



**TOWARDS A NEW PHASE  
IN SALESIAN YOUTH PASTORAL WORK**



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**DEPARTMENT FOR THE YOUTH APOSTOLATE - ROME**

## **NOTE**

The following pages are only meant to serve as a help to understand the development of youth pastoral work in the Congregation over the last 25 years, taking into account the evolution of the youth world and the efforts of the Church and in view of the new orientations that will be given by the 23<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter.

The presentation given here is deliberately synthetic. It does not pretend to cover every positive and negative aspect of Salesian youth pastoral work. Instead, it concentrates on some "crunch points."

The choice of these "crunch points" is not arbitrary. It is the fruit of a reflection on the documents of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> General Chapters, a re-reading of the reports on the state of the Congregation presented by the Rector-Major to the General Chapters, a synthesis of the various partial studies conducted by the Department for the Youth Apostolate in the last ten years and an examination of the several reports made by the Regions during the Team Visits.

There is a preoccupation underlying these pages and it is this: to make the new proposals concerning education to the faith part and parcel of the organic vision and operative framework of the Salesian apostolate that has been built up with considerable effort in recent years.

With this end in view, these considerations are offered to all those who are responsible for drawing up and applying the deliberations of GC 23.

Fr. John E. Vecchi  
General Councillor  
for the Youth Apostolate

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## **PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATION**

### A NEW AREA OF PASTORAL WORK IN THE CHURCH

In recent years there has emerged in the Church a new field of work, having its own characteristics and increasing in importance day by day, that is, the pastoral work for youth. Naturally, we Salesians are interested in it because of our charism. It seems appropriate therefore, to study the contributory causes and ensuing demands of this new phenomenon.

Youth pastoral work is not simply an updated and extended version of the previous religious care of children. Nor is it an adaptation to the young of the pastoral ministry to adults. It is instead the Church's response to a recent social and cultural phenomenon that in many respects is remarkably fluid and goes under the name of the "youth problem". The youth problem is the outcome of a number of factors: the lengthening of the period of preparation to take up social and professional responsibilities; the numerical increase of the group of young adults (between the ages of 17 and 27); the waiting period for a job and social involvement and the collective pain that results therefrom; and the difficulties experienced by existing institutions in helping the young solve their problems and complete their education.

The youth problem is clearly seen in the different attitudes assumed by the young towards society: aloofness, apathy, resignation, opposition, marginalization, lawlessness and adjustment (which results in deviance and delinquency)

It is called a "problem" because it poses questions to society, such as: what does society intend to transmit to the young and what are the measures it counts on to succeed in this endeavour? How does it plan to harness the vitality of the young generations and engage them in its historical development? And what is this historical development anyway?

The youth problem affects the Church as well. Because of her mission, the Church is concerned about communicating the faith and forming faith-communities. Now, these processes are closely connected with the human experience of youth as individuals and as a group. Where therefore this experience is not taken into account, the Church, while continuing her pastoral work of "initiating" children, attempts to care for youth within the framework of the pastoral care for adults.

The youth problem is a recent phenomenon. Together with the worker problem that preceded it and the feminine question that followed it, it has affected all societies in this century; but it has been felt with greater urgency and analysed with better tools in the more advanced societies. In fact, the evolution of the youth problem has been studied with the help of a socio-cultural analysis that was devised in the 1950's but methodologically perfected only in the last few years. Such an analysis represents a new approach, and therefore a new understanding of the youth reality, quite different from a description of the individual's evolutionary growth, to which we were accustomed in our work of education and different too from an idealistic view of the young possessing authenticity, a desire for truth, an openness to whatever is new, a readiness for change a description we often come across in Church writings and documents.

Instead, the kind of analysis we are talking about tries to show where the youth stand within the system of family, socio-cultural and politico-economic relationships. It examines the possibilities open to them in life, the values offered by their environment and their corresponding reactions. It also pays attention to their religious feelings, their attitude towards the practice of the Christian religion they have been brought up with, the idea they have of the Church, the stand they take on ethical questions and the influence of the religious element in the formation of their identity and quest for meaning.

It is precisely from a confrontation between the aims of pastoral activity viz to arouse faith and bring about conversion to form believing communities and to leaven the world with the Gospel and the actual situation of the young that youth pastoral work takes its rise as an "original" area of reflection and activity, one that cannot be deduced from the pastoral care of adults or of children.

To go deeper into this basic issue, we shall glance at the various stages of development of the youth problem and then consider the corresponding pastoral response made by the Church.

## THE YOUTH PROBLEM

### 1. Prior to the youth problem

Factors that make for social change, and therefore modify the youth condition among other things, have never been wanting in the course of human history. But the fact is that they began coming thick and fast in the second half of the last century and at the start of the present one. It is enough to consider how the family progressively evolved into its "modern" forms, how the school became the principal means of socialization and how the wide diffusion of the printed word made it a social reality addressed to the majority of the people and not to a select group of professionals. However, these phenomena affected only some sections of the population, while others remained untouched. In the case of youth, they did not give rise to a distinct social entity in mentality and in aspirations.

At the close of the last century and in the first quarter of the present one, the period of adolescence was the time for education in the family and - for a good number - also in the school. It was a phase of transition to concrete adult responsibilities in the form of a job, marriage and full involvement in social life. The idea of prolonging this period was rejected outright on the grounds that it would expose young people to moral aberrations.

Youth therefore did not emerge as an active subject in society, both because of their limited number and because of the control exercised over them by a society that had solid ethical and juridical frames of reference which were commonly held. The processes and the agents of socialization (which means an insertion in society by assuming its norms and the reasons for them) were few but efficacious, viz the family, the school, the social environment and in those countries in which the Church enjoyed public status, also the parish.

The picture did not change with the spread of primary schooling and the growth of the middle school. Already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since the existing scholastic institutions were not able to take care of the adolescents beyond a certain amount of time, there arose educational associations. These were groups that were set up for adolescents and directed by adults. In the course of time the adults came to be substituted in their traditional role of guides by the bigger youth. The guide would take part in the recreation of the youngsters in order to offer them the values that had not been communicated in the classroom or from the pulpit. Leisure time and socializing outside of the traditional structures were elements that began to develop later.

Between 1920 and 1940 a number of young people took part in revolutionary campaigns and social agitations. They were called up by their regimes and slotted into "organizations" which had political and ideological aims. The school for its part continued to lay a strong emphasis on patriotism and moral commitment. The slotting into structures in order to foist an adult role on the young was a typical trait of totalitarian regimes, but it was also found in the youth organizations of democratic nations. And so, hemmed in by associations of this type on the one hand, and by a type of school on the other that was severe and rigorous, organized in classes according to age (as a result of which the solidarity within the institution was strengthened and the links between different levels of schooling weakened, especially that between high school and university, the youth of the upper classes gradually lost their capacity for initiatives in common, while the youth who could not go to school either went in search of a job or made up a work-force that was exploited and badly paid.

In Western Europe, the United States and Japan, the years from 1945 to 1960 were a time of rebuilding, industrialization, "the economic miracle," full employment, the growth of middle and high schools, the European Common Market, television, the first experiments in space travel, and a sustained social front at in that led to a more just society.

Now that the acute phase of the cold war was over, the attempts to "slot" the young failed. There arose a widespread reaction of tiredness in the face of the Manicheism prevalent in opposing ideological positions. There grew up a "peace-loving" generation that sought to better its own private life and saw work (the

job) not from the "ethical and social" point of view but from the "positivistic" angle, viz as a means to attain economic well-being. Youth quickly assimilated models of adult behaviour and settled down to a life of security and comfort. Three things became important to them in life: marriage, a job and a car.

In the meanwhile, as the proportion of young people in society increased, this was one among several other factors - youth became a topic deserving of attention. In Eastern Europe, Marxism dominated the scene, exercising a rigid control over the processes of education, socialization and participation. Whatever may have been the reactions of individuals or of groups, it was this control which prevented any kind of evolution of the youth situation during the twenty years precisely that saw rapid changes sweeping across the rest of Europe.

There was no uniform pattern of evolution in the countries belonging to the Southern hemisphere. In general, it proceeded at a different pace, giving rise to an economic gap which is known today as the North-South problem. The emancipation from colonial rule in several countries, the lack of appropriate social and economic transformation in others, the high birth-rate and a dependence on political and financial centres elsewhere in the world all these various factors contributed to the creation of two different phenomena in the youth field: a minority of young people that had access to prosperity, education and high-level qualification, and a majority that hardly reached the high-school level of education in fact many of them fared so badly even in primary school as to give it up altogether. The first group was usually chosen when it came to occupying roles in society and in business; the second instead, because of the general economic deterioration, came to enjoy less and less opportunities and so fell outside the process of socialization, becoming part of a marginalized mass of young people. The youth of this second category entered the labour market much too early, took up menial jobs and were financially exploited.

## **2. The youth phenomenon of the 1960's**

Thus, we came to the 1960's, which turned out to be a decade of confrontation, culminating in the events of 1968. The phenomenon began in the democratic countries of the West, particularly in some famous scientific and research institutions. But, the repercussions were felt in other countries as well, including those of the Third World and of Eastern Europe.

It all started in 1962 and assisted by the movements of 1964 and 1967, became general by 1968. It was a matter of a decade, therefore and not just a single year. Without going into the geographical and chronological train of events, we think it useful to present here the various traits that characterized the youth phenomenon at the close of this decade.

On the world scene there had emerged certain general problems that helped create a common cause: under development, Third World dependence, the oppression of the poor and the link between poverty and affluence, wars for world domination (think of Vietnam), racial discrimination (think of Martin Luther King) and the subservience of educational and cultural institutions to economic and military powers.

This was the time when commitment to politics and collective action was exalted, the echo of which was found in the Latin American continent in the form of liberation movements and a desire to make the people the chief protagonist of social change.

It was at this juncture that youth emerged for the first time as a solidly united entity with certain common points of view. And the worldwide means of social communication carried. The ferment of ideas to distant and culturally different lands. However, the theory of contagion alone does not suffice to explain the oneness of mind among youth everywhere. A world consciousness was being formed. It was easy under the circumstances to presuppose the existence of a new and revolutionary class among the young. There was a tendency that clearly favoured the banding together of and solidarity among, equals to the exclusion of dialogue and confrontation between generations. The very meaningfulness of communication between the generations was sometimes denied. As one slogan put it, "Do not trust anyone who is above thirty years of age."



This was the time of global contestation and the glorification of revolutionary change, an era of idealism and utopia, which emerged also in the form of terrorism, counter culture. The difficulty of translating dreams into reality was clearly apparent, while the tirades against authority remain quite generic.

Within the youth movement itself, there were no doubt protests against authoritarianism in its various forms end against the reproduction of the prevailing systems; but there was also a strong demand for a direct participation in power structures, for the building up of a society without repression and exploitation, for a different quality of life, for a maximum development of one's potential and for the right to innovation and change. All this shows that, notwithstanding certain ambiguities, there was a collective consciousness and a will to face up to and resolve problems together.

### **3. The year 1977: newness and continuity**

The second half of the 1970's is seen by some as the funeral of '68. For others instead the deepening of the crisis in the economic, social, political and cultural fields failed to offer youth secure points of reference for their values and so ended up by converting the positive elements themselves into their opposites. Accordingly, there began to spread a "permissiveness" in society which was but a mask and a caricature of personal liberty; a "narcissism" which was a fake search for identity; an "indifference" which was a colourless outgrowth of tolerance; and a "pragmatism" which was a degeneration of the need for reasonableness in the face of idealism.

In the meanwhile, the social problems at the national and international levels went out of hand. There arose the energy crisis, the tension between East and West, the arms race, the gap between North and South the question of morality and the free pursuit of desires.

The youth world began to disintegrate: subjective feelings and day-to-day happenings were preferred to scientific data and the commitment to bring about long-term change. The young began to assume an attitude of radical freedom much more easily: "live as if time never existed and enjoy as if there were no limits." They became disposed to take up jobs that were not permanent, provided they had a chance to perform activities they did not find alienating. They believed in "celebrating together" rather than enjoying in debates or political gestures. They became critical of trade unions. "Let us take our life in our own hands" became the slogan of the new culture that displayed itself in the quest for a satisfying job, a house, an adequate formation and free time. Existential needs played a greater role than political tensions and demands, also because of the strong and conscious presence of the female component which had remained subordinate in the movement of the 1960's.

This phase was decidedly characterized by its few propositions and plans; it was also more "Provincial" in outlook rather than international. It gave scope to the individual to express himself freely and belong to a group. Many began to wonder if these young people would chase after post-material values, since they seemed to show a regressive movement towards possessive attitudes: physical security, economic prosperity.

And so, because of these dominant values, it was not possible to idealize youth anymore as the spontaneous embodiment of more authentic needs or of the tendency to innovate.

Private, withdrawn and lacking a progressive mentality these were the terms used to describe the general tendency among the young, without by this pretending to characterize every individual or group this way.

### **4. Towards the 1990's**

The rest is nearer to us. The youth problem has undergone successive developments and changes, diversifying according to the various contexts. In our education and pastoral work, we make use of certain expressions today to interpret and illustrate the novelty of the situation.

In the first place, we speak of "fragmentation." Gone is the idea of a "condition" or a "class" or a "single and solid social entity," one that embodies the common aspirations of a youth culture or sub-culture. The mass of youth today comes divided-socially and in their personal subjective consciousness. There are to be found many different agglomerations of young people, each with its own set of problems, aspirations,

ideals and situations. This forestalls any move to come up with a single interpretation or a global approach, for it is the very identity of youth as a group that is missing.

Then, we also speak of "marginalization." From a situation in which youth wanted to have a say in determining cultural and socio-political patterns, we have now reached a point where youth find themselves on the margins of society, with fewer possibilities and capacities for participation because of their late entry into the world of work and their voluntary estrangement from public life. Marginalization brings several consequences in its train, both in the personal consciousness of individuals and in the social phenomena that are much discussed. Youth at the present time appears more as a reflection of the crises and ills of global society than as a dynamic force for change.

Yet another expression that tries to encapsulate the problems and the behaviour of young people is: "the struggle for reality." Face of their collective identity, youth seek to acquire it for themselves on their own. And so, they live in a non-conflictual sort of way, not even communicating with structures and more generally, with those in authority. Each one draws up for himself his own system of values and his code of behaviour, choosing partial and several forms of belonging. Averse to any kind of conflict, young people tend to relativize every secure point of doctrine and to reject ideological positions.

We speak today of an "excess of opportunity," referring to the manifold experiences young people can have without fully committing themselves in any one of them. As a result, long-term planning is out and what is immediate and ephemeral assumes importance. Consequently, there is a better capacity to adapt to various situations and to live precariously. But at the root of all the preceding interpretations lies complexity, which is an image of our society and culture. Let us highlight some of its aspects.

In a complex society, there is no centre which can efficaciously propose stable points of reference, no single or pre-vailing philosophy of life, no unifying system of values. There is no power capable of exercising a strong force of attraction within the social fabric and giving a unitary organization to the whole system. Either the "centres" do not exist or there are many of them.

Our society is wanting in affirmation; it lacks a foundation. It offers goods and establishes norms or social life, but is not able to get a system of values to be accepted by all. Thus, losing its symbolic meaningfulness, it foments a rapid succession of provisionally dominating elements which arise and disappear just as quickly. This happens on the ethical, political and cultural planes. Thus, one witnesses a continual humle of messages and influences among different groups.

The result is a substantial "fragility" of the processes of socialization with the accompanying risk of producing a sizable number of persons who are poor in adapting themselves and poor in their sense of belonging and integration. Educators do not possess anymore a unified culture they can propose, but only heterogeneous elements of culture which are of ten times opposed or contradictory to each other.

We are actually faced with a society which forms persons who adapt to it with a lot of "pragmatism" and a pinch of cynicism, persons who seek to exploit every opportunity it offers to their own advantage, without however involving themselves deeply in its problems. They do not understand its real value, because this has never been conveyed to them.

In such a complex society, then, there arise new needs which our pastoral ministry should consider to be "signs." Since the majority does not have to face anymore (but is it really true?) the problems of food, shelter, work and social security, there has emerged the quest for a better quality of personal life and for experience that promote human relationships, personal needs and freely-chosen activities. These needs are usually dubbed "radical" or "post-materialistic."

Faced with an increase of leisure time, there is a hypothesis gaining ground which sees leisure as a new locus for growth in individual and collective identity. Until today it was the profession or the job that determined the fundamental identity of a person. Some are inclined to think that that situation is changing today. Perhaps we are heading towards a society in which the increased amount of leisure time will provide the opportunity for persons to choose different kinds of activity that, subjectively speaking, offer

better chances to realize themselves and to give meaning to their lives. Naturally this opens up whole new horizons for the work of education in industrialized societies.

For what concerns Latin America, the documents of the Church speak of youth as a "new social entity" ("once upon a time we spoke of young persons, today we speak of youth") and present it as a social pressure group they also take pains to describe some of its general characteristics. Nevertheless, they cannot subsequently void distinguishing six categories of youth, since young people in reality are found in very different situations, without linkages among themselves and without the consciousness of forming a group. The six categories enumerated are: rural youth, urban working-class youth, students frequenting school and college, young workers, youth in various critical situations and native youth.

From this one can deduce that some expressions such as "fragmentation" and "marginalization" are also applicable in the Latin American continent. Instead, the emergence of the quest for a better quality of life is very relative: it would be a characteristic of a minority of the population, and even so, it would appear to have been inducted from models of advanced societies, whereas most of the people have still to attain those goods which will enable them to live as "human beings," viz. economic sufficiency, culture and basic education, adequate professional training, a just remuneration for one's work and an active participation in society.

Extreme poverty (cf. Puebla, 33) (together with the awareness of its being provoked, maintained and aggravated by mainly economic structures run from the outside with collaboration from the inside) constitutes the determining element of the situation and consciousness of young people. Taking a stand on it has divided society and even the Church herself. Now, with the eclipse of "ideological systems," youth have become aimless and helpless. And following upon the fleeting experiences of "development" (in the 1960's) and of "liberation" (in the 1970's), they find themselves today more than ever, in the periphery" of the world and its decision-making processes.

From the religious point of view, the Church wields a strong moral force, and, given the Catholic majority in the population, still raises hopes, however vague they may be. Meanwhile, secularism is making headway, and popular religiosity is breaking down because of an enrolment in sects.

As for Africa, the available data points to a higher proportion of the young in respect of adults and highlights too socio-economic factors that are determining the destiny of many young people, viz. an exodus from rural areas and an un-controlled urbanization. One could enumerate the following categories of youth: those youth who come to the cities from their villages in search of work in order to survive, and among them sub-categories such as working youth, vagabonds, etc.; the youth of the rural areas which are generally very depressed; and the students who are divided in a number of sub-groups.

There are other actors too that are affecting the youth condition today, viz. the subordinate role of the young person in adult world; the rapid process of colonial emancipation and the subsequent difficulty of running the country satisfactorily, thus giving rise to gaps in the fields of education, culture and health care; the clash between ancient traditional customs and the impact of modern civilization; an educational system that is not yet able to offer suitable models for the African situation; and an economic and cultural dependence, because of which some pursue the living standards of the developed societies, not caring about the advancement of everyone.

If the aspirations of the young were to be consciously expressed, they would all be in terms of having a job or profession, living in a context of greater justice and freedom enjoying the benefits of the more advanced civilizations and recuperating their own traditions and their "African soul." But the majority still lives in a fundamentally precarious condition of existence, education and work.

Asia does not present a uniform picture. While some countries reproduce the characteristics of developed societies but with their own specific traits (as in Japan) others are entering upon a process of industrialization, a headlong rush toward economic goals and prosperity, a competition for jobs in the work-place and increasing demands in the fields of education and qualification (as in Korea and Thailand); In India, the youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are 155 million and form 20% of the population. 60% are below 24 years of age. The youth population in the rural areas (74 a) presents the

same characteristic everywhere, whereas the youth of the urban areas (26%) can be classified as students, workers, young people searching for jobs, vagabonds and deviants.

As in other places in the world, the youth of India do not have a feeling of oneness as a group or common points of reference. They do not take a stand in the areas of culture, education and politics, but tend to adopt "fads" or foreign modes - behaviour, while still continuing with the customs they have inherited in family and society in rural areas. There is an enormous gulf between the opportunities enjoyed by the well-to-do classes and those available to the vast majority of the population. The youth problem centres around education and the possibility of securing a well-paying job; it is difficult to speak of the youth problem as a collective demand for participation and cultural involvement.

The Philippines, because of its widespread Catholic popular religiosity and its social and economic situation, bears a strong resemblance to the countries of Latin America.

## **5. The challenges in our pastoral work today**

Faced with this youth situation, there are certain points that have a strong bearing on our educational and pastoral activity today.

The lengthening of the period of youth has made adolescents and young adults the focus of much attention. The traditional stages of Christian initiation, once considered decisive moments in communicating the faith, are no longer sufficient. The factors that determine the direction of a personal life (entry into the world of work or university studies) are now occurring in the post adolescent period; The forming of a cultural synthesis, the maturing of an ethical criticiser to face up to current problems and the making of certain life choices all are now taking place at a later time. The period of the Christian initiation of children, together with the experiences and the doctrinal contents it offers, still continues to be important; but it does not cover, not even materially speaking, the period of youth. Systematic programmes for the education of youth either do not exist or are very few indeed and this particularly for assisting the young at a time when their evolution is still in full cry.

Communication between the ecclesial community and youth is not easy. As young persons enter this period, they have fewer opportunities and means for religious meetings, dialogue and socialization. One cannot but deplore their falling away from the practice of the Christian faith, which sometimes happens soon after their first Communion, but more generally, after they receive confirmation.

Communication is rendered all the more difficult today because of a widespread religious indifference and a pragmatic view of human existence. This accounts for the social irrelevance not only of religious thought a practice, but also of the institution which offers and represents them through its various roles and initiatives. Young people tend to formulate the religious and ethical aspects of their lives in private, on the basis of personal criteria, in a fragmentary sort of way; and with a view to meeting their own needs.

The verbal language it uses to convey ideas in an orderly and coherently is far less effective today and hardly leads to acceptance and vital decisions. Today gestures speak and so do images, testimonies status symbols and promises of happiness and fulfilment. One does not persuade by means of "treatises; "instead, messages are captured in the realm of life, to which one must have the key.

The facets of human life where the religious message seems to have some meaningfulness today are: the subjective consciousness of the person and solidarity. The first prods one to search for meaning, to give oneself a centre of trinity and consistency as a person (identity) and to establish an anchor for one's ethical life amidst the complexities of the present situation. Here is where many expect the Church to give an orientation, a sign, a word of wisdom, a witness. But then, each one claims for himself the freedom to accept or refuse what the Church teaches, according to his own feelings and questions: he acts like a consumer in a kind of cultural supermarket.

Solidarity is understood as the energy by which people together face up to the great challenges every society and the whole of humanity have to cope with, viz. poverty, marginalization, peace, justice and the environment. Solidarity affects the consciousness of young adults in two ways: when they experience it personally in their moments of difficulty and when they exercise it themselves, considering it to be a very

Meaningful expression of their faith.

The vast youth field therefore confronts us in our pastoral work with certain common tendencies, which seem to indicate some kind of unity. But, when we consider the life choices young people make and how far they are open to the faith, it appears so very disparate. There are to be found youth of all kinds: committed, merely practising, near to the faith, open, distant for various reasons, and estranged from the language and the reality of the Church.

The largest circle is made up of those youth who are "far away" from the Church - a phenomenon which is beyond any doubt. It is enough to look at the statistics concerning "attendance" at Sunday Mass and catechesis, and even concerning the reception of Baptism and first Communion. The number of youth that the Church is actually reaching out to through her various initiatives is a very small percentage of the total number in-deed.

This phenomenon has been the subject of much reflection and calls for distinctions. There are those who remain "far away" from any ethical preoccupation that could form a basis for dialogue; those who have lost all interest in religious matters; those for whom the Christian message is just one more sample of religious thinking; those who feel no sense of belonging to the Church at all; and those who, while having a sense of belonging, stay aloof from her. Many of them have not really withdrawn from the Church: they have simply been born in "another cultural continent;" they have learned "another language;" they have grown up in "another climate." For them Jesus Christ and his Church are items of newspaper information, not a real proclamation, not "substantial" points of reference any longer. They are able to establish their own criteria and the meaningfulness of their lives without taking religious elements into account. This is the so-called phenomenon of the subjective "irrelevance" or "meaninglessness" of the religious dimension, despite its objective truth and value. All too often their keeping away from the Church is caused by non-religious factors, such as social and cultural marginalization, their precarious hold on life, and their lack of the basic conditions for a human existence.

Then, there is another circle, and it is made up of youth who possess a religiosity we could describe as "weak." This religiosity does not bother about an organic knowledge of the Christian faith or about a coherent and total practice of Christian life. Instead, it is open to everything. This is why it does not experience the crises, the euphoria and the problems that some time ago were typical of the school-going phase of religious socialization. These young people are not opposed to religious sentiments, and not even averse to the religious message; it is just that they remain "faithful to their declaration of independence from institutional and ethical commitments." They do have moments of religious emotion, impact and reflection, but these are all too fleeting. They are usually provoked by a person (Mother Teresa, Roger Schutz, the Pope), by an event (a personal encounter, a youth gathering, situations of extreme misery, a happening in their lives, a joyful experience of self-giving ...), by a personal or environmental problem (drugs, the pitiful situation of helpless persons), by a recalling of what they had learned in their earlier Christian initiation, or by their first mature reflection on life. For them it is all a matter of curiosity of feeling, of good dispositions and even of a certain intellectual interest. Our problem here consists in knowing how to accompany these youth towards a stable adherence to Christ and a conscious faith-decision.

A third circle is made up of those who are "practising Catholics." Typical of them is a certain regularity in performing religious gestures, a sense of social belonging to the Church as an institution and a general acceptance of the basic norms of life which the Church proposes in the name of Christ. But their faith does not set free the potential that is in them; the Christian life is not captured in its prophetic aspect as a unique adventure; their conduct is not 'pervaded by the spirit of the Gospel but instead by consideration of common sense; their charity does not succeed in becoming a self-gift. We are dealing here with a functional religiosity which is geared to the needs of the person, integrated without any conflict into the social fabric, and oftentimes exalted even by the secular press.

Finally, there are those youth who are "committed," for whom faith is a discovery; they regularly reflect on their Christian faith; they continually endeavour to live in coherence with it; they assume an apostolic

involvement in a variety of ways as an obligation; and they possess and manifest a strong sense of attachment to the Church. These youth are to be found as animators in Church movements, parishes and educational institutions and also in the volunteer movement. In number, however, they do not go beyond 6%. But their very presence is a sign of hope.

Each of these circles stands in need of appropriate objectives and programmes in order to stimulate growth in the faith but together with initiatives aimed at individual persons and at groups according to their human and religious condition, there is also need to build up a dialogue between the generations, to present the faith meaningfully, and to nourish healthy aspirations for a possible future.

This is what induces the Church to involve herself in the youth field, in the wider context of society, assuming her responsibility in the face of the new demands in the educational sphere, attacking with the help of others the roots of alienation and make adjustment and embarking on new ways of proclaiming salvation to the young through the message of the Gospel.

### **THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE YOUTH PROBLEM**

The human and Christian formation of the young generations has always been a central preoccupation of the Church.

Before the emergence of the youth problem, the Church's pastoral service to youth was pre-eminently a pastoral work for "children." It ran in three directions: first, catechetical instruction and Christian initiation within the community of believers by means of the religious teaching imparted in educational institutions; next, a service of Christian education through Catholic schools that were open to everyone, but above all to the lower classes; and finally, a social and religious assistance to those who were exposed to certain human and moral dangers.

Religious congregations were generally very active in the last two areas mentioned. In some places the Church carried out a work of education through an institution that answered the most diverse needs of the young and organized their leisure time, viz. through the festive oratory.

The group experience too did assert itself in many an educational and pastoral set-up: it was presented as a means to help assimilate the faith and live the Christian life better. Parishes and religious societies made good use of it to carry out a work of formation.

In the first fifty years of this century, then, the Church not only conducted the usual pastoral initiatives, improving them over the years, but also promoted a solid organization of associations (especially of Catholic Action) aimed at a vigorous programme of personal formation and spiritual and intellectual preparation in order to bring about a "Christian presence" in society.

At the same time, the educational and cultural activity of the Church came to be further strengthened by the increase and improvement of Catholic secondary schools and junior colleges, and above all by the establishment of Catholic universities.

These two environments of Christian formation (educational institutions and associations) enabled the Church to launch her youth in the realm of politics and society. The Church also manifested her concern for the young by engaging in certain areas of need among youth (marginalization professional training, work) and this mostly through the initiatives of individuals. Simultaneously there arose parish movements containing the seeds of renewal, e.g., building the parish community and giving it a missionary thrust.

The events of the 1960's and their culmination in 1968 took the Church by surprise. Her pastoral structures found themselves face to face with a new and unexpected reality. And so, the first reaction was one of disorientation. One notices this in the questions that were asked at the highest levels at that time. The traditional associations began to fade away for want of an adaptation to the new youth situation and the ecclesial communities had nothing to offer in their place. The emergence of youth and its confrontational stance caught everyone on the wrong foot, while the younger age group among the young

and the educational institutions in which were invested a considerable portion of the Church's resources, were relegated to a secondary position and their influence inevitably diminished.

And all this took place at a time when those intuitions of the Second Vatican Council which dealt obliquely with the youth problem (in those documents which speak about culture, society and international questions) had not yet been diffused and still less translated into concrete pastoral lines of action.

In this connection, seriously in 1968: "Is youth possible?" The various local churches had been well equipped to meet the pastoral problems of adolescence; but they now came up against a youth that sought to confront, to evaluate and to participate.

It was at this point of uncertainty and even of pain that there arose the idea of youth pastoral work, which has slowly kept on maturing until the present day. We can see it today in the theological and pastoral reflection of the Church and her concrete activities, and finally in her overall pastoral planning.

### **1. Theological and pastoral reflection**

From the time that the youth problem exploded, there developed in the Church a reflection on youth which was in effect a pastoral reading of their socio-cultural reality.

The Council offered the first elements for such a reading, but it expressed above all the Church's intention and will to meet and dialogue with youth. "The Church loves youth deeply always, but especially at the present time, she is called by her Lord to look upon them with particular love and hope and to consider their education as one of her principal pastoral responsibilities."

Hence forward, documents treating became the object example thereof is the World," on the youth theme found its way into all the of the general problems of the Church and of specific interventions. A convincing the Letter of John Paul II "To the Youth of occasion of the International Youth Year.

The particular churches have been re-echoing this reflection and enriching it with practical considerations. The youth problem was in fact discussed at the Symposium of European Bishops in 1975 as part of the topic, "Secularization and Evangelization in Europe," and it became the focal point of study at their next meeting in 1978.

Latin America has three documents of considerable doctrinal interest and practical application. The fifth Medellin document of 1968 represents the first overall declaration of the Latin American church on the specific subject of youth seen from the pastoral angle. Ten years later, Puebla made an opinion for youth. And recently (1987), the document "Youth Pastoral Work: Saying Yes to a Civilization of Love" presented a resume of doctrinal considerations and then went on to transpose them into practical lines of action.

There are many diocesan churches and national conferences that have drawn up quite an impressive presentation of the theme of youth in pastoral letters, study meetings, and practical guidelines. Not less important is the reflection on the theme offered certain centres and by groups of theologians and specialists in youth pastoral work who have shown an interest in the problem. It can be said that today the theme of youth has reached the Christian community and that the latter is aware of its various aspects and demands.

What is the overall picture emerging from all this mass of reflection?

To be sure, we are not dealing here with a systematic and complete study, but rather with a perspicacious reading of the youth problem in which we can identify certain important nuclei.

A first nucleus consists of a positive evaluation of the period of "youth" in the life of a human being and of "youth" in the onward march of society and of humanity. Youth in fact represent a typical spiritual and physiological attitude to life in so far as they embody a capacity to rejoice over what is just beginning, to give oneself feverishly, to renew oneself and to launch out on new conquests.

It is a time of a particularly intense discovery of one-self as a human being and of one's qualities and capacities in which are written, so to say the entire plan of a person's future life (cf. John Paul II, "To the Youth of the World;" n. 23). On the other hand, youth reiterate in an initial and intense manner the questions and the aspirations of man. Because of this new creation of the human conscience which takes

place in every budding life more than because of the biological succession of the generations, youth become the moving force of society and contain unheard-of possibilities for the historical development of humanity.

The Church therefore sees in youth an "image of herself, the youth of the world and the hope of society and of the Church. No matter the different ways in which this consideration is expressed or the angles from which it is studied, we are dealing here basically with a "unique spiritual insight.

In fact, we ought to consider the problems and aspirations of youth in this light, for they manifest the tensions experienced by individual persons and by humanity, as a whole in striving for complete fulfilment. These are at one and the same time an invocation of the divine presence and a recognition of human limits; they turn into frustration when, in satisfying them, the destiny and the dignity of man are ignored by persons and by the social set-up. However, the young have received from creation and redemption the possibility of rising above these conditionings and realizing their human vocation in any situation whatever.

The Church is aware that she can offer to the young a light to interpret the mystery of their being and a model for the building up of their personality, viz. Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. She can also offer them a human environment where they can sincerely search for the truth, experience it and share it with others, viz. in the community of believers. She can also offer them a historical opportunity to help build the Kingdom - a task which occupies the present time, is realized at every moment and embraces the whole of history.

But all this takes place within the experience of the individual and of humanity, which is oftentimes negative dominance as it is by adverse forces. And so, the Church reflects a new on her service of helping to grow. She sees it as an "offering of values" among stand out the values of faith, hope and charity which up the person from within in any situation. Again, she sees it as a help to the young for a discernment of whatever experiences they may have and so to enable them to discover what is positive and to denounce whatever is the very negative of life. Yet again, the Church sees herself as a companion along the road they must travel as they continually open up to God's action and strive to overcome their own limits. As Card. Ballestrero said, "It is along this road, which never fails or deceives, that youth will grow to maturity, coming to consider life as a call or a vocation. God's plans for them will acquire an incisive force, taking the form of fidelity - not only a conscious fidelity as human beings, but an exceptional fidelity of those - who are believers in Christ and true disciples" (Ballestrero , *Giovani verso Cristo*, 1).

To carry out this service, the Church begs her Master for those attitudes and that manner of approach which can help her educate" the freedom of young people. She knows that she must live and identify with their situation, guaranteeing the fulfilment of their legitimate aspirations and helping to unmask the forces that alienate. She intends to dialogue with youth, listening to their demands and offering them the richness of her experience, but at the same time, respecting their pace of growth and showing that she trusts them.

These nuclei, which are formulated in different ways, come be further explicitated when the reflection becomes "situated" and particularized, as in the case of Episcopal Conferences and Bishops' Pastoral Letters: values are proposed, risks and problems identified and the means further concretized.

In this way, the theological and pastoral reflection becomes more practical. The catechisms for youth which are prepared in the different cultural areas beckon to a growth to human maturity in Christ, within the community, at the service of the Kingdom. So, do the programmes of Christian life Which are drawn up for various movements and also the different documents in which the educative role of the Church is described.

## **2. The Church's activities in the service of youth**

While the theological and pastoral reflection on the youth phenomenon continues, the Church carries out various activities in the service of youth: she finds different ways of contacting them, promotes initiatives



that make for their involvement and their formation and devises new ways of becoming present to their world.

The pastoral service of the Church to youth is quite an important moment to evaluate and discern what youth are looking for and what the Church has to offer them and it would call for an in-depth treatment. But, seeing that it is no easy matter to define it and aware of the fact that we are dealing with a lived experience of ten times beyond calculation, we shall limit ourselves here to describing in broad outline some lines of action carried out by the Church.

In the first place, what many parishes have done is to involve their young people in the life of the parish community. They have satisfied the desire of the young to participate and to collaborate by adopting different measures to make their young adults co-responsible. At times these steps may have been hesitant and new avenues may well need to be explored; but the willingness to offer space for participation is real. In fact, in many parishes there are flourishing groups that take it upon themselves to animate the liturgy, to engage in social work to meet the various needs of their neighbourhood and to embark on initiatives to help the Third World and the missions. Many of these young persons are full of enthusiasm and dedicate themselves generously to bring about a renewal in the community along the broad lines traced out by the Council. The fact that these groups are informal does not diminish in any way the seriousness of their commitment, even if some ambiguities may not be totally absent. Seeing such an openness on the part of the young, many parish communities indeed welcome the participation of such groups as a stimulus to renewal.

There is no doubt that a preponderant portion of the Church's activity consists of her catechetical and liturgical efforts to form the young. She has both occasional and ongoing initiatives to deepen their knowledge of the faith. Religious instruction, appropriately renewed, will always remain despite difficulties, a principal means for the young to come into contact with religious themes. Similarly, the Catholic school is engaged in updating its curricula and methods to meet the expectations of the young. A novel instrument of formation has recently been the theology courses for the laity, in which youth seem to be taking part in large numbers. In short, the local churches have been striving might and main to organize different forms of evangelization according to their situation and the interests of various groups; they have been trying out new ways, drawing from the experience they have gained over the years.

But the local churches today are employing another particularly effective means, which, even if it is not new, has been renewed in its format, viz. groups, associations and movements. Youth take part in them easily, seeing them as a means to promote their own growth and to share with others.

There are some forms of group experience that take their inspiration from models which have consolidated over a period of time. It is enough to think of youth centres, Catholic Action groups, associations promoted by religious institutes, scouting and the like. But there are also newer forms of group experience today, such as movements which respond to the current interests of youth and explore new paths. Many young people are attracted to them.

The Church's activity among youth presents yet another new feature today, viz. the places (or occasions) of gathering which are serving as catalysts for the mass of young people. Taize is one of them: the attraction the place exerts on youth is without question and still more the spiritual force exercised by word and example. Similarly, the birth places of the saints, such as, for example, of Francis of Assisi and Don Bosco, both masters of spirituality, are becoming more and more place where many young people come together in their quest for a mature faith. Frequently too religious communities both ancient and modern in style, are bringing youth together and animating them. Likewise, Bible classes and prayer-groups are offering the youth of a diocese a common pathway to growth in the faith in tune with the new ecclesial sensitivity of the young.

Finally, we should not forget to mention those initiatives at the level of the universal church in which the Holy Father is a prominent figure. The annual meetings with the youth of the world (in Rome, Buenos Aires, and Santiago de Compo stela), the frequent conversations with the young during his pastoral visits to every continent and his repeated appeals to youth in his writings and on particular occasions, such as the Holy

year for youth (1984) and the celebration of the International Youth Year – these are all eagerly awaited occasions for the young to come together to be spiritually refreshed and stimulated.

A further set of pastoral initiatives has focussed on youth's concern for "the least of the brethren." This concern has found expression in several ways: volunteering, campaign for peace, animating cultural programmes and cooperating in missionary efforts, caring for the environment and working among the marginalized. We are dealing here with a service that embodies the Church's service to humanity and has become a prophetic sign and a witness to the faith.

When they discover that the Christian call to commitment answers the real needs of people, groups open up to the complex reality of their neighbourhood: they come to consider it as a human environment in which problems are shared and resolved together, culture is created and solidarity is experienced.

It is no surprise then that quite a few of these committed youth have taken to politics and social involvement, trying to put into practice the Church's relationship to the world, acquiring a new understanding of the Christian's contribution to public life, assuming political responsibilities, seeking to leaven society with the Gospel, and collaborating as believers in the defence of human rights and in initiatives which benefit the disadvantaged sections of the population.

Today the better organized local churches see the relaunching of an interest in politics and the imparting of a solid cultural and Christian formation as a means to bring the youth together.

### **3. Towards an organic vision of youth pastoral work: planning**

The theological and pastoral reflection of the Church and her inevitably fragmented activities in the face of a complex youth phenomenon have made the need felt for an organic approach by the Church towards youth. In fact, pastoral activities do show up certain limitations: the disjointed nature of the various initiatives and their heading off in different directions, the lack of clear objectives and of lines of action that have been successfully tried out, improvisation and the consequent lack of continuity and the absence of the support and involvement of the Christian community and sometimes even of the pastors themselves. What we witness all too often is what we could call a "try-this, try-that" pastoral approach to young adults. This is why the idea of drawing up a plan is gaining ground today because it is seen as a means to perform a set of actions that is more complete, better defined, with better linkage and greater co-responsibility. The aim is to reach out to the entire youth field and not to some sections or aspects alone, like: education, education to the faith, culture, social experience, responsibility in the Church, marginalization, adolescence, youth, the young who remain far away from the Church and those who are just practising Catholics. There is also a desire to capitalize on all the forces that are available, seeing them as gifts of the Spirit and at the same time, bringing them together and utilizing them in order of need and importance within an overall vision of the communion of the Church and its pastoral service. Consequently, the move is on to build up a convergence of those objectives which bear on the formation of the person and of the community and to ensure that everyone feels co-responsible for the mission and action of the ecclesial community towards the young.

Planning, as a pastoral norm of action it is more a norm than a technique or a methodology is under way in most local churches today. So too is the co-related setting up of diocesan structures, and in some places, even parish structure, to animate and coordinate the pastoral work for youth.

Such structures are of recent origin, going back to the last few years and their manner of functioning is still somewhat erratic. But the fact that they are there in the first place and are gradually taking root and growing, augurs well for the future.

From all this work of planning, there are certain tendencies emerging as characteristics of the present-day approach to the youth pastoral work.

In the first place, its "missionary" thrust. The youth seems to be poorly evangelized, if at all. And even in those places where the Church has been existing for centuries, there are Christian youth living side by side with youth who have lost every vestige of religious belief and practice; there are youth who belong to society side by side with deviant and marginalised youth, refugees and immigrants. All this constitutes the

field of pastoral work: not only the educational and religious institutions, therefore, but the vast "continent" of youth who may need at one moment to be rehabilitated, at another to be stimulated and at still another moment to be spoken to, to be evangelized for the first time or systematically catechized or to be invited to earnestly take man and Christian responsibilities.

This "missionary dimension" explains the transition that has taken place from a pastoral approach to education and evangelization that relied heavily and almost exclusively on "works and institution" to a new model which makes use of all the channels of communication and forms of presence (in order to convey messages), of all kinds of "youth experiences" (that unleash the desire to search) and of all sorts of places or occasion (where youth can express themselves and manifest their need for relationship and for meaning).

It is precisely this "missionary dimension" that calls for a multi-prolonged approach. Pastoral work thus becomes a "communion building" endeavour, more concerned with roping in various forms of service or charisms rather than leaving them out, more inclined to unite and integrate them than to separate and compartmentalize them. Gone is the limited notion of pastoral work being a care of souls only, a religious type of service. In some places in fact they have taken a very long time to bring the work of education to form part of pastoral work. They have been considering "pastoral" only those activities and moments that are explicitly religious. Underlying such a view there has been the idea, even if not always consciously expressed, that the religious dimension is to be added to the human, whereas it is the deepest dimension of the human an itself.

The Second Vatican Council, which was called a "pastoral" Council because of the angle from which it carried out its reflection, brought about a change in the very notion of "pastoral work." It presented pastoral work as that manifold activity carried out under the guidance of the Pastors of the Church, which aims at rousing faith, forming a Christian community and transforming society with the spirit of the Gospel. Instead of being a restricted area of religious elements offered by the Church pastoral work means a criterion, an orientation, a directing of all the Church's activity among men towards a particular end. And so, the field of pastoral work is not the Church, but the world; its concern is not with the religious dimension alone, but with the whole man; its final aim is not to insert him in a religious structure, but to save the person.

These considerations lead to another characteristic of youth pastoral work. It is "educative", "incarnated" and not generic. The Church, a citizen of this world together with man, not only takes into consideration but even shares in the happy or tragic situations in which man leads his life. She assumes therefore all that the young adult meets with in building up his identity, in opening out onto life and in taking part in human hi story.

It is the mark of religious fundamentalism to maintain that the appropriate pastoral method consists in placing the young person squarely before the decision to accept or to reject the faith expressed in a formula, to belong or not to belong to the faith-community. The Good Shepherd instead chooses another way: he meets people at the crossroads of life which have often little or nothing to do with the religious dimension.

The youth situation is a complex one. To want to simplify it in order to bring about an immediate encounter with the faith question may produce results in some cases, but does not resolve the problem of evangelizing the youth world. Above all, it is not able to fuse together faith and human experience, with the result that the former remains juxtaposed with life.

Education, understood as a global process of growth, is the area and the theme of human interest where the proclamation of Christ can become meaningful for a young person. We are not referring here to "classroom education" only, but to everything that enables a person to freely arise from the things that condition and dominate him to develop his potential to the maximum.

The educative nature of pastoral work raises many practical questions and points to certain solutions as well. Does the pathway to growth as a human person already contain elements which presuppose faith? Should catechesis be understood primarily as a learning of doctrine or as a personal growth in faith and an initiation to live in a Christian community? Does belonging to the Church mean regular participation in religious functions or is it chiefly an earnest search and self-examination and an involvement for the sake of the Kingdom? Are the sacraments rites to be performed or are they energies to build up one's personality according to the measure of the Perfect Man, Jesus Christ?

We must not interpret the educative character of pastoral work as a concession made to those who are weak and incapable of embracing the faith at first shot or as a simple facilitation device. We must also reject the idea that education is only a methodology in presenting the faith. The Incarnation of Christ teaches us that the life of man is the very flesh by which the Word of God draws near to us and becomes intelligible.

Consequently, we must add a final and most important characteristic to the preceding ones, viz. that ours is a "salvific" pastoral work. Its unique force lies in the truth it conveys about man, about God, about Jesus Christ. We present this truth, without picking and choosing, but at the same time, step by step; without twisting it, but using the language of the beatitudes. We know we are offering something different that goes beyond the outlook and the most desirable goods of this world. We cast it as a seed, which contains in itself the power of its own growth; in a first moment, we see it only dying, but we await in faith for it secretly to germinate. The Gospel - message, no matter how paradoxical, is not to be played down; instead, the young person is to be brought to the full measure of its truth, its joys and its demands.

And all this - the "missionary nature" of pastoral work, its aiming at the "full growth" of the person, and its seeking his "salvation" - is to be carried out in a climate of freedom. Pastoral work, therefore, is of its nature built on dialogue. It recognizes the values and the limitations of structures and affirms the centrality of the person. It considers marginal and outdated the methods of hidden persuasion or mass influence; likewise, it judges useless the application of any sort of imposition or a submission evoked by intellectual or moral showmanship. It is convinced that the young person must set free the elements arising out of his own experience, confronting them with the words of Jesus who is the font of knowledge and wisdom. Ours is a pastoral work of proclamation and invitation, not simply one of listening and responding. It relies entirely on Christ, on the truth of His Word; and on the power of His resurrection.

### III THE CONGREGATION'S RESPONSE TO THE YOUTH PROBLEM

Right from the emergence of the youth problem, the Salesian Congregation has been trying to meet it adequately.

Up till the 1960's, the Congregation was solidly ensconced among pre-adolescents and adolescents through well-defined educational structures such as schools and professional training centres, hostels, oratories and Aspirantate. In these structures certain common pedagogical "lines" were followed, the outcome of a long-standing and secure practice which had succeeded in integrating growth in culture with evangelization, in educational activities and the aims of the institution, in family life and in leisure time. The preparation of personnel and the roles of management corresponded to the general objectives, which were taken for granted and did not need to be reformulated or explicated. This was also the case of the curriculum of education - it was rarely submitted to revision or discussion, the overall pattern of the institution and the way it understood its social context and consequently the aims an educational institution ought to have. As yet, there had been no impact of phenomena such as "pluralism," "complexity," "an excess of opportunity" for the young, the "diversification of local situations," the fragmentation of the value-system and of the overall vision of reality and the predominance of each one formulating his own synthesis.

#### 1. Coming to grips with the new youth situation

The 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter represents the first time that the Salesian Congregation as a world community took cognizance of the changes taking place in the youth field. The Chapter carried out a quite systematic reading of the situation, although it was somewhat sketchy and still intuitive. The differences between the youth of different socio-economic contexts were underlined, as also the different "needs" they manifested. Above all, the Chapter took note of the emergence of a youth category above the ages of 14-15: this period is a decisive one in the evolution of a person and would have much to do with the collective youth phenomenon. Consequently, there came to be recognized "a society of young persons that was different from that of the adults" (ASC 244, Jan. 1966, p. 102).

Many documents too contained references to the general characteristics of youth, viz. their sense of freedom, their desire to participate, and their enthusiasm for technological progress and the production of goods that improve the quality of life (cf. ASC 244, Jan. 1966, p. 183-184). Mention was made of some new demands in the field of education, such as: the development of a critical capacity, a preparation to live in different and more open social environments, an education to love and an active social insertion of young workers to whom the Congregation felt particularly bound (cf. ASC244, Jan. 1966 p. 113- 125).

This reading of the youth situation was further updated by the 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, which took note of the enormous demographic, social, political and ecclesial impact of the youth problem (n.35-38); it highlighted the "new needs" felt by young people in the well-to-do societies and the tragic conditions of youth in the poor countries of the world (n. 39 - 44) also drew attention to the emergence of mixite and co-education in society (n. 50).

But it was six years later, on the occasion of GC 21, that the Congregation, faced with the rapid succession of changes in the youth field and their repercussions in education and evangelization, decided to create tools to observe the youth condition and required the reading of the youth condition as a preliminary step towards planning.

At the end of the first chapter of the document, "Salesians, evangelizers of the young," which sized up the social situation of youth, the conflict of ideas, the risks, the resources and the attitudes of the youth of the 1970's to the faith, it was stated: "The gravity of the youth situation of our time and the insistent appeal of the Church and society obliges our Congregation, because of its specific mission, to mobilize the confreres in the next six years around the problems of the youth reality. As a premise to every educational pastoral programme, Salesians need to be more sensitive to the youth condition, understood in its

expectations which are most in line with the Gospel, through an adequate and serious analysis and by means also of direct contact with the young" (n. 30).

Thenceforward, the reading of the youth condition, whether total or partial, became an obligatory task for provincial chapters; it inspired initiatives of an extensive nature, such as research studies at national and international levels; it led to the establishment of teams and observatories to monitor the youth situation and these in their turn linked up with data processing centres. Where it was not possible to conduct direct first-hand research, use was made of researches carried out by other competent organizations. In this way a real attempt was made to study the youth condition from the educative and pastoral angle.

The Rector-Major's report to GC 22 (1984)- made the following comment on the developments that had taken place: "Here the first positive fact: there has grown a sensitivity to problems and the mentality of youth, and there has been an increased contact with the instrument that help us get to know them."

In the last six years, the study of the youth condition has made further progress, goaded on by a society that keeps tabs on its various sectors, both with regard to their respective general situation and the emerging demands.

2. Reformulating the contents and the methods of education the urging of the Church towards the human development and evangelization of the young and the feeling of inadequacy in the face of the youth phenomena led to the reformulation of the contents and the methods of education and of education to the faith.

The Salesians used to take their inspiration from the way of doing things that had been handed down to them through a living tradition rather than thought out scientifically. It must be noted, however, that there did exist a brief chapter in the Regulations that bore the title: "On the civil, moral and religious education of the pupils." The norms in this chapter were relatively easy to apply in those all-encompassing structures where the aims of the institution coincided with the needs of the young.

In 1965 (GC 19), however, this synthesis of regulations was felt to be inadequate both with regard to its contents and language and with regard to its underpinnings. The norms governing the internal life of institutions were partially re-touched, while the formulation of new orientations was left to "directories" to be elaborated in the future. An attempt was made to define the goals of our work of education, to underline certain characteristics of the educator today (both Salesian and lay) and to offer some criteria and general suggestions concerning values that were shaky or a matter of concern in the then situation (cf. ASC 244, Jan. 1966, p. 182 - 185). The evangelization of youth and education to the faith were carried out almost exclusively in the form of a systematic catechesis, and, despite an urgently felt need for its renewal, it was left to post-capitular commissions, to the initiative of confreres and to actual practice.

The preoccupations of the Chapter centred around the "organization of our works" with a view to forming men of faith; "concrete action plans" (ib., p. 187); and the preparation and dedication of confreres to this task (ib.). It was considered that the usual ideas/contents, suitably amended and properly insisted upon, could be easily conveyed through the preventive system, which at that time - so it was felt - needed to recuperate the person-to-person relationship; assistance as a constructive way of sharing with the young, professional ability and a sense of community (cf. ib., p. 185-186). Educational institutions, the depositories of tradition and competence, were seen as an emblematic reference point for a systematic education and complete Christian formation.

Six years later (at SGC 20), the point of departure was the Salesian mission and those to whom it is directed and the sequences deriving therefrom. The Chapter reflection came enriched by all the elements that the Church had to offer. Proof of it is the Chapter document on "Evangelization and Catechesis" which applied to the Salesian set-up the new points that had been laid down in the General Catechetical Directory. The objectives came to be clarified and so too the steps leading to a growth in faith. The intention was to ensure that the young would live the reality of their lives as human beings in the light of Christ and incorporated in Him.

The Salesians thought that they would succeed in that endeavour "starting out from a group reflection on the facts in the light of the Word celebrated in the Liturgy and leading to an apostolic commitment." This, they felt, would be possible through: the pastoral attitudes of searching out and meeting the young, conversing and sharing with them (cf: SGC, n. 360-373). The elements of a solution to the educational problems arising out of the new youth situation and the new culture were scattered all over the Chapter documents and could not be immediately, applied, except with difficulty. SGC 20 turned out to be more of an attempt to clarify the Salesian mission and how to: actualize it rather than a spelling out of those educational elements that could answer the new needs of the young. It would seem that the primary focus of the Chapter was on giving the Salesians an orientation and enabling them to be faithful to conciliar renewal rather than on meeting the new requirements in the field of education.

But, the congregation got a chance to rethink the contents of its educational programme at GC 21. After evaluating the situation going over the frame of reference that had matured up to that moment, the Chapter enunciated the principal objectives that we ought to have in our Salesian education.

"In terms of personal growth, we want to help the boy in particular to build a sound and balanced humanity, fostering and promoting:

- a gradual maturing in freedom, in the assuming of his own personal and social responsibilities in the clear perception of values;
- a carefree and positive relationship with persons and things that will nurture and stimulate his creativity and reduce conflict and tension;
- the capacity to maintain a dynamic-critical attitude in the face of events, to be faithful to the values of tradition and be open to the needs of history, so as to become capable of making consistent personal decisions;
- a prudently given education in sex and in love that will help him to understand their dynamics of growth, of giving and of encounter, within a plan of life;
- the quest and planning of his future in order to liberate and direct towards a precise vocational choice the immense potential hidden in the destiny of every boy, even in one less endowed as a human being;

"In terms of social growth, we want to help our charges have a heart and mind open to the world and to the needs of others". To this end we are educating youth:

- to be available to have a sense of solidarity to dialogue to participate to share responsibility;
- to become part of the community through the life and the experience of the group;
- to become involved in justice and the building of a more just and human society (n. 90).

Something similar was enunciated with regard to growth in the Christian faith, after a little deeper analysis of the distinction and the fusion in our Salesian method between growth as a human person an education to faith.

Objective were spell out, and so also were the general conditions, the personal attitudes and the favourable environment for the maturing of a young person. However, still missing was the organic and explicit organization of the contents in a coherent and practical programme. Because of this we were told that "the preventive system" brings together in a single dynamic experience both educators and pupils, contents and methods" (n.96).

Hence rather than give us a better formulation of ideas, the rethinking of the contents of the education led the chapter to describe certain dispositions and attitudes on the part of educators which could make for a positive experience in their encounter with the young, in all educators, whether individuals or communities, some dispositions and attitude acquire fundamental importance:

- attention to the young as they really are, to their real needs, to their current interests and to the life tasks that await them; a liking for their world, the ability to welcome and to carry on a dialogue with them;

- a respect and fair considerations for the values of the young and attention to the dynamic nature of their growth;
- the reasonableness of demands and rules, the creativity and flexibility of proposals;
- the determination to elicit prompt compliance to values, not by a forced imposition but through ways of persuasion and love;
- the conviction, humanly and Christianly encouraging, that even in the most wretched youth, there is some point accessible to good; the first duty of the educator is to look for this good point, this sensitive chord and to profit from it;
- the frankness of an integral Christian proposal even if adapted to differences in age, in cultural and spiritual level, in the ability to listen and to accept” (n.101).

The cultural change that has come about has been rapid and profound. It has affected the way people see reality and their human and Christian values. The faith continues to be subjected to scrutiny; its very foundation, its language and the signs by which it was expressed in the past, are all called into question; its very credibility is challenged. And even if the faith were no more to be an object of suspicion by a portion of the younger generation today, the urge to believe is not widespread. And so, there are new areas appearing today where the Gospel is becoming a “proclamation of salvation”.

To the general considerations offered above by our Chapters (mission, pastoral service, goals, criteria, spirit, characteristic, structures, etc.), we must add the more detailed study of certain specific areas that has been carried out by the Department for the youth Apostolate, the provincial centres of youth pastoral work, and the provinces themselves, in a bid to draw up a suitable programme (formal education, catechesis, rehabilitation of marginalized youth, vocation orientation, group experience, etc.).

This endeavour has shown itself in three important ways: the educational and pastoral plan, Salesian youth spirituality and the programmes of human and Christian formation. The three of them have attempted to spell out at different levels the synthesis labourably arrived at, in the light of our Salesian heritage, the new challenges in the field of education and the guidelines given by the church.

### 3. Appropriate activities, a greater field of action, and a variety of initiatives:

Let us first consider the development of certain areas of pastoral work where in the past not much was done either because they were considered “exceptional” or because, as things stood, they did not call for much attention.

The adult world is no longer considered a marginal field in our apostolate; in fact, the pastoral solicitude for the adults because of the request from the diocese or because of its connection with the youth field, keeps us as busy as the education of the young. The promotion of the pious associations, which were mentioned in the Constitutions before 1972, has developed into the larger work of animation the Salesian Family: and the campaign for good literature “has become part of the bigger fields of social communication. As for the missions all the provinces are today involved not only in supplying personnel but also in directly supporting the works which are now scattered in the most distant lands.

And if GC 19 envisaged a homogeneous sector called “the adult apostolate” for which a service of the animation was needed, SGC 20 placed “the working-classes” in the text of the Constitutions, among those to whom the Salesian mission is directed; it mentioned certain categories of adults to whom we offer particular services and declared that the parish was no longer to be considered an exceptional apostolate.

But, the field of Salesian activity did expand also in the youth sector in response to the new forms and experiences that were meaningful to youth, there appears newer possibilities of formation and involvement and newer challenges thrown up by an increasingly secularized environment and by the spread of marginalization.

The first initiative in the shape of “new presences or activities” dates back to 1965. They took the form of retreat houses for the confreres and for the various categories of people entrusted to our care, viz. our pupils, co-operators, past pupils and other youth as well (cf. ASC244, Jan 1966 p.169); more hostels too, of



an open type, for university students and young workers ;and making personnel available for the religious instruction in public schools and for the spiritual assistance of the student and working youth (cf.ib.,p.104). But, these activities were only envisaged as a “complement “to those institutions that had been consolidating themselves over a period of time, that is the school, the oratory, the technical school and the boarding.

About the same time too, there appeared the first youth volunteer movements; the situation of poverty in the third world came to be widely known; and the traditional groups that GC 19 had recommended now disappeared.

SGC 20, determined to face up to the challenges arising from our mission and our charges, laid down that it was possible to meet them by experimenting with the new approaches and our present Constitutions summarizes the criterion thus: “our apostolic activity is carried out in a variety of ways, which depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working... The education and the evangelization of many young people... means that we have to go to them where they are to be found and provide adequate forms of service in the context of their own lifestyle (C41).

The next two General Chapters further clarified that these new Salesian presences could either be an internal renewal of our traditional works or entirely new activities and fields of work. The provincial chapters too made progress in this direction, and some individuals confreres and the groups tried out a few experiments. Such presences came to be viewed as capable of revitalizing the Provincial community and providing a new spirit of daring in pastoral work.

It is not easy to classify the new initiatives completely. They span the entire youth field and attempt to respond to some of the emerging needs of the young adults. One could mention among them, for instance, the many initiatives in the area of marginalization that sprang up in the early 1970s and were ment for the youth Apostolate and our Salesian University. One could also mention the movement of volunteers for the missions that began in 1968, the involvement of young adults as animators of the groups, and catechesis that have multiplied, the activities aimed at the young in the field of social communication (e.g. Magazines, drama, etc) and the recent attention that has been paid to university students.

#### 4. Redimensioning: the way to achieve a better performance:

The new question that arose in the youth field led the Superior Council to make clear and well-articulated proposal to every province, viz. redimensioning.

The council’s intentions were clear: “Considering that our works, despite their having had a mighty and consoling expansion in the past hundred years of life of the congregation, still need to find their bearings in view of the changed circumstances of the time and place... let provincials... spell out the activities to be promoted to enable the Province to respond to the local needs of the youth and the working classes”. (ASC, Jan. 1966, p. 44).

SGC 20 repeated the proposal, presenting it from different angels: making community life possible, a more effective insertion among our charges, a training for a pastoral work and an entry into new areas of the youth apostolate. The chapter also offered a complete framework of the criteria to be applied in the work of redimensioning.

Some Provinces began to make their first attempts. They did meet with some difficulty in gaining acceptance for the reasons behind the changes, as the reasons were all oriented to the future; there was also some resistance to the idea of giving up the usual fields of work and trying to meet new needs. But, in some entire regions, hardly any redimensioning took place. In 1977, in his report on the state of the congregation which he presented to GC 21, the Rector-Major stated; “Redimensioning still needs to be done... From the information available, apart from some exceptions, not many well planned operations seem to have been carried out. Oftentimes a practical and global vision of the situation of a province has been missing and likewise a realistic sensitivity and a capacity to envisage how situations could develop in the future. We have come across attitudes of passive resignation and also negative reactions that have seen in redimensioning nothing but an operation inviting death. Instead, redimensioning had and still has

the aim of revitalising and of bestowing energy and fruitfulness to Salesians in the first place and then to all their apostolic activity in the light of today's reality and tomorrow's" (n. 38).

Despite the meagre results, he concluded saying: "I admit that this is a difficult job. But it is of such great importance that to postpone it, or what is still worse, to ignore it altogether, would be tantamount to making oneself responsible for the decline, not to say the early demise, of the province" (n. 42).

GC 21 insisted once again on redimensioning, but only very feebly. Having failed to bring about an "overall redimensioning", the provinces came to adopt the criterion of graduality over the long term, which meant partially reducing, increasing or modifying communities in order to create some new service and deploy human resources. In this way, the provinces hoped to be in a better position to meet the urgent needs of the youth.

The problem of redimensioning has now come up again in terms of the "meaningfulness" of the Salesian presence in a place. Attempts to relocate our works are not wanting, as also to entrust them to be run by others in varying degrees of shared responsibility and to open up in new areas. But the new initiatives are simply being added on to our existing works, without any addition of personnel, thus weakening our communities in the bargain and overburdening the confreres with responsibility.

#### 5. The Structures of animation and government:

In the new situation which was marked by a greater openness to embark on initiatives, to reformulate the programmes offered to the young and to pay attention to the youth situation, a new system of guidance and orientation came to be applied to the congregation, viz. decentralization. It was unthinkable that in the very diverse situation in which Salesians operate throughout the world, the same programme or the same frame of reference could be immediately applied. The general orientation had to be assumed by the provinces in line with their own situation, with reference to their own culture, taking into account the exiting currents of thought and educational systems and taking inspiration from that common nucleus known as the "Preventing system". Decentralization required that the provinces and the regions see to the reformulation of their goals and programmes, the reorganization of their activities and structures and the preparation of their personnel.

In the Superior Council, the role of the councillors for schools and for professional training institution came to be substituted by a single councillor for "pastoral work among youth I parishes", "the general formation (of the young) under the religious, intellectual and moral aspects in all Salesians houses (oratories, boardings, groups, sodalities, youth associations)" (ASC 244, Jan. 1966, p.24). In the reorganization of the offices of the superior council, there was mooted the idea of a general centre for studies and Orientation, within which would function a Salesian Centre for youth pastoral work. Among its task were mentioned those of knowing better the concrete situation and the needs of a youth in rapid evolution; gathering together and coordinating the best reflections and experiences of Salesians and others throughout the worlds; and stimulating and orientating Salesians to carry out a fruitful work of education (ib. p. 201).

To this central organisation there would correspond, at provincial level, new roles of animation, the description of which was left to the provinces (cf. ib. p. 35). Anyway, between 1965 - 1971, all the provinces were asked to establish their own service of pastoral animation, following the lines of the plan sent out by the department; some national centres too come to be created as intermediary bodies between the Provinces and Department.

In the report that he presented to SGC 20 in 1971, the Rector Major remarked that it was difficult to evaluate the impact of such re-organisation. However, he had a word of appreciation for the initial contacts made and the communication that had been established among those in charge of youth pastoral work, especially in these areas of catechesis liturgy and the group experience (cf. p. 94).

The congregation reached the conclusion that it was indispensable to have a system of communication with a matching set of homogeneous "terminal points" and structures. In some regions such an organization did exist and has kept on evolving, animating the whole of pastoral work even today. In other regions instead, after a first experience that did not turn out to be altogether positive, such an organisation

was at first done away with, only to be later revived after a certain amount of struggle but without much conviction. After the constitutions were promulgated, the department sent out to the provinces a proposal concerning the service of animation, following the substance and the area mentioned in articles 32-36. In the meantime, the national centres began to multiply, catering to almost all the areas of operation of several Provinces together. Today these centres provide a communication channel between the Department and the provinces in both directions; at the same time, they permit a drawing up of plans that are autonomous and more suited to the local situation; It is instead difficult to establish a fluid and continuous dialogue with those provinces and regions where these centres have not been set up or where the pastoral framework has been arbitrarily fragmented.

As for the local level, GC 19 had kept the various roles unchanged and obligatory, viz. the councillor for studies; the councillor for professional training and the Catechist all of them de jure members of the local council. Successively SGC 20, considering the diversification of our presences that was already taking place transferred to the provinces the responsibility for creating the roles that thought first, in keeping with the nature and the purpose of the works. Some of the provinces kept the roles together with their names; others changed the names and their configuration as well; and still others did away with the roles altogether, thus losing a specifically educative effectiveness among the young.

The obligation to draw up a provincial directory in line with the renewed constitutions made the provinces face up to the need of defining the various roles within the context of a community responsibility (cf. C 185).

In the meantime, the Provinces felt the needs of creating their own system of communication so that their ideas and experience might become a common and shared patrimony. The meetings of rectors and of those holding posts of responsibility, the pastoral programming at the start of each year and its subsequent verification and the reflection in common on certain criteria or situations all became instrument for making progress together and to ensure continuity.

But, where these three requirements (a plan, a structure to provide animation and a system of communication between the communities) were not seen to, there was and still remains the difficulty of making the general orientation (of the congregation) widely known and of getting everyone to participate in what is done.

#### 6. The Educational and pastoral Plan:

The number of activities we have, the space given to individual and communities to embark on initiatives, the complexity of the youth phenomenon with regard to human growth and education to faith and the plurality of methods and options, all these factors serve to create a none too imaginary danger of a dispersal or juxtaposition of our forces. We can lose sight of essentials, overturn the hierarchy of ends, and not tailor our activities to meet needs adequately. To overcome this danger, therefore, GC 21 proposed the Educational and Pastoral Plan. From 1978 onwards there arose around this theme a whole body of literature in the congregation to motivate confreres, help them with suitable aids and offer them practical models. The drawing up of the Plan first occupied those responsible for animation at provincial level, while the local communities struggled to absorb the ideas. Finally, it became a norm when the Constitutions and General Regulations were promulgated. Art. 4 of the Regulations in fact lays down that "each provincial community should draw up its educative and pastoral plan, based on the preventive system, to respond to the youth situation and to the conditions in poor areas. A local plan should also be drawn up with the involvement of all the members of the pastoral and educative community and in harmony with that of the province, for the purpose of directing all initiatives to the task of evangelization."

The same text goes on to indicate those who are responsible for planning and the areas in which they ought to carry it out. The plan is meant to create a coherent unity of all the different aspects or dimensions of our activity, particularly in view of the unified growth of the person and his education to the faith.

But, it also calls for a renewal of our activities, within an overall continuity of style, in order to meet the new challenges arising from the young, from society and from new models of education. For this, there is need of a renewed understanding of the basic inspirations of the Preventive System, a sufficiently serious re-reading of the youth condition and a formulation of objectives, experiences to be conveyed and lines of action.

The outcome of all this planning can be seen in the report of the Rector-Major in 1984 and in the conclusions of the Team Visits. They show that the plan, besides affording a greater clarity of the final ends of our educative work, has made it possible to have a suitable global approach to our various environments (oratories, schools, parishes). It has enabled us to take up the needs of our charges with greater interest and awareness, and also the demand for innovation in our programme- contents and methods.

This process too has not been without difficulties, and is not yet over. An evaluation to be found in the Rector-Major's report states:

"A sizable number of provinces have concluded the work of drawing up their provincial plan... Others are still on the way but are persevering in this endeavour. Yet others made an initial but inadequate attempt and subsequently gave up. And there are a few who have not bothered to spell out their over-all pastoral orientation.

"These and other initiatives have made progress in the measure in which:

- there is in the provinces a team for pastoral animation, established according to the new criteria;
- the provincial council has devoted time to pastoral reflection;
- a dialogue and exchange of ideas has been kept up with the Department;
- the intermediary animating bodies, such as Conferences and Centres, have fostered collaboration."

The situation today is much better: a bigger number of provinces has drawn up the plan. Those that welcomed the proposal right from the beginning have been involving their communities as well, so much so that planning has become a regular feature in them. One can notice certain defects in attributing the right measure of importance to the various aspects; limitations too can be seen particularly in what concerns the education to the faith. But, there is now available an instrument to identify lacunae and correct them through a convergence of the members of the community. Where this norm of the Regulations has not been put into practice, one has to ask why certain roles and responsibilities have not functioned as they should.

#### 7. Improving the programme-contents in our works:

The theme of "new presences" applies to all our works. Part of our effort therefore is directed towards renewing our pastoral practice in each work with the assistance of the on- going reflection taking place in the Church (Cf. The Catholic School, The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School) and also with the help of a verification of our performance.

Every type of work faces problems and requires a new educational and pastoral approach, a new way of relating to the ecclesial community and to the neighbourhood. Right from 1965 the Congregation has been taking these elements into account while carrying out a verification at Chapters, and it has produced a considerable number of guidelines concerning each of those points. The reports on the state of the Congregation from 1977 to 1983 have done some evaluation as to how far these guidelines have been translated into reality. Provincials too have touched on the subject in the reports they have presented to their provincial chapters. In not a few places meetings have been held to discuss the global thrusts to be given to our educative and pastoral work or to tackle some of its problematic aspects, and various animating groups or com- missions have been set up, even if not always with a clear idea of their tasks and objectives.

From all this one, realizes that an effort is being made, but not yet successfully, in getting all the communities of every province to be involved in organic fashion.

Our schools and technical training institutions seem to be making little impact from the educative and religious point of view. The changed relationship that the young have with their institutions, the emergence of the meaningfulness of leisure- time activities for individual persons, a shorter time-table, new didactic and organisational requirements, a certain "secular" view of the educative mission and the predominance of instruction over education have considerably reduced both the ideal and the real possibilities of offering an integral programme of human development and growth in the faith. We have to deplore the disappearance of almost all the moments of "explicit religious education," including the teaching of religion, which is now limited to certain topics only and confined to a minimal amount of time. We have also to lament the separation that has been made between imparting culture, achieving educational objectives and presenting the faith. We know that education to the faith cannot be limited to the teaching of religion but requires a complex of realities that make for witness, proclamation and the experience of faith in the realm of the human, that is to say, the overall way an institution is run, educational relationships, the educative community, the relationship with the neighbourhood, evangelization through the teaching of each subject, and the meaningful presentation of religion to individuals, to groups and to the community. Furthermore, there are other problems about choosing the message we want to convey, translating them into intelligible language and offering experiences which present the faith with a certain clarity and efficacy.

The frame of reference for the work of, planning the school has often been enunciated. And the pace of realizing the plan is slow because it requires a convergence of the community, pastoral drive and a capacity for analysis, planning and evaluation.

Likewise, the Oratory experiences a tension between opening up to all and sundry and maintaining a strongly formative slant. It faces the difficulty of tracing out different programmes and contents according to the level of faith of the young so that the beginners may learn the basics whereas those who are advanced may be helped to grow still more and become committed Christians in the Church and in society. Furthermore, the Oratory seeks to insert itself in its neighbourhood by means of a programme offering both witness and proclamation through a participation in the cultural advancement of the locality: thus, it endeavours to occupy the middle ground between civil society and the ecclesial community. The programme can consist of many things, such as groups and movements, Salesian youth spirituality, curricula for growth in the faith, and the active involvement of the laity. In this way our Oratories and Youth Centres acquire a clear and sound physiognomy. But even in their case it must be said that they will put the general guidelines into practice in different ways, depending on various factors, viz. the continuity of the line of action, the relative stability of the personnel, the historical background of each Oratory, and the taking part of those responsible for the Oratory in the overall thinking of the province or region.

On the subject of parishes, the Rector-Major's report to CC 22 (1984) states: "Progress has been made in the grasping of principles and criteria. But the questions regarding our parishes remain the same as they were six years ago; they do not concern matters of principle, but of practical realization... It is becoming difficult today to assert that every one of our parishes has a particular youth physiognomy: perhaps the opposite is more frequently the case." The parishes, then, face the same problem, viz. how to communicate and engage with the young in the matter of faith. There are systematic programmes conducted in various places in order to help reinforce a parish's evangelizing capacity. But once the preparation for first Communion and for Confirmation is over, we have neither devised nor adopted a "model" for carrying out youth pastoral work or spelt out practical steps of presenting the faith to young adults.

#### 8. Those responsible for Salesian pastoral work:

The theme of the laity and the educative community has been under discussion for the last 25 years. It was mentioned by GC 19 in 1965, at a time when the Vatican Council was nearing its conclusion: "Let the lay people who are called to work in our institutions be considered our close collaborators and be effectively integrated in the group carrying out the Salesian education, even if they do not form part of the religious community. They ought to be chosen on the basis of three criteria: moral and religious uprightness,

competence in education and adaptation to our spirit" (ASC 244, Jan. 1966, p. 186). Subsequently, there took place a complete and articulated reflection on the subject, spelling out the role of animation that belongs to the religious as a body and to all those lay persons who have assumed a Christian commitment. There was also a lot said about informal and formal participation; the importance of the continuing professional, Christian and Salesian formation of the laity was underlined. Thus, there gradually matured the principle that all those who participate in the work of education are co-responsible and it came to be clarified that this co-responsibility is exercised above all in elaborating, executing and evaluating the educational plan.

In 1984 there came to be clearly defined those who are responsible for the Salesian educational and pastoral mission, so much so that it was stated in the Constitutions (cf. 47) and in the Regulations: "The application of the plan requires that in all our works and settings we establish the educative and pastoral community, whose animating nucleus is the Salesian community."

Going through the official and unofficial documents and studies which express the mind of the Congregation at world, regional and provincial level, one comes across such a massive and definite insistence on this point that one has to ask why there has been a certain lethargy in its implementation.

It is certainly quite clear today that education and education to the faith are not to be carried out by a religious community only but that the lay faithful have an original and replaceable contribution to make. The more decisive task of forming individuals, giving a general orientation to the work and consolidating the educative community belongs to the religious community. It is our goal that this new model of a group which is responsible for pastoral work should be accepted and realized in the provinces, in the same way as the model of the religious community has been once upon a time.

#### IV

#### **SOME REMARKS ON YOUTH PASTORAL WORK IN THE CONGREGATION**

In describing the path that the Congregation has trodden these last twenty-five years, there clearly emerge certain lines of development that take their basic inspiration from a coherent underlying vision of Salesian youth pastoral work.

These lines represent the effort at reflection and guidance carried out by responsible organs in order to better respond to the needs of youth and to clarify the particular Salesian way of facing up to the youth problem.

In implementing these lines there have appeared certain issues, that we shall describe here very briefly:

1. The gap existing between the amount of guidelines and orientations on the one hand and the actual possibilities of carrying them out on the other.

In considering the actual situation of Salesian youth pastoral work, we cannot but attempt to verify how far the various guidelines and orientations offered by the General Chapters and by the various animating bodies have been put into practice.

There have been many initiatives and efforts in the line of animation. The central bodies of the Congregation have been repeatedly encouraging the provinces to engage in the work of rethinking and renewal asked for by the General Chapters.

In animating and coordinating youth pastoral work at world level, the various dimensions of the plan have been repeatedly treated. So too have themes like promoting the identity of our different educational and pastoral settings, the relation between pastoral work and Salesian spirituality, the new frontiers of youth pastoral activity opening up to Salesians and other topics of synthesis.

The impression one gets is that at times not much thought has been given to the stages of implementation and that they have been assigned too short a space of time. The continual flow of new ideas and suggestions

has not made it possible for provincial communities to really assimilate them. Above all, their practical implementation in daily life has turned out to be very difficult, if not impossible.

The communities have had to speed up the pace of learning at a time when depth of conviction was being asked for. The multiplicity of suggestions has led to a dispersal of effort in a thousand-and-one enterprises and lessened attention to new phenomena. In fact, the excessive heaping up of several activities and new initiatives on the same person can increase his feeling of inadequacy, if not frustrate his energies altogether. Obviously, the need for preferential choices and precise objectives has been badly misunderstood. This is all the more evident if one considers not only the field of youth pastoral work, but takes into account the whole packet of orientations and suggestions given by our headquarters.

Further, at provincial level we do not always have adequate structures of organization, with clearly defined functions recognized by all the communities, to sustain the work of animation and coordination. The channels of communication are often disjointed and partial, and so the work of provincial teams turns out to be exhausting and insufficient when it comes to planning initiatives and carrying them out.

Even the most relevant suggestions will fail to be translated into daily life if an adequate communication is missing and there does not adequately function on the spot a group for conducting operations. Sometimes, moreover, the centres of youth pastoral work churn out their own proposals, and these are not made the object of decisions by the appropriate governing authorities; such centres are not so much interested in allowing time for implementation as in continually stocking the market with goods.

The upshot of all this is that the provinces have been able to assimilate and above all to put into practice the guidelines given by the Congregation only at the cost of hard work and that too in a limited way. The reasons for this have often been the difficulty of understanding the various ideas, the language barrier, and the painful effort required to renew communities. We have also witnessed an unequal implementation from province to province so much so that the Congregation does not have a uniform appearance. The specific situations of the various provinces, their unequal pace of growth, the different levels of preparation and competence (or lack thereof) of their Salesian personnel and the pastoral practice obtaining in their area in embarking on new ventures have often been decisive blocks in education and pastoral work.

However, there is growing all the while the consciousness of being communities responsible for actualizing the Salesian mission in their locality by working according to a plan accepted by everyone. It is not possible any more today to engage in work among youth without having clear goals following doubtful methods and offering occasional experiences that are not sufficiently proven.

All this makes it impossible to offer any proposal in the future that will be valid in every context (consider: groups, the neighbourhood, animation, the Salesian Youth Movement, participation). It becomes increasingly difficult to trace out the same path for everyone to follow. Instead, it seems more practical to exchange ideas and offer an animation that is tailored to different situations. This raises questions calling for solutions at the level of animation and government, starting out from the decisions of GC 23 itself.

2. The emergence of new contexts for the work of education Faced with the new needs of young people and the need for a renewal of our work, provincial communities are recognizing the inability of the present institutional forms to give an adequate response to the requirements of education and education to the faith. Notwithstanding the substantial effectiveness of the organizational structures and the commitment of educators on the level of action, one becomes aware of ascertain impotence in the face of new educational problems and also experiences a certain frustration at seeing the wide- spread sense of futility in leading youth to the faith. Institutions that were once in a position to offer complete education are today considered none" among several agents of education.

In a complex and pluralist society like our own, we are witnessing the emergence of new contexts for the work of education of the young, contexts in which models are offered and styles of life are created, both of which are attractive to the mass of young people. One has only to look at the "parallel school" of the mass-media, the gatherings for music and sport, tourism, the new forms of commitment in the Church and in society and the important area of leisure time, which has become a new context in which a person can

discover his identity. One can also consider the enormous mobility young people have in order to come together and the many kinds of experiences available to them. The new contexts will be seen to be even more numerous if one includes the young adults, to whom but a passing attention was paid in the past.

In the face of such a great variety and plurality of formative situations, then, the provinces have been attempting to give a new outlook to their traditional institutions; but above all in the last few years they have launched out on various initiatives and put a lot of effort into the new contexts that have opened up for the work of education.

### 3. The effort at renewal

In an attempt to meet today's complex youth reality, the provinces have embarked on two new paths: the reanimation of educational institutions and the relaunching of youth groups.

The first path seeks to identify the needs of the locality properly and meet them; to work in such a way as to involve all the various components of the educative community, especially the young; to try out experiments in classroom teaching and technical training; to recover the educative and pastoral dimension of the institution; to renew the method of education; and to create a new rapport with the young.

Thus, it becomes necessary to redefine the physiognomy of the oratory, to spell out the identity of a Salesian school in its local context, and to delineate the salient features of a Salesian parish.

But structures offer resistance to a change of pastoral orientation. The reasons for this are: their very nature, which always tends to be conservative; the difficulty a province experiences in trying to effectively communicate an overall proposal for renewal; the personnel situation which does not easily allow for substitution; and the scarcely enterprising spirit of communities, notwithstanding the fact that there are individuals in them who are forging ahead in the task of renewal. And so, it is possible to come across imaginative moves often existing side by side with a general mode of conduct which does not succeed in renewing itself.

The second path consists of a renewed attention to youth groups. In fact, there is a new form of presence among the young that is taking shape in all our Salesian Houses. Movements, groups and associations have always been a heritage of our preventive system. Nevertheless, there is something new coming to the fore today and deserving of our attention. It is the reality of the coming together in groups on the basis of certain felt stimuli such as the readiness to contribute to the missionary enterprise, the desire to animate others, the openness to volunteer for work overseas, the fostering of vocations, the commitment to be an apostle, and the move to make young people themselves more and more responsible. In this context the invitation to live the Christian life in the foot-steps of Don Bosco is catching on in the form of the Salesian Youth Movement.

The Salesian Youth Movement is a reality today in many provinces: it is promoted as a movement that makes for education, and it brings together groups having the most diverse interests. Of course, the key figures of the Movement are the animators, whose number has considerably increased today; they are beginning to establish close bonds among themselves and are receiving a preparation through specific training courses. It is these animators, young people that they are, who are the backbone of the Movement and its most ardent supporters.

The Salesian Youth Movement is offered to all young people as a means to assist them in their growth; it presents to them a practical way of living, with the help of programmes of education to the faith. It gives the multi-faceted Salesian work a "youthful appearance," and is capable of securing the involvement of the young people of our Houses and of those with the most diverse needs.

But there is also need for a point of reference. Following the example of the Youth Appraisal of '88, Valdocco and Colle Don Bosco have come to serve as significant rallying points and can offer new opportunities to come together, to exchange ideas and to grow spiritually.

In terms of new approaches, we also come across two important presences among the young that respond to their feelings and needs, viz. the centres of spirituality that meet their need for spiritual guidance and



the houses for young people in difficulty that are a manifestation of the Salesian concern for the least among the young, the marginalized.

Such presences catch the eye because there are not many of them in the provinces and the creative way in which they are organized tends to make of them centres to which the young flock together and in which adults are willing to collaborate. They serve as a stimulus to renewal for the whole province.

#### 4. Two "forms" of presence among the young

With the increase of our involvement in new areas of work, one can see emerging even more clearly in the provincial communities two forms of carrying out youth pastoral work, even if they are not necessarily opposed to each other: they are different in programme and style and also in the manner of approach and the way they offer "substance."

One of the two forms concern youth pastoral work in and through institutions like the school, the oratory, the boarding, the parish, ... The other instead pays special attention to the associations and movements among the young in the form of recreational, cultural, apostolic, vocation and missionary groups; associations having a Salesian inspiration or forming part of different movements; and the Salesian Youth Movement. This is a reality that is taking shape also in the not so clearly defined ways in which youth come together, such as centres of spirituality, communities for young people in difficulty, educational and vocation orientation services, and the new forms of solidarity among youth.

This form of youth pastoral work is marked by a greater freedom of action and is based on a capacity for pastoral initiative. It makes greater use of the possibilities of communication than the stability of a physical environment. Further, it cultivates a basic linkage among different realities, concretizing it and making it visible in a common educative and spiritual programme. Its core themes are the revitalization of an apostolic spirit among the young and a reflection on the Salesian Youth Movement. In this form of youth pastoral work, it is relatively easier to draw up suitable educational programmes and the help young people mature into animators, as we are aware that the journey we have to undertake together lies in their hands. In fact, a distinct advantage lies in the spontaneity of relationships and the freedom to belong to a group. The basic common denominator lies in sharing and building up an experience of life together, in tracing out specific programmes of human and Christian growth and in involving everyone responsibly.

In the other form of youth pastoral work, one is more aware of being part of an "established" reality which has norms that have been handed down and consolidated. Here a continuity in time and a certain coherence of various elements is possible. However, not so evident in the realization that one ought to have an experience of life. The greater part of the educational activities is carried out within an institutional framework (things to be learned, a job to be done, various initiatives...), in a community with a fixed structure (schoolmates, a teaching body, a catechetical group ...) and with formation curricula that have often been laid down in advance. In short, we are dealing here with a kind of youth pastoral work that is situated within an institution that is led by its own laws and purposes; these have to be safeguarded at all costs and are not easily amenable to the needs and requirements of the young.

Even if on the ideal level, it is accepted that these two forms can be integrated and complementary, the fact remains that in actual practice there exists a tension between the justification and the concrete effectiveness of each of these two forms in attaining educational and pastoral objectives ....

Such a tension also exists with regard to future developments in the two fields, and even when many and the best of energies are employed in them. Consequently, one notices in reality a clear separation of the two forms, and because of this they are not able to mutually complement each other. Often too the confreres do not feel they are represented and paid attention to in a fair way by the provincial structures of pastoral animation, or for that matter even entrusted with responsibility in the same animation structures.

#### 5. A sense of discomfort

The youth problem as a whole occupies the forefront of the preoccupations of Salesians and notwithstanding some of their positive approaches and activities, the youth world with the new elements

it brings remains a problem for them. In fact, faced with it, apart from the sensitivity or intuitions of certain individuals, our communities in general experience a sense of disorientation. They generally feel unequal to the task and are not able both to devise an effective response to the substance of the actual questions in the educational field and to get on to the wavelength of the culture and language of the young. Thus, on the one hand, we seem to be seeing a certain fall in educational competence, as the generations that were formed in bygone years fail to keep pace with the changing situations, and the young educators as well struggle to meet the needs of the youth world because of the complexity of the situation and because of their limited educational experience.

On the other hand, the new developments in youth culture and language defy easy interpretation by those communities which tend to reproduce their current experiences and methods rather than try out new ones.

Thus, the desire to educate on the part of educators and expectations of the young do not meet in a way that could allow for a fruitful dialogue and consequently gratifying educational results for the educator.

This disorientation is seen especially with regard to the communication of the faith. There are far less possibilities, both in time and in space, for a continual presence among the young. The task of educating them to the faith has often to start once again from the basics as there are not a few young people who show serious gaps in their formation. There are fewer chances of explicitly presenting the faith and all the while a religious emptiness keeps on growing in the hearts and minds of the young. To make headway in such a situation, therefore, we need to create communities that attract and provide the young with considerable orientation to enable them to handle the many stimuli coming to them from every side. But, many communities are not prepared for this and find it difficult to be reference-points for the young in the matter of values, and particularly of the faith.

Further, in areas of widespread secularization, one has the distinct impression of our educative effectiveness being very poor. Our presentation of the faith seems to be passing over the heads of most of our young people, even in our own Houses. No doubt, these difficulties derive from a background of separation of faith from life, as a result of which there is a religious indifference. But, when our Salesian communities examine themselves on the efficacy of their own work of education to the faith, they admit that they are not able to get a grip on the situation and above all to meet expectations adequately.

## V

### FUTURE COURSES OF ACTION

From a consideration of the youth problem in its evolution and present reality and of how the Church and the Congregation have faced up to it, there derive intuitions, guidelines and elements of a response that need to be appreciated and developed.

We shall now underline some of them which seem particularly important in the new phase we are about to begin with GC 2:

#### 1. Go back to the young, to the plan and to the community

The first course of action is to make the right choice, viz. to increase our presence among the young rather than scatter our forces in too many fields. The youth problem ought to spur us on to devise new initiatives for the 15-25 age group. Because of the various kinds of situations in which young people live, it should be possible to have a variety of presences and diversified programmes (to be carried out with the help of specifically competent persons) both within our traditional structures and in our new forms of presence and action, that is to say, in our schools and professional training institutes, oratories, care for the different forms of marginalized youth, youth migration, volunteer work in education and on the missions, conscientious objection, apostolic and cultural youth movements, social communication, youth tourism and spirituality centres.

It is difficult today to be considered and to really be educators of youth to the faith while remaining on the margins of the world of the young or not bothering about the deeper experiences they would like to have. A community will acquire a total competence in this field only if it is actively present in the various areas in which youth are searching or experiencing difficulty.

To choose the right type of activity, there is need of a continuous sensitivity to the evolution of the youth condition and the requirements of the young and of the neighbourhood. Just as in the past twenty years we have witnessed the lengthening of the period of adolescence and the appearance of unexpected forms of poverty and of education, so too in the future will there arise new phenomena, which for that matter are already visible on the horizon. In order to forge an adequate response to these emerging needs, there is an instrument that has become indispensable at provincial and local level, viz. the educational and pastoral plan (R 4 -9). It would be a mistake not to bother about it because of the difficulties encountered or because of certain stagnant situations. The plan continues to be a necessary tool to shape our initiatives and interventions, and to improve what we impart to the young and our whole scheme of action. In particular, the orientations that will be given by GC 23 ought to find a proper place in our Educational and Pastoral Plan.

The moving spirit behind the drawing up of the Plan is the educative and pastoral community, this "new subject" responsible for education and pastoral work that has emerged in recent years. No effort ought to be spared to improve its internal functioning and external operation. As a responsible subject, the community, consisting to a great extent of laypeople, creates an environment teeming with initiatives to involve the young, especially the bigger ones among them. The laypeople have their own specific contribution to make, while the Salesians as a body have to take in hand the work of animating, orientating the work of education and providing on-going formation. If the community outlook were to be lost sight of or if it were to be emptied of any practical significance in reality in order to leave everything to the initiative of individuals, we would be diminishing one of the traits of our charism, lessening the efficacy of our action on the young and stalling the progress made in the last few years. That is why we have continual need of suggestions and orientations to develop the educative community even more.

Finally, such a community must take its proper place in locality or neighbourhood. It is in the locality that the various channels and forms of human communication are employed in order to create communion and solidarity. Hence, we are not to consider any initiative of education to the faith as a "service" to individuals, but rather as a presence and witness, in so far as the growth of individuals is linked with the cultural and evangelical development of the environment (CF.C 33).

## 2. Pay attention to the quality of our educative and pastoral work.

A glance at the road we have travelled since 1970 seems to show that our development has taken place mainly in terms of the extension of our works. This was something that became necessary because of the new frontiers that opened up for missionary work, as well as the emerging social needs of youth and the addition of lay forces in our institutions. Thus, every single work has been enlarged and almost all the provinces have multiplied the number of their works. We were hoping that the "novelty" of launching out into hitherto unexplored fields would serve to stimulate our energies and enthusiasm for the Salesian mission. And that, in effect, is what has happened.

But all too often such an expansion of our works has ended up producing a certain diminishment of our communities, in so far as they have become weakened and overburdened by organizational and management responsibilities. And above all, it has not regenerated our forces, as we expected.

One of our future courses of action, then, is to prefer to concentrate on improving the quality of our work, without however falling into a kind of elitism. In not a few sectors of our complex society today; quality is seen as a condition to create meaningfulness and to generate quantity.

To focus all our energies and animating efforts on quality means:

- considering insufficient the level of first contacts with those for whom we work or the purely administrative way of running our institutions. What happens in fact is that in the medium and

long term, we are prevented from developing more intense ways of evangelizing either because of our personnel and their collocation or because we relate very poorly to the needs of the young;

- concentrating our efforts on the objective of growth as a person and education to the faith. This means dedicating time and resources to follow up persons and groups systematically, according to the level they have attained, and so going beyond just giving a general attention to the whole group;
- showing particular concern for the Christian and professional growth of our collaborators, animators and educators by conducting appropriate programmes and giving them more elbow room to exercise responsibility;
- offering opportunities to our confreres to become experts in pastoral work so that they feel the urgency and the joy of helping our charges to make progress and do not stop at merely repeating age-old formulas;
- applying ourselves to devise an original and appropriate response to the different needs of our youth in the new contexts of our mission and so avoiding the blind borrowing of "models" from other contexts;
- drawing up plans for the pedagogical and pastoral competence of our personnel, so that they are able to interpret and orientate the growth of persons, groups and communities (what we call "discernment") with the help of suitable programmes and initiatives;
- being able in every one of our works to raise and accompany vocations to the priesthood, to religious life and to the Salesian Family.

### 3. Give consistency to the local Salesian community

The quality of our educative and pastoral work requires a certain quantitative and qualitative consistency of the Salesian community. All the suggestions for improving methods, activities and programmes inevitably come up against the actual possibilities of a community. The proliferation of our works and the decrease in personnel have reduced the number of confreres to the barest minimum necessary to meet the needs of the work.

If it is true that the ideal is not to have too many in a community, still to go below a certain number is to risk being unable to have sufficient impact. Hence the norm established by art. 150 of the General Regulations has to be seriously taken as a criterion.

But, consistency is to be also and principally understood in a qualitative sense. The group of Salesians must, according to the particular nature of the work, be able to authoritatively animate the wider community in its entirety towards the objective of growing in the faith. For this, there is need of competent persons, and their competence should be availed of. An institution that wishes to launch activities in the educational field today and keep them going, must see to providing regularly all that is required.

It follows then that we need a programme of formation that not only prepares the confreres for pastoral work in a general way but also qualifies them for specific areas. Such a programme would have to ensure continuity in the effort at qualification and in the proper integration of the different kinds of competence. We do not have as yet a perfect correlation between the pastoral plans of the Congregation and the programmes of study and formation.

Finally, consistency applies also to the style of community functioning. Some functions, like that of animation, are assumed and carried out by the community as a whole, no doubt with the help of specific roles. Precisely for this reason-the wider educative community should see the role of the religious community within it as one that goes beyond merely organizing framework for action but that manifests instead its own radical and religious commitment.

At the heart of the apostolic community lies spirituality, not as an aspect having nothing to do with the work of education, but as its source and motivation. There is a danger in fact that, perhaps out of a desire for an immediate spiritual renewal or for reasons of research in the educational field, the relaunching of spirituality among Salesians may remain as something apart from their educational work, thus giving rise to a gap between educational competence and pastoral commitment. This is what makes the basic integration of the two aspects difficult.

#### 4. Deepen the key-points of the faith-experience

In today's world it is becoming more and more difficult to motivate and justify the Christian faith. Several of its elements, seen not only as "doctrine" but also as a practical attitude towards life, create problems.

Our striving for quality calls us to evaluate our way of "announcing, presenting and teaching" the faith and its effects in the different areas of human, personal, family and social life.

In the last few years, we have reflected and worked sufficiently on the role of the community, on the areas of action (education, communication, pastoral work), on concrete ways means (CF. GC 21) and on methodologies; in a word, on the preventive system. On occasions, theological frames of reference and motivations have been presented side by side with descriptions of socio-cultural situations. What we have taken for granted all along are the fundamental elements of the Christian experience ' which remain always a typical and differentiated.

In the light of the socio-cultural evolution described above and in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, both the understanding and the actualization of the Christian dimension have undergone considerable renewal. Evidence of this is seen in the catechisms prepared by various countries and for different ages. But what creates problems is not so much this or that religious practice, this or that "truth," as the very faith commitment itself and the religious meaning of existence. Some nuclei of traditional doctrine have practically ceased to be central truths anymore, even if they are not denied. Others are now frequently repeated and sought to be transposed in new contexts, language and practical applications. Themes about man are coming to the forefront; in them, faith as a personal commitment appears meaningful, not so much for what it says about God, as what it says and does with regard to man and his destiny in the light of the Christ-event.

It is quite possible that the insistence on the fundamental truths alone and the effort to create a new synthesis in order to win over persons could have caused some doctrinal voids, limitations and deficiencies in an organic presentation of the Christian mystery. Nevertheless, such a presentation cannot be corrected and integrated by simply patching together some formulas, or pointing to precepts and outdated practices, because what is at stake is precisely the fusing together of a person's life, his culture and the faith.

It is useful therefore to go over everything once again in the light of the reflection that has matured in the Church (Cf. The General Catechetical Directory, *Evangelii Nuntianti, Catechesi Tradendae*) in order to work out a balanced appraisal and formulate a basic "programme" that can be referred to, without of course by passing the accentuations typical of each context (Latin America, Africa, Asia). Such a programme must be suited not only to those who have grown up in the faith, but above all to those who are considered to be far away from the faith or have yet to take the first steps.

Consequently, our attention is directed in the first place to the one who lives the faith and therefore to the type of genuine and complete man we wish to build. The tendency today is to favour the individual's growth in the faith and ignore the community through which it is mediated and the normative value of the "deposit of faith." Moreover, in the very growth in the faith, preference is accorded to the "emotional and existential," and at times the operational aspect. There is no doubt that we have to recover today the total response in which the Christian message is addressed to the intelligence as truths be known and deepened, to the will as a good to be accepted and loved, to conscience as a decision to be made, and to interpersonal relations as a social world to be built up.

But precisely in order to promote in the young person of today maturity and completeness of the faith, we feel the need of re-organizing in a communicable manner the presentation of the mystery of Christ; in His light will he come to see his on condition and assume a coherent line of action for his own salvation and that of humanity. And this kind of presentation ought to take into a count that we are at a moment when people are restive and diffident about explanations which are "certain and "total."

In carrying out this task, we have to identify ethics, culture and spirituality as the three areas that need to be thought out. The first area concerns the encounter between a person's conscience and the demands flowing from his destiny. To educate a person's conscience means to enable him to discern what is "right" and so to direct him to his fulfilment. This is the field in which many conflicts are taking place at the present moment, and therefore it is the pivotal point of real education today. And it is on the basis of his conscience that a person defines his responsibility to himself and to his future.

Next, the area of culture is concerned with the rational effort of a person to organize his existence according to the dictates of his conscience in the most diverse aspects of his life. It is therefore a testing-ground for faith, hope and charity and at the same time for their impact on our life with others.

Lastly, spirituality consists in perceiving the mystery of God and of man, the mystery of transcendence and its expressions in the light of the event of Jesus Christ. It is to give shape to one's life, taking inspiration from the values and motivations of the Gospel and making some practical life- decisions.

These three aspects are complementary to each other and develop together.

Such a rethinking of these areas ought to take place in an eminently existential manner, shunning formulations which are clichés, making use of catechetical and pastoral rather than purely theological language, and treasuring whatever has already stood the test.

It therefore requires in the first place that we identify some nuclei and place them in a hierarchical order of importance, following the principle enunciated by the General Catechetical Directory, n. 43: "The following is the hierarchy of truths to be observed in catechesis: the mystery of God, the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the Holy Spirit present in the Church, the mystery of the Church." Such an arrangement of the nuclei ought to be done as a response to the secularized and pluralist environment in which the young lie today.

But, beyond these nuclei which set before us truths to illumine our lives, we ought to take care to use appropriate language so that the proclamation becomes good news and something meaningful for the man of today, affecting the decisive elements of his personal and collective existence. It is not primarily a matter of words, but rather of existential connotations that conform to today's anthropological sensitivity. Every word of proclamation contains a Christological meaning, that is, an announcement of Christ and of God; but at the same time, it contains an existential element, that is to say, it says something real about the salvation and happiness of man. It also has an indispensable historical significance - without which it would remain "abstract" for it indicates "whither and how" human history is to be transformed. Finally, it possesses an eschatological dimension, for it reveals man's final destiny and the conditions to achieve it. Should any one of these meanings or aspects be ignored, the "word," the proclamation, the truths remain partially silent.

To this presentation of the nuclei and their meaning we must add the careful attention that the young ought to pay to learn the "daily" practice of their faith. These could be moments of formation to a mentality of faith, the path of religious discipline, the meeting with the Lord in prayer and in the sacramental signs of the Church, and their engaging in service to their fellow-man. We have to identify the "experiences" and the "places" where all - this can be actualized. Evidently it is not a matter of our making recommendations to them but of offering them the most effective types of experiences (animation, volunteering, liturgy, spiritual direction) whereby the educator follows up their growth process and works towards goals.

##### 5. Make institutions adequate

What has been written so far leads us unavoidably to evaluate how adequate our institutions are not in the abstract, but in their real and actual possibilities to cope with the new requirements. No doubt, the first and most important criterion of evaluation should be the Salesian mission that is to be accomplished in its fullness. At the same time, however, we should not ignore the role institutions have in realizing the mission, otherwise we run the risk of creating a split between the goals and the actual opportunities to attain them.

To make institutions adequate means to reformulate their characteristic aims (Cf. school, oratory) and review their cultural and organizational norms so that these are applied by the community and do not remain written down in "documents" only.

It is of little use to enunciate educative and pastoral goals, to present "models" of animation, and to offer suitable experiences, if the norms governing the functioning of the work, either by force of habit or because of the internal structure and specific programmes (teaching, professional preparation, sport) do not grasp these goals and models and so let the mechanism of the institution run the usual way.

Adequacy is achieved by seriously linking together the goal to be attained with persons, times and possible actions, that is to say, reviewing the norms of living and working together. No doubt, the local community is responsible for adapting the functioning of the structures to the goals which have been formulated to secure a more conscious and intense education of young people to the faith. But the province must make such an exercise of responsibility possible, by making and reviewing the choices of a general nature. It must express itself on the type, the dimensions and the collocation of the works; it must consider the personnel available and place them appropriately in the communities to provide for a better education to the faith.

## N O T E

The following pages are only meant to serve as a help to understand the development of youth pastoral work in the Congregation over the last 25 years, taking into account the evolution of the youth world and the efforts of the Church, and in view of the new orientations that will be given by the 23rd General Chapter.

The presentation given here is deliberately synthetic. It does not pretend to cover every positive and negative aspect of Salesian youth pastoral work. Instead, it concentrates on some "crunch points."

The choice of these "crunch points" is not arbitrary. It is the fruit of a reflection on the documents of the 19th, 20th, 21st and 22nd General Chapters, a re-reading of the reports on the state of the Congregation presented by the Rectors-Major to the General Chapters, a synthesis of the various partial studies conducted by the Department for the Youth Apostolate in the last ten years, and an examination of the several reports made by the Regions during the Team Visits.

There is a preoccupation underlying these pages, and it is this: to make the new proposals concerning education to the faith part and parcel of the organic vision and operative framework of the Salesian apostolate that has been built up with considerable effort in recent years.

With this end in view, these considerations are offered to all those who are responsible for drawing up and applying the deliberations of GC 23.

Fr. John E. Vecchi  
General Councillor for the Youth Apostolate