headings: friendly, self-centred and outwardly committed.

- The second is the 'resocialization', through the group, which takes place prevalently around fundamental values of a friendly-relational kind:
 - its importance lies in the reinstatement of that personal 'vital world' which constitutes the primary group;
 - the risk consists in the lack of enough stimulus for bringing commitments and responsibilities to maturity, which makes difficult its application in the ecclesial community and in society

The third is the mediating power of the group on current religious ideas. This happens in ways which frequently seem to produce too facile a synthesis between the christian proclamation of the Gospel and the prevailing values in culture and society:

- its value is, that it gives rise to a 'language' of signs and facts which overcomes any contrast with tittle community;
- the risk, and it is by no means a small one, is the levelling out of the deeply 'alternative' content of the Gospel.

4.2 The place of groups in the context of a plan

- In the Church
 - there are 'workers' in the pastoral field who merely give themselves to a movement from which derive, as a vital necessity, charitable works, cultural initiatives and educative interventions;
 - and there are others who combine the care of a movement with other initiatives.
- We foster groups as part of a wider plan of work in a setting or area which calls for our first and principal attention. What is thought up and done with regard to groups' needs to be

- planned in the context of the particular setting;
- realized in harmony with the objective to be attained with the wider community;
- assessed against the background of the entire pastoral work.

4.3 On the way to a movement

The need for support linkages emerges not only from the realities that have matured in the Church in the last ten years but also from the vital requests of the groups 'themselves. We are moving towards a 'system 'or a coordination of groups.

The Church, because of the characteristics of the society in which it has to be a leaven, expresses communion and the missionary spirit in new ways which are different from those proper to a ' local ' community.

Education too needs new forms of ample socialization which extend beyond the classical institutions.

The ' group ' and 'groups' are not sufficient by themselves. In Salesian circles there is talk of a 'movement' with a call for organizational elements which expressions will be best suited to various situations will emerge from what will be said in the following chapters.

Second Part

DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROUP MOVEMENT

1. SOME SIGNIFICANT OPTIONS

The reflection and commitment of Salesians in connection with youth movements during the period 1978 -84 have led to the emergence of certain repeated observations which are by now maturing into characteristic options.

1.1 All young people

- Don Bosco used to say: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much", emphasizing in this way the deep conviction he had of being sent to the 'poor and abandoned ' youngsters of his time.

His one-to-one pedagogy - the art of making all who approached him feel that they were the objects of his entire and exclusive understanding and trust did not restrict him to a relationship with the individual boy or with restricted groups.

Don Bosco is the Father and Teacher of the young, of youth in general: he went more than half way to meet any youngster willing to follow the way of life he offered them. And it is thus that he is still seen in the ecclesial and social context whenever his inspiration and personality are invoked.

- The Salesians make their own this "fundamental disposition: an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them" (C 39). They give priority as recipients of their mission to all youngsters, meeting them in a climate of welcome and trust, with the desire to make effective contact with all of them.

The theological reason understanding this option is the recognition of the operative presence of God the Father in each young person, and trust in the resources of each youngster is the practical expression of this faith: "There is a point in every youngster which, if you can find it and build on it, leads him to open up, and after that you can obtain from him whatever you wish ".

- This option implies
 - a choice of field of work: to go to anyone willing to go along with you, even the less gifted choices;
 - a choice of method:
 - the creation of welcoming plans and settings;

- the giving of individual attention to each boy: each one of them is a singular and unrepeatable gift whose growth has to be promoted individually and personally;
- the acceptance of points of departure, and therefore of arrival, proper to ordinary people who are lacking in so many things;
- the offering to the more serious and committed youngsters of adequate means for maturing in the faith and apostolic commitment

1.2 Education as the ultimate purpose of every intervention

- Education is not only one of the fundamental dimension of the plan, but it also dictates the way in which all the others must be carried out. We educate by evangelizing and we evangelize by educating: this is the commitment which Salesian communities have tried to live out when drawing up the educative and pastoral plans. The plan aims at the "integrated, human and christian development of the youngsters; the individual in the totality of his dimensions ("man directed towards God") is at the centre of the plan.

"The Salesian plan aims at another growth... A truly religious and christian course of action is developed in Salesian educational and pastoral action, in continuity with the commitment to develop and promote the more specifically human values" (GC21, 91).

- The elements deriving from the 'charismatic' choice of education in Salesian practice are:
 - to look at the positive qualities, the richness, the potentiality which every young person has within himself, as we work at his development;

to give pride of place to the person of the youngster: all the rest, organization and structure, means and methods, causes or objectives, which are of interest to the educator for a personal choice in life must be proportioned and directed to the growth of the person;

- to leave to the subject the responsibility for his own growth, giving support to his efforts and quest;
- to put oneself at the service of the vocation of each one, with all the consequences that follow, especially of the methodological kind;
- to concentrate on the 'quality' of the intervention rather than on its 'quantity': the good seed has within itself the germ of fertility, and the good result is already inherent from the beginning in the seed which is sown;
- to have confidence in human sciences, which have a significant and efficacious word to say even with regard to evangelization;
- to be aware of the time factor in formation: the values and ideas to which young people are being educated and prepared need to become translated into attitudes and life practice. Before the seed becomes a plant many seasons must pass by Evangelical patience is a necessary quality, especially in an educator who cannot be certain in advance about the results

1.3 The group

In addition to the reasons already put forward, the group is a characterizing option in our plan for the following motives

- The group is an important halfway stage between the individual (with his risk of loneliness) and the large mass (with the risk of anonymity), leading gradually to a change from the 'I' to the 'we' outlook.
- For the youngster the group represents the most efficacious environment for the building of his personality: the setting in which he can grow at a personal, effective and relational level and seek out solutions for his problems.
- The group becomes the handiest stamping ground for discussing the sense and reasons behind problems of life which constitute the most meaningful quest for young people.

- The group offers elbow room for creativity, and makes possible an opening to the social world outside with the possibility of beginning a commitment of service, of participation with others, and of sharing responsibility.
- Fundamentally the group is the privileged place where the young person can be offered an experience of Church and community, where they can try out for themselves the gospel values ('Come and see...').

Our educational settings make this option for group organization, giving preference to those of a formative and apostolic character (cf. GC2I, 126, 132; R 6, 13). We educate therefore through groups and encourage them.

In practical terms this option implies:

- considering the group in which the youngster lives his life as the most important element of his group experience, and membership of wider movements as a support for the first ones;
- giving the group the possibility of managing its own affairs, adapting to, the situation of its members and to the social and ecclesial context in which they live;
- considering the 'group movement' as a convergence of groups, rather than looking on the groups as., so many similar cells of the movement itself.

I.4 Animation

Animation is an option linked with the preceding:

- with the option for 'all young people ', because the aim of animation is to arouse and mobilize all the resources which each individual has within himself;
- with the 'group' option, because it is the natural setting in which animation operates and is most successful;
- with the 'education' option, of which it represents the most typical method_

Animation is not just a chapter in the book of education: it is the whole book

The animation we mean

- a **manner of thinking about man** and the dynamic processes involved in his maturing: through his interior resources he is able to determine and take responsibility for the processes which regard him;
- a **method** which selects resources and educational opportunities, but especially which organizes them in a free, authoritative and developmental relationship;
- a **style** of accompanying the young, with suggestions and motivations, helping them to grow and accepting from them stimuli for their common progress;
- an **ultimate and overall objective**: the giving back to everyone the joy of a full life and the courage to hope;
- a **function** which reflects the concrete daily physiognomy of a person: the animator. With the option for animation we emphasize the importance and also the specific role of the animator in the life of the group;
- a **unified strategy** covering times, places and various agents which develop convergent and unified processes.

2. THE SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

2.1 Progress and its significance

First attempts and subsequent study and analysis have led in recent years to the discovery of a plan of Salesian spirituality for the young, which is still not sufficiently spread abroad and accepted

Salesians and youngsters, equally committed in the group movement, try to organize their own lives around certain faith perceptions, certain values and attitudes which are able to express in a new way what it means to be young and a believer in today's world, following the 'way of christian life' experienced and made concrete by Don Bosco.

This spirituality is still in process of elaboration. Interdependent manifestations of it and attempts at synthesis exist, but with different emphases according to the contexts and times in which they were made.

But three requirements emerge:

- the need to reach an accepted and relatively stable formulation of a central nucleus of spirituality, starting from whatever deeper analysis may be possible;
- the need to translate the manifestations and synthesis into gradual pedagogical practical steps adapted to the boys and youngsters who will be involved (significance, values, attitudes, experiences);
- the need for a re-elaboration based on living experience. Before being expressed as a series of organized formula, a spirituality is an 'experience' of christian life: Only when many people live it, and persons arise who are able to guide it to maturity in line with the expressed formulation, can it be said that there exists a group spirituality

The implications and significance of the enterprise seem evident.

- By the use of the term 'spirituality' is meant
 - a re-reading of the Gospel in the context of the present day;
 - a11 overall significance, able to unify the gesture and attitudes which characterize christian existence;
 - a progressive maturing in christian identity;
 - the possibility of an experience of God in the context of one's own life and inserted in to the wider panorama of history;
 - a path to sanctity, or a specific plan of life in the Spirit.
- It is called a youth spirituality, by which is meant
 - that what has already been defined must be thought out and realized within the experience of the young, and not as a possibility to be achieved after the period of youth;
 - that it tries to present the image of a young christian in a manner suited to our own times and to those who are living in today's youth situation;
 - that it is directed to all young people, because although made to measure for the poorest of them it can also indicate goals to those capable of rising higher;
 - that it facilitates the making of contact with the individual youngster at the point at which he is at present with regard to freedom and faith, and helps him to become progressively responsible for his own growth (cf. C 38);

- that it aims at making him a protagonist in plans for his peers and for the surrounding environment.
- It is called Salesian, which implies
 - that it draws its inspiration from the intuitions, life and teachings of Don Bosco, but not by a simple repetition of what he said and did himself;
 - that it is shared by Salesians and young people in a single life experience;
 - that it is connected with the preventive system which combines pedagogy, apostolate and spirituality (cf. GC21, 96);
 - that it is nothing else but the development of the Salesian educative and pastoral plan which is offered to all, translated into a way of life calling for greater commitment

2.2 The nuclei around which a group spirituality can be thought out

Our purpose here is to gather together and put forward once again the key themes which recur in different syntheses and concentrate into more central nuclei those in which differences appear.

We want also to bring together into a unified synthesis some topics which were given particular emphasis at various times during the period from 1976-1985 when an attempt was being made to draw' up an organic panorama of this spirituality. ·1

We shall also take advantage of the mature reflections made in the process of the drawing up of the new text of the Constitutions, in a double connection: The Salesian spirit (C 10-21) and the path to be followed by our young people (C 31-3 7).

1 In making the synthesis we have used in particular

- "Un manifesto per la spiritualità giovani le salesiana • - NPG , January 1982. " L: associazionismo delle F.M . A." · Dossier CIPG 1982.

These two organic reflections should be compared with the following texts:

- •11 Siste ma Preventivo come cammino di santità ", LDC, 1980.

Giovan i Cooperatori salesiani, in "Movimenti ecclesiali contemporanei ", LAS, Rome 1982.

"Riflessioni sulla spiritualità dei gruppi salesiani •, Cumbaya 1985. " Riflessione sulla spiritualità dei gruppi ", Spa in 1985.

• Le beatitudini del Vangelo " - Atti della XI Settimana di Spiritualità della Famiglia Salesiana , Rome 1985.

Manifestos and plans of different groups and salesian group movements, cf. Appendix .

In each of the key themes we shall consider:

- its significance,
- its verification in Don Bosco,
- some illustrative examples of attitudes relating to the point concerned,
- some settings in which attitudes can be expressed and developed

2.2.1 LIFE AS THE PLACE FOR MEETING GOD

■ Significance

The daily life of the young person is made up of duties, social contacts, recreation, growing pains, family life, self, development, future prospective, requests for assistance, and aspirations. This is the material which has to be accepted, deepened and lived in God's light: to 'discover' the fatherhood of God in the simplicity of daily life is the first feature proposed to both Salesians and youngsters. Holiness therefore is not to be sought in distant places and ideals, but in one's own life and present situation.

According to Don Bosco all you have to do to become holy is to do well whatever your duty demands of you. He considered fidelity to duty as the criterion for discerning true virtue and as a sign of spiritual maturity

At the basis of this understanding of the daily round and of the positive evaluation of life in general there stands faith and a continual reappraisal of the event of the incarnation. In Jesus Christ God became man. The common human condition of Jesus rendered him able to reveal the presence of God, to manifest his transcendence. Jesus as Man is the sacrament of the Father.

The humanity of Christ is of the same stuff as our; he has taught us that the place to meet God is in our humanity: ours, not that of other people; the humanity of this point in history: "Whenever you did something for one of my brethren, you did it for me

It is a question then of taking up the daily round, of accepting its challenges and questions, the tensions of growth, and of putting together again the fragments! in the unity worked by the Spirit in baptism; of correcting the ambiguities inherent in ascetics and of leavening it with love. In this way life becomes a sacrament, 'the place where the youngster can meet God. Going beyond the limit of what is visible in quest of a deeper meaning the discerns true presence of Christ and opens himself to his revelations.

■ **Don Bosco** taught his boys not to detach themselves from life in their search for the Lord. This is shown by

- the way he welcomed each boy, just as he was;
- his burning desire for the total salvation of the boy, and of every boy;
- the conviction he had of the presence of God in the heart of every boy, even those who seemed most affected by evil,
- his ability to be united with God in joy and in work; his ascetical view of duty as penance and prayer;
- his candid and sincere manifestations of humanity

From the acceptance of daily life enlightened by the incarnation arise some indications of attitudes to be fostered and areas of experience to be emphasized.

■ Among **attitudes** to be matured can be listed:

- *a lived faith in the incarnation of God who became man in Jesus Christ, assuming the whole of human reality, the life of every day, and made of it the place and instrument of salvation;*
- *the responsible acceptance of one's own life discovered in the great mystery of salvation;*
- *a positive and reflective -mission of one's own period in history with its values, fellow human beings, tendencies and attainments, seen as a process of humanization which anticipates the salvation we await in hope*
- *the willingness to live each day as a protagonist;*
- *love for one's own work and profession, carried out with dedication and renewed competence as a collaboration in the construction of God's plan;*
- *a passionate desire: to work in such a way that every youngster might bring to fruition all the values he has within him;*
- *in a word, to live the faith of life and the life of faith, on the basis of human values and the content of faith*

■ **Experiences** of daily life to be lived in the depth of the Spirit could be:

- *One's own family life: the group should help toward the understanding of the exceptional value of this experience and to deepen its relationships, overcoming the typical adolescent conflicts that arise.*

- *Study, cultural growth and scholastic experience: these things taken together mobilize positive tendencies for commitment, sound reasoning and methodical approach; they call constantly for a confrontation with faith, and so give rise to conflicts which must be resolved and human situations in which collaboration is needed. The activity of the group should help towards the joyful acceptance of the endeavours which bring necessary in consequence.*
- *Friendships, solidarity and spare time: these can still out to be nothing more than pleasant pastimes or dimensions, or they can be moments for building up a complete personality and opportunities for generous self-donation. The choice made and the way in which the individual approaches: These realities will help him to have them as experiences of grace and not just time.*
- *A progressive acquaintance with the world, people and the neighbourhood: this can be a neutral or even aggressive meeting, or it can be one productive of a serene and positive relationship.*
- *One's own path of spiritual growth in daily endeavour: self-knowledge and an understanding of one's own resources, the acceptance of what is good in ourselves and of what needs correction, perseverance and periodic evaluation of our plans for the future, the learning of good human and christian habits (prayer, relationships, etc.).*

2.2.2 A LIFE WHICH CONFORMS PROGRESSIVELY MORE TO CHRIST

■ Significance

Spirituality means living under the promptings and inspiration of the Spirit, rather than that of the flesh or mere human reason. Christ is the man of the Spirit. From his, virginal conception, through his baptism, public ministry and sacrifice, right down to his resurrection, his human life was moulded by the Spirit.

There can be no christian spirituality without the explicit and permanent centrality of the person and mystery of Christ. This is not something to be taken for granted, like an initial assertion that has no need of repetition or as a general common basis for all plans for christian maturing. We are all equal when we go to Christ but profoundly different when he has grown in us. In

fact, his person is inexhaustible, and in each individual his mystery of Man 'par excellence' is reflected in an individual way

For young people of the present day who are bringing their christian identity to maturity, there are three factors of great importance for looking at Christ as the explicit point of reference in their path through life:

- in a market in which there is a spontaneous mixture and confrontation between various concepts of what man is, Jesus offers the one according to which they must grow as new men;
- youth spirituality must be 'critical': maturing in faith cannot be separated from dialogue on current values; without constant reference to the Gospel there will always be the risk of taking as christian what is merely 'mundane';
- a spirituality must come to terms with the dynamics of history and with its struggles; it must be an incentive and not a hindrance to interventions in the direction of man and the Kingdom: Christ and his paschal mystery mark a historical practice from which to draw inspiration.

But Christ is also the revelation of God from whom all spiritual endeavour takes its rise and to whom it tends: to the Father, as man makes his pilgrimage. To know and reveal the riches of Christ is not only an objective but a daily programme, until the vital insertion is achieved into his operative paschal mystery. Word, sacraments and prayer all exist in function of this knowledge, this encounter and relationship born of faith and identification.

Every day ecclesial movements lean ever more on this conviction, prompted by the present day circumstances of the faith, of the different concepts of man and of the ambiguity of historical projects. It is not just a question of telling the story of Christ, but of helping young people to see in him and find again in him the appropriate dimension of their own life.

■ The spirit of Don Bosco "finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ" (C 11). Some of the things about him, about his Gospel and about what he did, strike us and prove an inspiration for our own path of personal maturing and apostolic initiatives.

Perhaps the giving of too rapid attention to sacramental practice has caused some people to lose the vision of what personal contact with Christ meant for Don Bosco in the spiritual maturing of a youngster

It is interesting therefore to recall that Jesus is presented by Don Bosco as:

- the friend of the young: "Young people are the delight of Jesus" (Don Bosco).
- "My friends shall be Jesus and Mary" (Dominic Savio). "
- "Jesus is my friend and companion" (Francis Besucco) . fi
- the teacher of life and wisdom;
- the model of every christian: "The model that every christian must copy is Jesus Christ. And so in the life and action of a christian should be reflected the life and actions of Jesus Christ himself"; 7
- the redeemer who commits his whole life in love and in his passion for salvation, even to the extent of dying;
- being present to the needy and the little ones. Frequently we find him quoting "Whenever you did these things for the least of my brothers, you did it for me". 8

He was constantly concerned about educating to the faith, living with the boys to lead them to the person of the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his Gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new men (cf. C 34).

For Don Bosco, life in Christ develops through every effort to grow in charity, but has privileged moments of 'grace' and awareness in the sacraments:

- the **Eucharist** is the great memorial of God's love for man manifested in Christ, and of his entering into our history so that we might enter into communion with him;
- **Penance** is the sign which celebrates the mercy of God which is stronger than man's sin and, through conversion, gives us the grace which transforms us into him

John Bosco: "Life of Dominic Savio", chap. III.

t, 11 il, 11 Bosco: "Il pastorello delle Alpi", chap. XXIX, p. 80.

11t 1111 Bos co : "Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio", cf. Joseph Aubry

In "Spiritual Writings", p. 165 ff. (English edition, New Rochelle).

11, 1., scattered references in the writings of Von Bosco. cf. Aubry: "Spiritual

Writings, Subject Index, p. 382.

Together they are "the sure foundation" for a christian growth, able to inject deeply into an individual the autonomous dynamism of spiritual life and apostolic initiative. The sacramental presence of Jesus gave to the Don Bosco's youth community a tone and an intense point of reference for meetings.

■ For the purpose of increasing in conformity to Christ, here by way of example are some attitudes to cultivate and develop:

- *the desire to understand and make one's known themselves of Christ and the reality set out in his Gospel: conversion of heart , the message of happiness, the Kingdom , , , faith in the force of his liberating presence in our life and in human history, and particularly in that of immediate environment;*
- *a comparison of one's own life and events with his whole allude and mode of action;*
- *identification with him in the cause of salvation particularly of those who are for;*
- *the positive evaluation of whatever increases the awareness of our insertion into his life and deepens our relationship with him and with his saving work: celebrations, use of the sacraments, contact with the community of his disciples;*
- *a proper understanding and deep esteem for the life of grace as a progressive insertion into Christ Jesus;*
- *a 'personal' relationship of admiration and friendship with Jesus living in history*

■ Experiences leading towards a life rooted in Christ could be

- *a systematic deepening of the faith which will help youngsters to grasp the mystery of Christ, from the level of elementary catechetical to the kind of systematic reflection proper to adults;*
- *the learning of prayer as a dimension of life in Christ and in the Spirit: a prayer steeped in the events of daily life which leads to the interpretation and acceptance of one's own existence in the light of God. The process of learning goes from the development of fundamental attitudes, through the experience of different forms of prayer until it becomes a well-rooted 'habit' of life;*

- *reading and meditation on the word of God as found in Sacred Scripture, particularly the New Testament, and the interpretation of events according to the mind and criteria of Jesus;*
- *participation of faith in the community; which lives by the memory and presence of the Lord and celebrates it; celebrations and Eucharistic life: in the Eucharist we celebrate the paschal mystery, communicating in the body of Christ so as to build ourselves in him and renew our apostolic commitment (cf C 88);*
- *the experience of reconciliation with God and with neighbour through the sacrament of Penance, celebrated as a sign of God's pardon but seen also in its therapeutic aspect of healing, of the ascetical evaluation of our personal commitments and as a pedagogical occasion for personal growth as sons of God;*
- *liturgical celebrations with young people with a festive sense, as real expressions of the life of the youth community;*
- *historical commitment along the lines of Jesus in the choice of field of work, purpose, practice and method (as is developed further in the following points)*

2.2.3 LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST: JOY AND COMMITMENT⁹

■ Significance

The most deeply rooted tendency in the heart of man is the desire and quest for happiness. Joy is the most noble- expression of happiness. "it is a presentiment of the divine mystery" (Paul VI). It is biologically congenial to the young.

In the history of education and spirituality there are those who have linked man's maturing only to commitment, to responsibility, to endeavour, to obligations, to duty; they consider happiness, spontaneity and joy as complementary relaxations or a compensation for the weakness of a nature in capable of constant tension. Perhaps it was a reaction to the manifestations of empty happiness which displays life in pleasure and enjoyment.

Christianity is the religion of ' salvation ', and of the joy which is a consequence of it. The christian faith, by vocation, is the proclamation of a

radical happiness, a promise and bestowal of 'eternal life', without boundaries of space or time and with no limit to aspirations.

God loves us and has said so in Christ. "Happy are you!" The discovery of the Kingdom and the meeting with Christ are man's beatitudes. There is a sense to life. Jesus is risen and this victory of life over death illumines the whole existence of the christian and the entire history of the world.

"Seen in this light joy is full, pure, enduring, and preserved from deception. From the heart it extends to every dimension of being. It meets the natural exuberance of the youngster to give it spiritual dynamism, to increase it and to make of it the translation and visible sign of the joy God can give to his children".

9 For further development of this point, cf.:

Le beatitudini del Vangelo" (op. cit.). /

- "Beati...". Comment of the Rector Major, Fr E. Vigano, on the Strr1111 for 1985.

10 "Don Bosco proclamatore delle Beatitudini ai suoi ragazzi", in • Le beatitudini del Vangelo" (op. cit.).

The Gospel is permeated by the fullness of joy and expresses it in the Beatitudes, which have a double sense:

- "they are a revelation and manifestation of what God is for us, the extent of his love, the feeling of his heart";¹¹
- but they represent also a task to be carried out: "They prompt us to intervene in certain situations, following God's predilections, so that we work for the same people, have the same tastes, and especially have the ability to express love with historical efficacy" They are an indication of a line of conduct and practice, because they unveil to men once and for all the true face of God.

■ This is how Don Bosco understood it, and this how he put it across to his boys: he linked together and fused into one duty and joy, holiness and happiness.

As a boy at the Becchi he spontaneously linked the proclamation of God's word with the exuberance of games; as a seminarian at Chieri, in the Societa dell'Allegria, he combined in a single programme the fulfilment of the duties of piety and study and the outings for relaxation.

In his plan of christian life for the boys at the Oratory expressed in the 'Companion of Youth' (a plan he never changed all his life), he spoke of a "holiness that was easy, serene and joyful", which could be synthesized in the formula: "Serve the Lord and be always happy".

Don Bosco is original and well founded in linking together joy and duty, in combining in a single vital experience the playground and the study hall, happiness and the fulfilment of obligations: "God loves you at the age at which you are now. . You are the object of God's love. But God is counting on you; you are still in time to do a lot of good works".

"Happiness, study and piety" was the programme that Don Bosco gave Besucco as a sure way for living a good and happy life. "Constant and moderate happiness and perseverance in the duties of piety and study", he recommended to Dominic Savio. And Dominic Savio understood: although only a pupil himself, he became the teacher of Camillo Gavio: "Here we make holiness consist in being very happy".

This kind of sanctity might well surprise an experience spirituality: it might appear that holiness is being played down, that its meaning is being devalued

as the way to attain the Kingdom of heaven . . . , but it would not have surprised those who knew Don Bosco deeply: "Joy must include among the complex realities of which Don Bosco, with sure intuition , understood and appreciated all the aspects... Without excluding its pedagogical merit, joy has especially a theological value. Don Bosco saw in it an inescapable manifestation of the life of Grace".¹³

■ The exploitation of joy as something belonging to the spirit, a source and consequence of commitment, means that certain attitudes should be fostered in young people. We may list the following:

- Optimism and trust. Life is a gift, and the Lord is working in it; it makes sense above every absurdity. Hence one should esteem whatever is positive in one's own existence and in that of others.
- Thanksgiving and hope: each one of our neighbours is an enrichment; let us accept therefore whatever we learn from past experience, gather the seeds of eternal life at the present time, and have trust in their unfailing fertility.
- Simplicity and the ability to communicate one's own joy and to share that of others.
- Readiness to support what is good, the small seed that begins to sprout, enlightened and positive enthusiasm for great human causes.
- The ability to take the initiative in case of need, in the sure awareness that it is going to cost one a lot personally.
- Solidarity with those who are struggling and those who are suffering for the values proclaimed in the beatitudes as fruits of the presence of the Lord: the poor, the peacemakers, those persecuted in the cause of justice.
- Willingness to be militant and to "stand up and be counted" in the face of the 'slaveries' falsely presented as man's 'future'.
- Willingness to take up one's own duties and mission. No evasion therefore, nor indifference nor remaining non committed, but the ability to approach others and to take upon one's own shoulders with courage and creativity the problems of a neighbour. In every task God is waiting for us with an enriching surprise. Life spent for him becomes an enterprise full of novelty.

- Admiration and an internal inclination towards the good things presented in the beatitudes: poverty of spirit, purity of heart, active non-violence.
 - A positive and redeeming view of difficulties and sufferings. The cross is an obligatory stage on the road to the light and joy of Easter and the transformation of man.
 - The spontaneous connection between holiness and happiness, between grace and joy, between commitment and hope. To become holy does not mean to deny life, but to live it in a fuller and deeper dimension.
- **Experiences to foster:**
- Unconditional acceptance and welcoming of every individual as a person, quite apart from any particular qualities he may have. The only truly joyful experience is that of affection. Without it everything else is insufficient. A group in which one is welcome therefore, and which welcomes others in its turn, is indispensable for growing in joy.
 - The friendly sharing by the group of responsibilities, results, problems and moments of relaxation, without any exceptions being made.
 - The building up of an environment of family joy, of spontaneity and free expression, entrusted to the responsibility of the youngsters themselves.
 - Youthful and community feasts and festivities. The feast is a human and spiritual fact which expresses the truth that all life is in the hands of God. It is a special moment of growth which calls for commitment under many aspects: relationships, collaboration, creativity, expression, fun and diversion, and prayer. It is an experience of freedom.
 - The savouring together of the joys which the Creator has laid out along our path:
 - *the joy of nature and of silence,*
 - *the joy of accomplishments realized together,*
 - *the joy of friendship and service,*
 - *the exacting joy of sacrifice.*

Meetings with other groups. Such meetings should be fostered to promote communication between different groups, to celebrate life, the joy of being together, common study, mutual comparisons and enrichment: e.g. Easter celebrations for young people, summer camps, etc.

A deepening of the personal and historical meaning of the values to which the Lord links the joy of the redeeming presence of Christ just foe, poverty, purity of heart.

Commitment in the areas in which these manifestations of the Kingdom call for personal or group interventions; service of the poor, struggle for peace, the sense of justice, the defence of life and of love.

2.2.4 AN EXPERIENCE OF CHURCH: COMMUNION AND SERVICE

■ Significance

Every group cultivates in its members an image of the Church and an attitude towards it. According to the ideas it causes to circulate and the experiences it proposes, it can tend to produce a vision of the Church as a distributor of religious services, as a closed aggregation of believers, as an agency for initiatives for good works, or as a leaven in human history. Similarly, according to the kind of relationships it fosters it can create deep or merely superficial feelings of belonging, of distance or even opposition, and attitudes of a messianic elite or of communion. It can give rise to notions which would do away with some of the Church's dimensions, e.g. its mystical reality or its visible organic unity. The experience and understanding of the Church is one of the points, and even the main point, in the discernment of what progress the group has made in its common pilgrimage.

But there can be a projection too in the opposite sense, which gives life to a group. The Church, as it has to be built by Christians, is a spiritual communion and a community which becomes visible through common gestures and convergent practices; it is a service to men, and it does not separate itself from them like a ' sect ' which considers good only those works which bear the imprint of its own trademark

The Salesian group and all its components learn to see in the Church the visible body of Christ, the continuation of his incarnation: a mystery which embraces, within the limits of human weakness, the invisible grace of the presence of God. The group provokes an awareness of the divine dimension and of the human reality of the christian community.

■ Don Bosco was a man of the Church because of the capacity of his heart for communion and the love of Christ, before the fact of his institutional and public role. He taught his boys to live the mystery of the Church through its visible elements: the sacred building, the community, the bishop, the Pope, the history of God's people, the works of the apostolate.

A spirituality which claims to be Salesian must put into practice what the Constitutions say: "Our love for Christ necessarily gives rise to our love for his Church, the People of God, the centre of unity and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom ... We educate young Christians to an authentic understanding of the Church and we work assiduously for its growth" (C 13).

■ The attitudes to be created are therefore:

- *Attention to the more characteristic phenomena of the ecclesial community and the understanding of their meaning.*
- *Participation in the life of the christian community in a manner suited to the age of the individuals.*
- *A progressively deeper understanding of the purpose of the Church's activity in the world and of its typical methods.*
- *The assuming and sharing in the Church "of the joys, hopes and anxieties of men" among whom the Church lives as leaven in the mass.*
- *The ability to live in communion and working harmony with all those who form the Local Church.*
- *Openness, respect, esteem and trust towards other christian denominations and other religions, because in them too takes place the mysterious dialogue between God and man which is also the fundamental mystery of the Church.*
- *The study and assimilation of the directives of the Church's magisterium, as a response to the appeal God makes to us for the life of humanity.*
- *The maturing and growing interior sense of belonging to the Church*

■ **Experiences** to be fostered

- *The concrete environment is the place for experiencing an image of the Church which is fresh, genial, active and capable of responding to*

the expectations of the young. Signs, behaviour, satisfactions and individuals all speak of a Church which accepts and welcomes what is human, gives it dignity and is able to show new horizons for quality of life.

- *The educative community becomes a place of communion through the quality of relationships between a Salesians and youngsters and between the youngsters themselves. In the community the young people enter gradually into contact with a world of faith and play an active part in its creation. In this way the decision to be a christian comes to maturity, i.e. to belong to the nucleus of men aware that they are moving towards a new world promised by God.*
- *The youth group of service must be the leaven into the mass. It is not separated from other people nor made up of the elite; it is inserted among them and open. Those youngsters who want to live their christian identity with greater awareness make efforts to be elements of community and service, so that all others may make progress on their earthly pilgrim age. The Salesian group is faithful to certain conditions imposed by ecclesially becomes the Church of the young.*
- *The local Church. In it are gathered together all the endeavours of Christians to remain faithful in a visible communion and in a service perceivable in a defined area: its assemblies, the persons of those who preside over it, its spiritual and practical directives, its sufferings, and all the signs of the Church which it knows and lives.*
- *The universal Church. It is perceived and lived in its relationship of love for the Pope, information about missionary activity, and the situations in which the People of God find themselves obstructed in their desire to live the faith; through knowledge of the Saints and of charismatic persons; through contact with vocations and significant personalities representing christian thought and achievement in different fields*

2.2.5 A PATH OF GUIDANCE AND VOCATIONAL CHOICE

■ Significance

Life accepted as a meeting with God, a pilgrimage of identification with Christ, a commitment for the Kingdom, the Church seen as a communion of service where each one has a place and there is need for the contributions of

all, lead to the forming and maturing of a conviction: life carries within itself a vocation; life is a plan which has to be discovered and realized.

The vocation is a free and gratuitous initiative on the part of God, forming part of the plan of providence which touches the individual not in isolation but in the context of a community and of history.

A reading of reality with the eyes of faith leads us to perceive that at the origin of this life of ours, as it is - with all its thrusts and aspirations there is the call of God.

Awareness of the riches and limits of our own personality, with its fundamental dynamism and inclinations, helps us. to discern the plan that God is putting to us; while the needs of the Church, the urgent needs and problems of men show us the fields where our life can be spent for the salvation of others, so that it may itself be saved: "He who wishes to save his own life...".

But it is not enough to understand the sense of life and interpret the complex of signs. The vocation, the 'voice' and initiative of God, call for our attention and ability to respond, and so a dialogue develops, a communion of life with the Lord, a conscious sharing in his work.

As a development of one's own personality, deriving from this preferential relationship with the Lord, this requires a gradual maturing process and the making of progressive and coherent options; as a service to the Church and to men it presupposes a radical self-donation, a detachment from whatever does not help to the giving of a generous response and insertion into the human and ecclesial community.

All this requires vocational orientation, which is understood as a process interior to the individual, who underline the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is working out a plan of self-donation; but it is also understood: as the sum total of personal and environmental assistance which helps a young person to make a choice and to respond to it with realism and generosity.

- This point finds many illustrations in the young and apostolic Don Bosco. In fact:
 - he saw and lived his own existence as a vocation from the time of his dream at the age of nine, as one who had heard an invitation and

responded to it with a generous heart: to go to young people to save them

- as a young priest he was a vocational guide: he considered the choice of a state of life as the principal task' of the young, and he offered both an environment and personal guidance so that it should be accurately made; he promoted in a special way, priestly, religious and lay vocations;
 - he left this same task to his Congregation as a major concern; it is expressed in art. 37 of the Constitutions
 - We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel. This work of collaboration with God's design, the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity, is sustained by prayer and personal contact, above all in spiritual direction".
- Vocational guidance implies the fostering of certain attitudes. They can be grouped around three main ideas
- Research: an active commitment to discern one's particular task in life, by comparison with a mission dimly seen, knowledge of oneself, and dialogue with the One who is calling.
 - Receptiveness: starting with an opening of the mind to whatever permits of growth, through a taste for facing up to new situations and the ability to renounce secondary values so as to acquire those which are essential, to help .in overcoming the sense of one's own inadequacy, apprehension at the taking of an irreversible step, fear at the length of time involved, a desire for complete certainty and perfection as compared with hasty and poorly based decisions
 - Oblation: of ones whole per on and abilities for the Lords plan and the service of others
- Linked with these attitudes are some experiences which should be promoted, such as:
- *an opening to reality and human contact: situations of material and spiritual need, model achievements, people and phenomena, significant cultural or pastoral settings;*
 - *to do something together for other people. This is an experience that cannot be learned from others nor by word of mouth description no*

matter how authoritative. The joy of doing something for others is a personal prerogative of the one who lives the experience. Many vocations are born of a happy experience of service in some poor quarter or region, in the teaching of catechism in an oratory, in visiting the sick, in commitment to the work of a summer camp, in a volunteer movement, etc.

- *the presentation in a gradually deeper manner of the ministerial Church and the various vocations which enrich it for the work of salvation: the lay person, the consecrated secular, the religious, the priest, the missionary;*
- *the provision of information on the Salesian vocation and the Salesian Family wherein it is to be found;*
- *the promotion of meetings with concrete models which exemplify the different vocations in a clear and attractive way, and particularly those which represent Salesian spirituality in its various expressions*
- *direct personal guidance, either through the sacrament of reconciliation (understood also as a means of building the personality for the service of the Lord), or through personal talks and spiritual direction, or through a daily relationship.*
- *shared moments of research and planning as an addition to the organic development of a life plan as a response to God's call (meetings, vocation camps and groups; the insertion into welcoming communities of those youngsters who are beginning to formation plans for following a consecrated vocation and want to evaluate it further.*

2.2.6 A LIFE WHICH TAKES ITS INSPIRATION FROM MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

■ **Significance**

Mary is the first and most perfect disciple of Christ. The Word of God became man and entered history in her soul and in her person, before doing so in her womb. She it was who gave Christ his humanity, and so she is a realistic representation of the laborious but happy pilgrimage of every single man and of humanity in general towards its fulfilment. In her the path of man met that of God and God entered humanity. She therefore represents a key in-terpretation, a model and type.

And all this happened in the course of her daily life. While she was living on earth a kind of life common to so many others, full of solicitude for her family and work, Mary was intimately united to the Son of God. She stands out among the humble and the poor, a strong woman who knew poverty and suffering, flight and exile, the Lord chose her to collaborate as a woman in the salvation of humanity, But the extraordinary thing is that this did not change her lifestyle. And this is the wonderful things: that God made himself present not through heroes and supermen, but in the life of those who lived as children

Mary felt and was proclaimed 'blessed', happy in her humility and poverty, through the gift of God and through her receptiveness. It was through this attitude that she could read the history of humanity and proclaim in her "Magnificent" the triumph of the poor.

Mary accompanied the new-born Church in its early days and still takes part at the present day with the richness of her maternity in the maturing in history of the christian community and in its mission in the world. On Calvary, at the moment when the Church was born from the pierced side of Christ and again when the Church was made fertile and sent by the Holy Spirit for its mission in the world, Mary was with the disciples as a guarantee of the humanity of Christ, "born of a woman" and ' a witness of his divinity

- Don Bosco experienced in a quite extraordinary way the presence and intervention of Mary in his life and work: "She it is who has done everything" (MB 18, 435) .

In the oratory of Valdocco Mary was a living presence, the inspirer, the guide, the teacher. Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and so many other youngsters did not look upon her as an abstract ideal or a simple object of cult and devotion, but as a living and active person who filled the house and made them feel and experience the love of God.

She was also felt to be a Mother: God's Mother" and ours too. She it is who gives us the joy of Christ and allows us to feel his tenderness and the efficacy of his help.

She is the Immaculate one: full of grace, totally available to God without any half measures, always on God's side. For this reason, she is for

young people a model of holiness and christian life lived fully and consistently. Devotion becomes imitation.

She is the helper: The Help of Christians in the great battle of the faith and of the building of God 's Kingdom. She is the protector and guide of the Church. For this reason, Don Bosco considers her the "Mother for difficult times", the support and stay of the faith and of the Church. She is therefore the model of fidelity in the service of the Church, called to a total commitment in the christian community.

- Some fundamental attitudes which seem to express a Marian spirituality, a life that draws its inspiration from Mary, would be:
 - *"Contemplation as an ability to enter deeply into events so as to discover in them, in the light of the Word, and accept with faith the mysterious fact of salvation. At the present day the world needs people able to read with hope and responsible commitment humanity's "Pilgrimage of grace".*
 - *Complete availability to the love and holiness of God, and to what he asks of us for the building of the Kingdom. It means a free, radical and continuous commitment to live the demands of the beatitudes in the poverty of our life which becomes a concrete collaboration for the salvation of our fellow men.*
 - *Service to men, to every man, lived in the awareness that he is "the place of God's abode". Our service becomes for him the revelation of this mysterious presence. It is a service which becomes a proclamation of the hope that Jesus Christ is for us.*
 - *Praise and gratitude for the wonders of grace that God works in our poverty. It means knowing that we are people of hope, because of the certainty that the life of man is in God's hands. Sorrow is not ignored but we are enabled to accept it responsibly and with hope precisely because of our absolute trust in God, which exceeds all human expectations.*
 - *Fidelity, which enables us to go ahead with courage in our own duties in the daily round, marked by toil and the suffering associated with lack of success. It is a fidelity which has its roots in the fidelity of God himself who never fails to honour his promises and gives to man the grace and courage of hope."*

■ Here are some **experiences** that can be lived:

- *Speak of Mary in a vital and meaningful way for young people at the present day.*
- *Analyse more deeply the gospel pages in which her words and attitudes are related*
- *Meditate again with the christian community on the presence and figure of Mary, in the light of situations which youngsters have to face today.*
- *Personalize the values of 'popular piety'. The latter is based on a gospel intuition, on life convictions, on practical attitudes, on devotional practices. There is certainly a need to look again at some of its expressions, but youngsters must be able to bring about in themselves a personal fusion between faith and culture in popular practice*
- *Deepen 'devotion' to Mary as loving admiration, cult and imitation, taking part in celebrations and restating her messages. Of particular relevance for the young are*
 - *places of Marian interest, where people gather around our Blessed Lady*
 - *her feasts, their global meaning and individual significance (Immaculate Conception, Help of Christians. etc.).*
 - *Outline a plan for christian living, taking its inspiration from Mary*

These six themes are not intended to follow each other: - in succession, but rather to mutually compenetrates. Each one places emphasis on some point which is expressed in the others: life, Christ, the beatitudes, the Church, vocation, Mary herself, are all points of reference for reflecting on and living in unity the whole of the christian experience.

3. THE PEDAGOGY OF COMPANIONSHIP

3.1 Steps and criteria

The educational option we have made determines our kind of intervention and leads us to set up group movements on the basis of pedagogical criteria. They are:

- the central place of the young person;
 - the unity of the subject, which has to be kept in mind in every intervention;
 - the convergence and consistency of the different interventions;
 - the fact that the formative process must be gradual and progressive.
 - It also suggests a methodology to be used at the various stages.
- The first is experience: learning from what has happened in the past. This implies:
 - a starting point: a group movement that sets out to be educational must begin from the questions of the youngsters, from their requirements and expectations, which are always related to the stage of development they have reached and the social and cultural conditions of their environment. One cannot speak of the Gospel without keeping these things in mind.
 - the dynamics of our educational and pastoral activity. If the message of Christ is to bring about a real transformation of young people, the lived daily reality must be
 - sincerely rethought with respect to its consistency,
 - compared with the word of God, which illumines every situation,
 - celebrated in personal and community prayer,
 - handed back again, to be lived in a new and different way.
 - a planning and decision making phase: this will incorporate the needs and expectations of the youngsters and what has been gleaned from past experience; it will be realized gradually and make its messages abundantly clear, even those which are of great and fascinating import, and push them to their logical conclusions.
 - The second stage is sharing: let the community speak. Sharing means building communion through the challenges that are thrown down by life.

The aim of a group movement within the group itself is

- to foster among the member's interpersonal relationships, and the circulation of questions, expectations and proposals of individual members who thus come to grips for the first time with concrete

problems and at the same time discover needs and resources in themselves;

- to draw up together a plan for service with many different manifestations;
 - as regards external reality the aim of the group is
 - to lay the foundations for an ongoing dialogue with other experiences met with in the life of a young person: his family, school and other educational environments in which he may find himself situated;
 - to open up the members to dialogue, comparisons and collaboration, by promoting meetings of different age groups, whose members have the same kind of values and use the same kind of language, so that they can feel the joy of being partners with a large number of others in proclaiming that today and always Jesus Christ is Lord;
 - to enrich itself by the input of other groups living in the same environment; starting from a common interest in a particular sector, or a special interest of the group itself, this can lead to a development in collaboration with the other groups of the other dimensions of the Christian and Salesian project;
 - to foster meetings at provincial level or that of the local Church;
 - to become inserted in the human community of the neighbourhood through its various institutions. While avoiding all exploitation the group
 - train its members to participate (sometimes as a group) in the problems of the people among whom they live, and whose joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments they share (cf. GC21, 141);
 - gives special attention to an adequate cultural formation, and to the communication of culture through the means now available to society.
-
- The third stage is that of discernment, understood as a process rather than any particular method: it means teaching the "see, judge, act" sequence, and can relate to the individual, the group or the situation in which it is inserted.

A truly educational group trains its members to analyse reality, make judgements about it, and intervene when appropriate

In practical terms this means providing help

- to observe a situation objectively: in its reality, its immediate and deeper causes, its distortions and the motives which pretend to justify it;
 - to take the responsibility for doing something about it. The group should not draw back from situations which dearly call for some 'intervention to change them;
 - to study and broaden frames of reference for the purpose of giving ii christian interpretation of social situations regarding individuals or groups;
 - to decide on objectives and draw up a plan by which the group can attain them, in harmony with the environment in which it is inserted and the prevailing siltation.
- The fourth stage is that of **action**: a service for remedying dehumanizing situations. Don Bosco **rendfred** his boys capable of being educators, like himself, of their companions and of contributing to the building of society and of the Kingdom of God. Activity of this kind, a stage in a circular process with others, does not depend only on the inspiration of the individual but also on the situation.

In practice in our own groups we come across the following forms of service on the part of youngsters

collaboration and generous availability within the group itself;

- a commitment as 'animators' of younger groups;
- active and responsible participation in educative programmes and settings, whether Salesian or not;
- intervention in situations of poverty and need in the neighbourhood;
- apostolic service in the Church;
- temporary participation in civil and missionary volunteer movements.

Animation

This is the name given to the style and manner of promoting the experience, sharing, discernment and action already referred to.

It includes some significant elements:

- the presence of an animator,
- the following of a flexible process.

a) The presence of an animator

The life of a group brings about an overall growth in an individual to the extent to which the service of animation is carried out with the authority of

- a witness who inspires commitment,
- a guide who points an unambiguous way,
- a person with a responsible discernment of the validity of the formative process,
- an apostle who proclaims the living Christ, a competent educator.
- The purpose of animation is to pass to the young people themselves the responsibility for the life of the group.

b) The following of a flexible process

The passage from a given situation to the attainment of final objectives must take account of the values to be inculcated, but still more of the situation of the individual. One and the same process can be achieved by many different paths, and many different paths or proposals can be reduced to unity to the extent that we keep clearly in mind the requirements of a formative process, which we can state as follows:

- the presentation at every stage of the fundamental and essential aims of human and christian growth;
- the following of the criterion of a little at a time, restating the whole message in the manner and forms best adapted to the various age groups, and to the spiritual and cultural state of those you are dealing with the harmonizing in an educative manner of the widening of human experience, the discovery of what it means to be a christian, and the expression of the faith. The method combines these three elements in circular fashion, so that any one of them recalls the others and makes them grow, and so produces a rich personal unity which is clearly recognizable as christian;

- being open at the end of each phase to finding results different from those you expected, and therefore being ready to modify subsequent steps according to the rate of maturing of the members of the group;
- being always on hand, because at every moment there may be need for verification, conversion and growth on the part of someone

4. ORGANIZATIONAL INDICATIONS

Every group movement has need of organization if it is not to be just a flash in the pan, or remain isolated from others.

This tends to ensure the collecting and deeper examination of positive experiences, a widening of the enterprise in terms of space and time, and the taking up of aspects which a single group cannot develop. The Salesian group movement therefore needs an organization.

4.1. The options already referred to, i.e. all young people, the group, the educative plan, the method of animation, call for forms of organization which will obey the following criteria:

- **Plurality of levels:** it may well be that included in our movement will be individuals and groups who are at very different levels of faith, interest and formation; but who want nevertheless to follow a plan of human and christian maturing.
- **Different** kinds of group: in some places for instance, there are large scale 'Boys Clubs', sometimes with a civil statute conferring recognition by the State, which youngsters join solely because they know they can find there the answer to their sporting or recreational desires; and there are other groups which youngsters join for specifically formative or apostolic purposes.
- **The existence of a unifying bond:** the different levels and the different kinds of group become united through
 - the common spirituality expressed in progressive programmes;
 - constant communication between the animators who are responsible for the growth activity;
 - the formation of youth leaders;
 - meetings for promoting common action and understandings.
- **An exchange mobility** between different levels and different kinds of group in concentric circles fashion: from the more advanced

groups come animators for those at lower levels, whilst the latter very often provide the youngsters who, as they mature, want to join groups at a more explicitly formative and apostolic level.

- **Attention to the differences between age groups:** experience already gained and the prospects for the immediate future make it abundantly clear that what has been suggested earlier needs to be implemented in different ways for the three different levels: boys, adolescents and young men.

4.2 As far as organization in terms of 'space' is concerned, this needs to be thought about along the following lines:

At local level: The Group Movement is the concrete expression of the coming together of primary groups and associations which bring youngsters according to their centres of interest to an awareness of belonging to that original expression of vitality in the Church which is the charism of Don Bosco. This takes place within a growing sharing of a common Salesian spirituality which does good both to the youngster who knows no more about it than the sense of 'belonging', as well as to older boys and young men who manage to become 'educators' of their peers. The community ensures that the animating nucleus of the movement is an expression of the meeting of the activities of the different local groups and is closely linked to other ecclesial realities

At provincial level: the province is the promotional centre of any Salesian Youth Movement. Obedient to the law of incarnation, they take their inspiration from a common ideal matrix, rethink it and then express it in a way that meets the local situation. The province sees to it that

- the Movement is a reality inserted in the context of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan;
- it has a certain minimum internal linkage to ensure adequate communication;
- it participates in the pastoral organisms of the Church;
- there are courses for the preparation of animators, who form the heart of the Movement itself and give it life;
- meetings of whole groups do not exclude possibilities for personal faith experiences;

- the formative process is a gradual one and adapted to a gradual and suitable integral maturing of the youngsters until they are able to make a commitment of themselves in the Church and society

At regional or national level: to support the provincial organization which is the fundamental one, national offices might be set up for

- the production of support material,
- the drawing up of formative programmes for different age groups,
- providing opportunities for meetings for assessment purposes, etc.

At world level: it is possible to elaborate a general set-up or type of organization deriving from the convergence of the essential lines of Salesian group movements as they appear around the world, and to organize periodic meetings, especially for the exchange of material and experiences. The Youth Pastoral Department accepts the task of being the point of convergence and the clearing to use at the level of the Congregation and the Salesian Family for aids which will give practical expression to the planning outlines put forward in this document. The Department also accepts responsibility, which it shares with national centres, for stimulating reflection, guiding the drawing up of formative programmes, extending the group movement along Salesian lines, and promoting meetings of animators at inter-provincial and inter-regional level for opportune comparisons and ongoing verification and assessment.

Third Part

LINES OF ACTION

In this third part we shall take up some of the points already dealt with earlier, and present some selected plans to encourage provinces and local communities to promote group movements

1. CREATE A SOLID SENSITIVITY IN THE MATTER AMONG THE SALESIANS THEMSELVES

Such a sensitivity should be at one and the same time both educative and group oriented: able to appreciate the group experience, and make use of the opportunities it offers for education.

- The group is not an activity
 - for keeping youngsters occupied in their spare time,
 - to be provided only to the extent that the youngsters want it,
 - which serves as an easy means for putting values across.

It is rather

- an educative experience with original contributions, which should be fostered and developed to the full;
- an experience which is capable of realization in our own settings only if it is properly understood in all its motivations

It should not be considered as something opposed to the major structures like schools and oratories, nor regarded as something secondary to them. Nor is it something merely complementary to them, even though in some cases it may turn out that way. The GC21 reminds us that the animation of a network of groups or group movements can be a form of 'new presence' (cf. GC21, 158).

- The provinces will be able to promote this new line:
 - by including in their educational plan a chapter on their own plan for group activity;
 - by stating and maintaining a community line of action in this regard;
 - by studying the theme and how it can be put into effect with the local councils in the individual communities;
 - by providing information on the educational and pastoral aspects of this experience;

- by helping the communities to assimilate its positive values and overcome any obstacles that may arise.

2. PREPARE THE ANIMATORS

- Animation: are the driving force behind every movement in the Church and the secret of the movement's vitality and expansion.
- The practical influence they have is directly proportional to the following five elements:
 - their spiritual and apostolic convictions;
 - their number, which should be sufficient as regards the extent of the movement;
 - their educational and pastoral qualifications;
 - their permanence: excessive, or even frequent change militates against the expansion and consolidation of the movement;
 - their convergence and coordination.
- The principal aspects of their work are:
 - to encourage the formation of groups, following a certain model; to use their competence and experience to overcome any crises that arise within the group, and to foster personal relationships among the members;
 - to act as middlemen between the Salesian Pastoral and Educational Plan and the individual groups;
 - to make use of opportune moments for seeking with the member's openings to new perspectives of reflection and activity;
 - to suggest to the member's criteria and points for deeper analysis, so that they make a better assessment of their proposals and desires;
 - to foster communication between groups, so that they become more open to each other;
 - to keep in contact pastorally with the individual members so as to help them with their personal problems on their path to spiritual maturity;
 - to keep constantly before the group, the figure of Christ and his outlook, on the problems and proposals the group bring forward; to arrange matters so that the group can manage their own affairs as far as possible.

- To bring about a reawakening or consolidation of the group experience, the preparation of animators in greater numbers and the possibility of greater incidence, becomes
 - a necessary preliminary step and also
 - a task to be carried out in parallel with the development of the movement itself.

3. DRAW UP FORMATION PROGRAMMES AT PROVINCIAL OR REGIONAL LEVEL

- The proclamation of a spirituality has no effect unless it be translated into concrete objectives and possible experiences in harmony with the different phases of the youngster's development. These are what constitute the path the youngster has to follow. It is the chief indication for the maturing of the individual within the group and a proof of the educative ability of the animators
- The path or itinerary is based on the options we have made on the basis of our experience with groups. It must aim at a balance
 - between interior conviction and outward commitments,
 - between personal maturity and community capability,
 - between primary relationships and convergent objectives,
 - between religious reflection and open ness to culture.

And all this must be offered not only in 'ideal' terms, but in a way that can be assimilate d by the individual members. It is therefore the work of direct animators, youth experts and those in authority, coordinated by the relevant organisms.

- The itinerary must be flanked by adequate and specific aids. The production and exchange of such things within a province or between one province and others, as well as freeing animators and experts from the continual task of thinking up something new, will permit a more profitable exchange of ideas in the quest for link age and common lines of activity.

4. LINK TOGETHER AT PROVINCIAL LEVEL THE GROUPS ALREADY EXISTING AND THOSE WHICH WILL COME INTO BEING IN THE FUTURE

- The call for a link between the groups and the desire to overcome any fragmentation should find its first and most dynamic point of reference in the local community and, on a wider scale, in the animating group of the province.
- The principal functions of such a linkage are:
 - to open the members to a wider and richer experience of Church;
 - to give them the opportunity of comparison with other, and so widen their interests and vision of reality;
 - to facilitate the formation of Salesian animators and young people by the exchange and study of different experiences;
 - to encourage participation in activities on a larger scale;
 - to promote new ideas and better and more unified plans for formation, which will help to ensure continuity in the movement;
 - to spread the movement by bringing it to the knowledge of more people;
 - to create in all the groups, the sense of belonging to a single youth movement.
- The linkage, of which the local group remains the protagonist, is brought about by
 - communication between the animators;
 - a study in common of the spirituality or the path to maturity which is proposed;
 - the formation of youth leaders through initiatives designed particularly for them;
 - opportunities for meetings, exchanges and common work among the members of different groups.
- Other ways and means can be thought up, as also linkages on a still wider scale, e.g. regional. Those that have been mentioned are within

the capacity of single provinces and represent the first steps that need to be taken.

5. ETHINK THE WHOLE GAMUT OF GROUP EXPERIENCE AS THE MEMBERS INCREASE IN AGE

In the past Salesian experience with youth groups has certainly shown them to be valid and interesting, especially in the preadolescent and adolescent phases. But it is unthinkable that such activity should extend only as far as the 14-17 age group or a little beyond.

We are sent to young people. Now

- important decisions concerning life choices mature at the present day at a much later age than they did in the past;
- the 'educational' period of a young person has therefore become much longer, and this also because of the demands of preparation for the professions;
- the most interesting phenomena of ecclesial experience and cultural maturing take place in the period between 18 and 25 years;
- Salesians are in fact working with young people in this age range (18-25) in parishes, hostels for university students, and youth centres.

The group movement therefore needs to be thought out at three levels: boys, adolescents and young men, with differences in content, experiences and method for each group.

6. BE AWAKE TO THE NEW FORMS OF GROUP MOVEMENT

This is not just an example of the widespread mania for what is new and different, but of due attention to the signs of the times, especially in the sector of youth movements.

We quote two typical experiences, which are of particular general interest at the present day and to which young people are especially sensitive: voluntary service movements and conscientious objectors.

Voluntary service, if educational in character and not just an exploitation of young people or a time filler while they wait for a steady job, contains within itself an interesting contribution to a life plan, in which the values for freely

given service and participation are particularly close to those of the Gospel. Among other things the voluntary service movement can be a natural channel to follow at the end of the formative itinerary in the group itself.

Conscientious objection, understood more in the sense of a christian option for peace and the service of others rather than as a method of dodging military service, is already present as a characteristic in some group movements. When in fact the interests of the objectors lie in the area of education and development, our communities can offer them space and an atmosphere in which they can mature

7. FIND SOLUTIONS TO SOME PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

Along the path we have been following, some problems have been mentioned to which we should suggest solutions.

- The first concerns the plurality of group movements and the possibility of offering intensive formation programmes. There are groups which members join because of their own spontaneous interests or because of some facilities of which they want to make use.

And there are other groups which attract members who have the personal and explicit desire for a means of formation and for apostolic outlets.

The fusion of these two levels of interest and membership into a single movement has seemed to some people the best way of eliminating elitism and making realistic our option for 'all young people'. On the other hand, there are those who see such fusion as an obstacle to the development of formative programmes for those who are in the process of maturing their faith choices, and an impediment to an effective linkage between apostolically committed groups. Such linkage needs a common objective and a common 'language'.

And so in the different provinces two organizational models can be found:

- a single Salesian youth movement with
 - different levels,
 - different kinds of organization according to the different interests,
 - a unified nucleus of animators;

- different movements with their respective organizations according to their different programmes and interests:
 - movements of an apostolic kind,
 - associations for wider and more general purposes.
- Linked with this problem is another which concerns the relationship between apostolically committed groups and the institutionalized group movements demanded in some cases by civil legislation: -it is impossible to include both in a single plan, because the reasons for their existence are so diverse.

It is necessary nevertheless to reflect on "these different realities so that one does not compromise the other, and study what forms of linkage may be possible in the light of the needs of the neighbourhood and the characteristics of the young people themselves.

- A third practical point concerns the relationship between the Salesian Youth Movement, understood as an effective plurality of groups, and other groups linked with other ecclesial movements operating in the same area.

Because of the requirements of the local Churches, because of the due attention that must be given to needs appearing in a large neighbourhood, and because of the need to see how the different initiatives complement each other in a positive manner, the Salesian Youth Movement does not put itself forward as something exclusive, even in Salesian settings, but lives its harmony with other groups which respond to the interests of youngsters and older youths.

All of them are asked

- to participate in communion and with shared responsibility in building up the neighbourhood, and not to close themselves in or shut themselves off from others;
- to develop an educational programme for all young people, without trying to attract certain categories on a selective basis;
- to get involved with whatever other groups work out together at the level of the neighbourhood, contributing to it the specific richness of their own plan.

- A fourth point concerns the simultaneous presence of both boys and girls, which is a frequent phenomenon in youth groups. Here one must proceed on the basis of reflex criteria, keeping in mind that
 - at certain levels separate homogeneous groups of boys and of girls may be more desirable;
 - experience suggests that there should be specifically distinct groups when their scope is specifically that of vocational guidance;
 - in every case, while preserving a proper proportion and giving due attention to the style of the initiative, it should be kept in mind that our pastoral service is directed to boys and young men" (R 3). Girls are more available than boys for a certain kind of religious and social formational programme and this may lead to the girls being numerically in the majority;
 - Always there should be present a formative intention and criterion. Coeducation is not at all the same thing as putting boys and girls together. It implies concrete educational objectives for adolescents and young adults and a meaningful presence of both men and women educators;
 - a combined pastoral plan of action with the FMA is necessary and enriching: on the basis of such a plan meetings and common activities are possible between the different groups with due separation at certain times

8. THE NATURAL OUTLET: THE SALESIAN FAMILY

The group is simultaneously an educational instrument and a place for a faith experience. The young person is going to remain in only for a time - this is explicitly understood. Group members are "birds of passage", because the groups belong to the period of youth and their purpose is education. The group movement must therefore have in mind what it is leading to, because this will be the measure of its efficacy.

The movement accompanies the members from the stage of preadolescence through their youthful development and until they have become inserted into the Church and society.

Salesian youth experience must therefore end up:

- in a choice of the manner of participation in the life of society, rendering the young person fit to take on moral, social and professional responsibilities, cooperating with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity (C 33);
- in insertion into the ecclesial community, living the vocation which the formative process has helped him to identify and accept;
- in a firm choice of Salesian spirituality with the maturing of a possible "lay, consecrated or priestly vocation for the benefit of the whole Church and of the Salesian Family" (C 28).

This last preference

- is already included in the whole project of spirituality;
- is underlined in the process of orientation and vocational choice;
- but can be further emphasized by the linkage of the Salesian Youth Movement with the Salesian Family and the presence of the latter in the former.

The Movement can become the point of convergence of the pastoral service of the Salesian Family. In its plurality of initiatives and lawful autonomy in planning, it offers the effective possibility of the joining of forces between the variety of initiatives and of groups at moments of unity which are ideal (here the spirituality comes in) and real (in the field of meetings and congresses)-, which it brings to maturity first in small nuclei and then in ever wider circles the sense of belonging to the ecclesial community and to the Salesian Family

CONCLUSION

At the end of all the indications we have given it is possible that a question will arise is not all this quest, for past oral convergence and planning in the Congregation not a prelude to the kind of hierarchical group structure which is decried at the present day by the experience of history?

A careful reading of this document will reveal two elements which lay such a fear to rest

- Unity comes from the ideas which provide inspiration for it all, from our commitment to offer to our young people and to our community's valid form at ion al and group proposals which find their motivation in our pastoral and educational principles, their content in Salesian spirituality, and in our formational plans their translation in to practice.

The very youth movement at which we aim should not be seen as a massive structure, but as a youth ' environment ' where the spirit of Don Bosco continues to operate, with its ability to reach out to every last one and at the same time form little (who are at the same time great} saints.

- The translation in to daily practice of the youth movement is founded on a more authentic creativity and the ability to adapt itself to the requirements of any and every context. The realization of the projects expressed in formative plans is in fact left to regional centres through a convergent process to them is entrusted the task of dividing up and spreading the work which the provinces welcome, adapt and incorporate in their Salesian Pastoral and Educational Plan. Finally, the local community is the place of its incarnation in ways in which only the same local educational community can in the last analysis decide. It is precisely there, where the scale of mediation has begun to be realized, that the fruits of a resurgent group movement are visible.

In the face of inevitable doubts and problems it must be emphasized what great hopes attach to the relaunching of the group movement; without creating any illusions about a project which is always valid, from this endeavour to move in accordance with well discussed and

expressed options and criteria will derive a deeper sense of continuity and hence also of pastoral fertility.

May Mary Help of Christians sustain us as we propose to young people once again, with the optimism of Don Bosco, the group experience and movement as a place of growth even to the point of sanctity.

INTERPROVINCIAL CENTRES FOR LIAISON PURPOSES

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Centro Nacional Salesiano de Pastoral Juvenil, Madrid. Consulta de Pastoral Juvenil, Región del Plata, Buenos Aires. Consulta de Pastoral J uve1.; J, Sao Paulo.

National Delegate for Youth Pastoral, Bangalore

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APPENDIX

Some examples of themes around which different groups have built up their programmes of youth spirituality. They are taken from documents issued by the groups indicated.

Note that not all the groups use the term 'spirituality'. Some use the term 'programme of life' or 'programme of christian formation' or some similar phrase, which they consider more concrete and appropriate

1 A MANIFESTO FOR SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

Italy - CSPG - 1982

- **LIFE** as the place in which one experiences God.
- Salesian **PRAYER**.
- A lifestyle which takes its inspiration from **MARY**.
- Salesian style of **COMMUNITY**: "Come and see" (**CHURCH**).
- We are a **FESTIVE** people.
- Life as **VOCATION**.

2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

F.M.A. - 1982

- Meet God in the round of **DAILY LIFE**.
- Live the daily **COMMITMENT** in a **FESTIVE** manner.
- Be **CHURCH** for the **KINGDOM**.
- Celebrate salvation in the **EUCCHARIST** and in **PENANCE**.
- Follow the demanding path of **MARY**.

3 TRANSLATED INTO PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Formation plan for boys, prepared by the National Centre of Friends of Dominic Savio - Italy - 1981

- **JOY and optimism**.
- Attention to and **COMMITMENT** for one's neighbour
- Central importance of meeting with **CHRIST** (Eucharist Reconciliation).
- **MARY** Mother and model of service and availability.
- Communion with the **CHURCH**.

4 OUTLINES OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE-PLAN ACCORDING TO THE SALESIAN SPIRIT

Drawn up at a meeting in Spain - 1984

- Take **LIFE SERIOUSLY** (know it, welcome it as a gift, live it sensibly. the God of life).
- **OPT FOR LIFE** (develop it, transform it, live it to the full eternal life; the living God).
- Live **LIFE TOGETHER** (society, group, christian community, Church ... God participates in life and shares it).
- **CELEBRATE LIFE.** (festive joy, Word, prayer, sacraments · Life in God and with God).
- **GIVE LIFE** (service, commitment, apostolate, fertile love, vocation).
- Live it **AS MARY DID** (woman, first christian, collaborator; God who has done great things in me).

5 A GROWTH PLAN FOR THE YOUNG

ACCORDING TO THE SALESIAN CONSTITUTIONS (C32-37)

- **LIFE** accepted and developed under all its aspects.
- Knowledge of **CHRIST**, the model of the new man.
- **MARY**, model of faith, help and hope.
- The sacramental experience: **EUCCHARIST and PENANCE**,
- Insertion in the **ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY**.
- **VOCATIONAL** guidance.

6 A STYLE OF LIFE FOR SALESIAN YOUTH COMMUNITIES

Chile - 1985

- We serve the Lord with **JOY**
- We try to **LIVE** in such a way that others feel they are loved.
- We live in **WORK and TEMPERANCE**.
- We have an oratorian heart animated by "**DAMIHI ANIMAS**".
- With **MARY** we are and make **CHURCH**.
- In this way we proclaim the **BEATITUDES** as a pathway for the young

7 VALUES OF THE SALESIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT FOR THE PRESENT DAY

Uruguay - 1978

- Live **LIFE** as a response to the call of the **FATHER**.
- Experience of friendship with **CHRIST** and among **OURSELVES**.
- Presence of the Holy Spirit who gives guidance and strength.
- Quest of true **BRITTYHERLY LIVE** and **FAMILY SPIRIT**.
- Presence of **MARY** as Mother and Teacher.

8 SALESIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT

Somos Don Bosco que camina " - Colombia 1978 and 1983

- Central point of reference: seek the fullness of youthful **LIFE** in the clear and decisive option for the risen **CHRIST**, in the **SALESIAN STYLE**, with **APOSTOLIC** applications in one's own environment.

Further explanations:

- We are called to **HOLINESS**.
- We make of our **LIFE IN COMMUNITY** a hymn of praise, a feast, a commitment.
- We are and we feel ourselves to be **CHURCH**.
- Our faith option quires us to **GIVE OURSELVES TO THE POOR** to promote their emancipation through the assumption of gospel values.
- We find in **MARY** the example for our life.
- We follow the example and the way of life traced out by Don Bosco and those who sanctified themselves with him (development of Salesian style).

9 NUCLEI FOR THE GENERATION OF AN ORGANIC FRAMEWORK OF SPIRITUALITY

Agreed on at a meeting of animation of Latin America - Cumbaya 1985

- **CHRIST** discovered, welcomed and lived in the evangelizing community; and followed through commitment to some chosen practical work for the poor.
- The balanced maturing of the personal, social and historical **CONSCIENCE**.
- Commitment in the **CHURCH** for the construction of the **KINGDOM**.
- The **BEATITUDES**, as an attitude and programme.

10 OUTLINES FOR A SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF LATIN AMERICA

Cumbayi, 1985 (complimentary to no. 9 above)

- A LIBERATORIN spirituality: centred on JESUS who was born, died and rose again, who, inspires and sustains a "type of man" and a "praxis".
- A PASCHAL spirituality: Love for life: the hope and to produce new initiatives in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ.
- A UNIFYING spirituality: which takes in and unifies ALL DIMENSIONS, including the social and political ones; which does not separate being a christian frail, acting like one; which overcomes dualisms (between immanence and transcendence, faith and history, person and structure, contemplation and action).
- A spirituality which calls for COMMITMENT and abhors evasion and self-interest; which does not detach relationship with God from commitment to man; which makes of life a VOCATION of service.
- A COMMUNITY spirituality: which "hears the cry of the poor" and interprets the "signs' of the times" TOGETHER with others, and with them offers a valid response according to the Spirit who unites us.
- A LAY spirituality: which leads to an AWARENESS of the world, of history, of the salvific value of temporal realities.
- A MARIAN spirituality: in harmony with the Marian faith of the people, which rectifies distorted ideas about women, about wives, about mothers; receptive and available (Magnificent); contemplative and believing.
- An ESCHATOWGICAL spirituality: which induces trust in the future, helps to overcome fatalism, inculcates a right sense of Providence in history, and is able to assess historical projects in relationship to one other.

11 THE SALESIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT

La Plata - 1983

- We feel the need to come together in GROUPS.
- We form CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES.
- We insert ourselves in the local, Latin American and universal CHURCH.
- We bind ourselves to the Salesian Family with the SPIRIT OF DON BOSCO.
- We commit ourselves to being APOSTLES among young people.
- We bring our VOCATION to maturity as a lifelong self-donation.