

The Salesian Family in the Church

Art. 1. The charismatic and spiritual experience of the Founder

With humble and joyful gratitude, we acknowledge that Don Bosco, by the initiative of God and the maternal mediation of Mary, gave rise in the Church to a singular experience of evangelical life.

The Spirit shaped in him a heart filled with a great love for God and for his brothers and sisters, in particular the little ones and the poor, and in this way made him Father and Teacher of a multitude of young people as well as the Founder of a vast spiritual and apostolic Family.

Pastoral charity which found in the Good Shepherd its source and model was for Don Bosco a constant inspiration in his work as educator and evangeliser, guiding his life, his prayer and his missionary zeal. In choosing the motto *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle* he wanted to express his passion for God and for the young, ready for any sacrifice in order to carry out the mission he saw in his dream at the age of nine.

In order to respond to the needs of the youth and the ordinary people of his time, in 1841 he founded the Oratory, which he conceived as a large family of boys, and established the Pious Society of Saint Francis de Sales, which he wanted to be a vital part of the Church, which recognised in the Supreme Pontiff its centre of unity.

His meeting with Mary Domenica Mazzarello in 1864 persuaded him to extend the educational frontiers to include girls; for this reason, with her in 1872 he founded the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, dedicated to a work of education conducted with his spirit but given a feminine interpretation by the Saint of Mornese.

Don Bosco also had contact with many Catholic men and women in various ways dedicated to the good of youth, to the defence and strengthening of the faith among the ordinary people; with them he experienced the strength and the effectiveness of working in a united manner. In this way the Association of the Salesian Cooperators came into being, committed to carrying out in their families in the Christian

communities to which they belonged, and in society, a shared apostolate for the young, the ordinary people and the missions, animated by the spirit of Valdocco.

Don Bosco dedicated time, energy, formative and organisational commitment to the founding of these three first Groups. While recognising their different fields of action, he was always convinced that the apostolic strength of the whole Family would depend on its unity of purpose, of spirit, of method and style of education. The sign and guarantee of this unity were the juridical links of the FMAs and of the Cooperators with the Salesian Congregation, and in particular with its superior, the Rector Major.

From Don Bosco also came into being the Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians (today the "Association of Mary Help of Christians") to promote veneration for the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Around Don Bosco the first Past Pupils also began to gather.

Art. 2. The development of the Family

On account of his stature as "a great man with a charism"¹ and as a saint, Don Bosco takes his place in a singular manner among the founders of institutes of consecrated life, religious and secular, and of apostolic lay associations in the Church. To our amazement and gratitude, in fact, that first seed has grown to become a flourishing tree.

To the first four groups founded by him, numerous other groups have been added in the course of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the new millennium. From the founder some of his spiritual sons have drawn inspiration and guidance in order to give life in the different continents and in various social-cultural contexts to new groups, sometimes begun in collaboration with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and with the support of the Salesian Cooperators and the friends of the Salesian work.

Many of these groups have been officially recognised as belonging for various reasons to the Salesian Family. While having specific vocations, they recognise in Don Bosco the common "Patriarch", they

¹ ASGC 7.

feel themselves animated by his spirit, which they live out according to their own characteristics, and they find themselves with the common mission of serving the young, the poor, those suffering, as well as those people not yet evangelised.

Other groups are in the process of moving towards a possible aggregation to this one large Family as a significant sign of the perennial vitality of the Church.

In the implementation of the renewal promoted by Vatican Council II, the awareness of belonging to the single spiritual and apostolic Family has grown more and more; the animating role of the Salesians has been clarified, re-affirming the Rector Major as the essential point of reference; exchanges between the groups have been fostered, arriving at an ever more fraternal communion and a sharing which is increasingly convinced of both the formation plan and the missionary activity.

Art. 3. Institutional structure

The term *family* describes the link which connects the various groups, though in different degrees. It is not simply a matter of closeness or of friendly rapport, but the formal expression of a communion that is interior, charismatic and spiritual; it helps, therefore, to explain the different levels of belonging to the Salesian Family.

This belonging draws on a *common spirit* which is the foundation of the mission inspired by the charism of Don Bosco, while respecting the *particular and specific characteristics* of each group. This demands a wise process of discernment that can lead to official recognition.

Therefore, there are different levels of belonging. The first is that enjoyed by the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Cooperators and the members of the Association of Mary Help of Christians: these are the first four groups established by Don Bosco and the direct heirs to his work. To these all the other groups need to

refer and make comparisons as regards the spirit, field of mission, and methodology of pedagogical and apostolic activity.

A second level of belonging is that of the numerous groups of consecrated life, both religious and secular, as well as some Catholic associations which have come into being through the creative efforts of some of Don Bosco's sons. They enrich with their particular charismatic and spiritual forms of expression the common patrimony of the Family.

A third level, finally, is constituted by *particular titles to membership* constituted by the circle of people who form part of the vast *Salesian Movement* and find in the Salesian Family their animating nucleus. This is formed by the Friends of Don Bosco, by the Salesian Youth Movement and more in general, by Salesian volunteer social service and by an extensive category of men and women educators, catechists, adult professionals, sympathetic politicians, co-workers, even those belonging to different religions and cultures, who are working in the six continents. The juridical title to belong is conferred by the official letter of recognition which the Rector Major sends in reply to the request made by the individual groups.

Art. 4. Unity and diversity

The Salesian Family of Don Bosco is a charismatic and spiritual community comprising different groups, officially established and recognised, linked together by ties of spiritual relationship and apostolic affinity.

These communities are formed by diversity of *types*. They are: the difference of gender, male and female; the specific, distinct vocations; the different ministries exercised in the service of the people of God; the distinct forms of life as male or female religious, consecrated lay men and women, male and female Christians who are celibate or joined in matrimony; the plan of Salesian life proper to each group and codified in the respective Statutes; the great variety of social, cultural, religious and ecclesial contexts in which these various groups live and work.

Unity is nourished by the common baptismal consecration by which all are drawn into the mystery of the Trinity and in communion with the Church; by participation in the Salesian mission at the service of the young and the poor and for the promotion of a new Christian humanism; by a new sense of citizenship and solidarity on a global scale; by sharing the spirit of Don Bosco; by the exchange of spiritual gifts within the Family; by a common reference to Mary Help of Christians and to Don Bosco, their holy Founder or Patriarch; by the special link with the Rector Major, the successor of Don Bosco.

Art. 5. The mystery of the Trinity, the source of communion

The apostolic Family of Don Bosco is first and foremost a charismatic Family, that is to say, a gift of the Spirit to the Church in view of a mission (see 1 Cor 12:1.4-6); its truest and deepest roots, in fact, are to be found in the mystery of the Trinity, in other words, in that infinite love that unites the Father, the Son and the Spirit, source, model and goal of every human family.

If that is its origin, the members of the Salesian Family recognise in their lives the primacy of communion with God. This is the heart of Salesian *mysticism*.²

This communion with the Trinitarian God is appropriately codified in the constitutional texts of the individual groups.

Reference to *God the Father* inspires and motivates the members and the groups of the Salesian Family to welcome each other as brothers and sisters because every individual is loved by Him and called by Him to collaborate in the vast field of the Salesian mission; it is an invitation to overcome any fears, reservations or doubts, and to appreciate what each one can give and succeeds in giving.

Reference to *Jesus, Apostle of the Father*, sent especially to the little ones, the poor and the sick, motivates every group to highlight one or the other of his features: Jesus the child or the adolescent; the hidden life of Jesus at Nazareth; Jesus obedient, poor and chaste; as the good Samaritan; Jesus the Good Shepherd who blesses the children and gathers disciples, men and women, around him; the Christ who on the

² See Egidio Viganò, "Closing Address," in *Atti del Convegno di studio sulla Animazione della Famiglia Salesiana (Rome 1980)*, p. 56.

cross shows his merciful love, as a victim offered in sacrifice; the risen Lord, the first fruits and hope of those risen from the dead (see 1 Cor 15: 20). The Salesian Family aims in this way to re-live all the attitudes and the life of the Lord Jesus, differentiating its services for the benefit of those to whom the individual groups are sent.

The reference to the *Holy Spirit* relates to the fruitfulness of our Family since it is the Spirit who in raising up Don Bosco the Founder gave him a spiritual posterity; in this way the particular groups came into being through the work of the different founders, all of them, however, linked to Don Bosco as their Patriarch.³

The Spirit, therefore, is prompting everyone to appreciate the diversity of charisms and the multiplicity of the forces present in Christian communities, and to know how to recognise His presence in people's consciences, even those outside the boundaries of the Church,⁴ and to establish intelligent relationships of dialogue and collaboration with all people of good will.

Art. 6. In communion with the Church

The Spirit of God distributes different charisms to the faithful "for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7), inserting them harmoniously into the life of the Church in view of its mission of the salvation of humanity.⁵

He is at the origin of a marvellous variety of groups of consecrated men and women who, while contributing effectively to the mission of the Church, enrich her with different gifts, manifesting in this God's manifold wisdom and making visible the characteristic marks of the Church herself: one, holy, catholic and apostolic.⁶

The Salesian Family consists of Christian men and women, consecrated men and women who with the individuality of their own charism and spirit, place themselves at the service of the mission of the Church,

³ See ASGC 171.

⁴ See GS 22e.

⁵ See LG 12b; AA 3c.

⁶ See PC 1b

especially in the vast world of youth, in working class areas, for the poor and for peoples not yet evangelised (*apostolicity*).

Living at the heart of the Church and carrying out the Salesian mission, it reflects the different gifts, unites together particular vocations within a single spiritual and apostolic Family, expresses communion between the various different ministries, all directed towards the service of the people of God (*catholicity*).

Being present in the local Churches, it fosters communion among its members and with the Successor of Peter, in this way re-living the devotion to the Pope handed down by Don Bosco (*unity*); it participates in their apostolic activity, offering its own particular contribution, especially in the area of the mission to the young and to the working classes; it promotes understanding and collaboration with other groups and institutions for an all-round education of the individual; it takes care of the vocational guidance of the young, educating them to the faith and setting them on the way to an apostolic commitment in the Church and for the world. In order to carry out their educational mission, the various groups make good use of the support of the past pupils, including those belonging to other religions or with different views of the world (*catholicity*).

The Family of Don Bosco, developing its characteristic spirituality of charismatic origin, enriches the whole Body of the Church with a model of Christian life all of its own⁷ (*holiness*). Bearing witness to this are the numerous ranks of the spiritual sons and daughters of Don Bosco already declared saints or proceeding along the path of beatification and canonisation.

Art. 7. For a new Christian humanism

The apostolic Family of Don Bosco is called *Salesian* because it is linked to Saint Francis de Sales, whom Don Bosco chose as his inspiration and patron, and with whose work and writings, he proposed that Christian humanism and that expression of charity which corresponded so well to his intimate aspirations.

⁷ See ASGC 159.

It is a humanism that does not ignore human weakness but is based on an unshakable confidence in the intrinsic goodness of the individual who is loved by God and by Him called to Christian perfection, in every state of life.

This humanism is a constitutive element of the charismatic and spiritual experience of the groups founded by Don Bosco, and as a precious inheritance has been made their own by the other groups which today are aggregated to the single Family.

The whole Salesian Family, therefore, enters into this large movement, offering to the Church an original contribution in the field of education and in apostolic work.

"Salesian" humanism for Don Bosco meant giving due weight to all that is positive in the life of individuals, in creation, and in the events of history. This led him to accept the genuine values present in the world, especially if pleasing to the young; to place himself in the flow of culture and of human development in his own times, encouraging the good and refusing to lament about the evil; wisely seeking the cooperation of many people, convinced that each one has gifts that need to be discovered, recognised and put to good use; believing in the power of education, which provides support for the young person's development, and encouraging him or her to become an upright citizen and a good Christian; and always and everywhere entrusting himself to the providence of God, perceived and loved as a Father.

With the founding of the groups which make up his Family, and with other apostolic initiatives, such as missionary expansion, Don Bosco intended to make his own contribution to the achievement of the program of a "Christian society" to be restored in the midst of the secularisation proper to the 19th century, or to be established in contexts not yet evangelised.

In creative fidelity to Don Bosco, the groups of the Salesian Family are committed to offering to today's society their own services, following the new guidelines promoted by Vatican Council II and subsequent official pontifical teaching regarding the relationship between the Church and other religions and with contemporary society, centred on

interreligious dialogue,⁸ on the defence of the dignity of the human person and of the family, on the promotion of justice and peace,⁹ on intercultural dialogue especially in multi-ethnic contexts, and on the safeguarding of creation.

Art. 8. The valuable contribution of women

The Salesian experience of the first groups and of those which subsequently arose came from and was enriched by the significant and effective contribution of a number of women.

It is recognised that Don Bosco, in drawing up the Preventive System and in creating the family atmosphere that was evident at Valdocco, received a significant contribution from Mamma Margaret.

Nor can we forget Mary Domenica Mazzarello, who knew how to translate into feminine terms the experience of Don Bosco, giving it a practical and original face in both the spiritual life and the educational and apostolic life, which is the real inheritance of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The first Don Bosco Volunteers, guided by Fr. Philip Rinaldi, introduced the feminine consecrated secular state into the Salesian Family: united among themselves by the spiritual ties of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, they carried out the common Salesian mission in the contexts of the family and the daily work place.

At the start of almost all of the new groups of consecrated persons in the Salesian Family which arose in the 20th century, we find a small group of Christians, generally of humble condition and already in various ways dedicated to apostolic works, who nurture an ideal of consecrated life and, guided by a bishop or by a Salesian priest, give life to and develop new foundations.

In the last decades of the 20th century, a consideration of the rightful place of woman in the various continents, has led the groups of the Salesian Family, and in a special way the religious congregations, the female secular institutes and the Salesian associations of the laity to reflect on a due appreciation of the contribution of the feminine intuition

⁸ See LG 16; NAe 2-5.

⁹ See GS 77-93.

in our world, following the guidelines, in many aspects innovative, of the teaching of St. Pope John Paul II.¹⁰

Art. 9. For new forms of solidarity

The current phenomenon of globalisation has increased interdependence between individuals and peoples in the economic, cultural, political and religious spheres; the opportunities are clearly to be seen, but so too the danger of its turning into those forms of domination which cause new kinds of poverty and increase marginalisation; none the less there is another way of thinking about globalisation, that of *solidarity* inspired and guided by Gospel values.

“This, then, is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”.¹¹

The groups of the Salesian Family are engaged in exercising this solidarity through a variety of educational and apostolic activities:

1. Education, which is the highest form of solidarity, if understood and carried out according to the criteria suggested by the Salesian mission. Today we could define it as the “ethics of being neighbour”, that is: personalized interventions, relationships of friendship and trust, listening to the deepest expectations of the young and the poor, identifying possible and effective responses, faithful accompaniment.
2. Civil, social and missionary voluntary work, which today is very widespread among young people and adults, can be for some an authentic vocation, since it requires the availability of energy and time; it puts people in contact with concrete problems, it commits them to support promotional initiatives, it invites them to exercise co-responsibility, it urges them to educate themselves in gift and service.

¹⁰ See MD 20 21 28-31; VC 57-58.

¹¹ See SRS 38.

3. The social and political commitment, implemented above all by groups of secular members, according to the criteria expressed by the Magisterium of the Church. We read in *Gaudium et Spes*: "The Church praises and esteems the work of those who for the good of men devote themselves to the service of the state and take on the burdens of this office" (GS 75); and in *Christifideles Laici*: "The lay faithful cannot in any way withdraw from participation in 'politics', that is to say, in the manifold and varied economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural action designed to promote the common good organically and institutionally".

Art. 10. Exchange of gifts

As heirs to the Salesian charism and spirit, the groups establish among themselves a very close relationship so that each group expresses the identity of the Salesian Family, but not without reference to the others. In fact, entering a group in virtue of a specific vocation means entering the whole Family; it is as though each one feels entrusted to the others in a mutual relationship.

It is then that the different members enable the Family to live the completeness of gifts and values, because in the various groups an emphasis can be seen of the particular spiritual features which are the common patrimony and which for this reason cannot be missing in any Salesian heart. The communion of the Family places these at the disposal of everyone.

All this is for the benefit of the mission, since it makes it possible to undertake in a more adequate and effective manner the human development and Christian education of the young, of poor people, of the sick and of peoples not yet evangelised.

The relatively short history of the Salesian Family demonstrates that without real communion there is the danger of a progressive impoverishment of Don Bosco's project even to the extent of being unfaithful to it. The recognition that without the others the members of a particular group cannot be themselves - an awareness which ought

to be cultivated by all - inspires appropriate expressions and practical attitudes.

Art. 11. At home with Mary

From his childhood Don Bosco saw in Mary his Teacher and Mother, since that was how she had been pointed out to him by the Personage in his dream at the age of nine.

In his first educational undertaking, following the custom of the local Church, he entrusted his work to Our Lady of Consolation; the boys "poor and endangered" becoming aware of her protection and consolation.

Later, in communion with the Universal Church living through the experience of the definition of the Marian dogma, he proposed to them Mary Immaculate, presenting her as the teacher of their love and the powerful support of their human and Christian development.

Finally, having recognised that in the founding and development of his work "Mary has done everything", even in extraordinary ways, he dedicated the newly-born Congregation to the Virgin under the title Help of Christians.

Then, receiving from Mary the inspiration to found the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, he wanted it to be a "living monument" of his gratitude to the Help of Christians.¹² To her also he entrusted the Salesian Cooperators, so that in their apostolate they might be protected by and find inspiration in her. He also set up the Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians, linked to the sanctuary in Turin, as a sign of gratitude for the maternal presence of the Madonna in all his works.

This special reference to Mary has profoundly marked the charismatic and spiritual identity of the various groups of the Salesian Family which came into being during the 20th century. Some have even included her in the name by which they are officially recognised in the Church, such as the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and *Mary*, the Catechist Sisters of *Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians*, the Sisters Servants

¹² *FMA Const. Art. 1; cf. Angelo Amadei, BM X (New Rochelle: Salesiana, 1977), 265.*

of the *Immaculate Heart of Mary*, the Missionary Sisters of *Mary Help of Christians*, the Daughters of the Queenship of *Mary Immaculate*, the Sisters of *Maria Auxiliatrix*.

Although all the groups of the Salesian Family venerate Mary Help of Christians as their principal patroness, some refer to her presence with various titles to emphasise particular aspects of their apostolate.

Mary is considered not only as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians, but also as the Mother of all humanity, so that male and female co-workers of the various groups of the Salesian Family, also those belonging to other religions, cultivate a sincere devotion to her. With good reason, therefore, one can say that the Salesian Family is a *Marian Family*.

Art. 12. With reference to Don Bosco

The originator of a true school of apostolic spirituality, Don Bosco is the point of reference for all those who, responding to a particular impulse of the Spirit, feel themselves called to share his mission today in the various states of life and in the different forms of commitment.

This means that, belonging to the Salesian Family, they gather around him as the centre of unity. In fact, the founders of the groups which arose in the 20th century are all spiritual sons of Don Bosco, members of his Congregation. Their constant preoccupation was to carry out the vast mission in new contexts and with new apostolic forces, in which they had infused the spirit of their Father and Teacher. What links together the different groups and their members in a single Family is a kind of *spiritual relationship* with Don Bosco, due to the presence of the Spirit, the One who in the Church unites together those gifted with particular charisms.

It is a relationship that finds expression in the pastoral charity that is Don Bosco's. Apostolic passion was the spiritual energy that drove him to seek souls and serve God alone; it is a charity that filled hearts, minds and plans intended to expand and give stability to his work. For this reason he gathered around himself a variety of people; he coordinated

and harmonised the roles and manifold gifts as well as the different states of life and ministries.

Don Bosco found the source of all his strength in an interior life constantly open to a relationship with God. For us too, educative and apostolic love requires a practical and demanding form of interior life.

Art. 13. The Rector Major in the Salesian Family

Belonging to the apostolic Family of Don Bosco has its origin in communion and is nourished by communion. This consists in corresponding to the Spirit, who leads it towards unity, bringing into existence and giving practical and even official forms to it, so as to ensure an effective relationship and collaboration in activities.

Belonging to the Salesian Family, therefore, of necessity requires a vital centre which makes the reference to Don Bosco, the common mission and the same spirit, a reality.

This centre, according to the mind of Don Bosco, is the Rector Major. In him all recognise a threefold ministry of unity: successor of Don Bosco, common father, centre of unity for the entire Family. It falls within his official competence to admit to the Salesian Family the groups which request it, according to the pre-established criteria.

Since this is his mission, his duty is to offer the necessary guidelines to ensure the fruitfulness of the charism in each group of the Family. Through his example and teaching he constructs unity and ensures in the variety of the specific vocations, fidelity to the spirit and the coordination of certain initiatives. He exercises this ministry with the paternity which was Don Bosco's own: an approach that requires understanding and kindness, attention to the growth of each one, guidance in charismatic fidelity, commitment to the fruitfulness of the Salesian vocation in all its expressions, just as Don Bosco wrote: "Your Rector will have care of you and of your eternal salvation".