

## THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR IN COMMUNION AND COLLABORATION

«...walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called,  
with all humility and meekness, with patience,  
bearing with one another in love, careful to preserve  
the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...»  
(Eph. 4:1-3)

After having reminded the Christians of their new condition by merit of Christ's action, the apostle Paul begins his practical exhortation to the Churches of Asia Minor, giving it a particular tone. His language is not legalistic but encouraging: "I exhort you." With this invitation, he calls them to a conduct which is in conformity with the Call they have received. The first topic he tackles is *the unity of the Church*, indicating that this is the premise of every authentic relationship in Christian life. Unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, in unison with each person's effort: so Paul states, first of all, those attitudes in which the Christian must mature, listing three virtues and two behavior styles: detachment from every form of ambition (humility); maintenance of a sweet and amicable deportment (meekness); and, in imitation of God, a merciful response to evil for the sake of bringing back one's brother or sister (patience). Such virtues are realized in the loving *welcome* extended to one's neighbor and through concern to preserve and safeguard the bond which the Holy Spirit has generated among believers; i.e., *Peace*, the gift of the Risen Christ. (Eph. 2:11-18)

Paul takes up again his vision of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23) which has been called to give witness to the world of the Mystery of God's Will to save all mankind and in which the Spirit of the Risen One is active. (see Eph. 1:8-10) All believers have been called to this reality by their Baptism; it is not a sociological thing. The goodwill of individuals is not what unites believers: it is God the Father, in His Son, who reconciles "those who were once far off". The Ephesians knew very well just how "far off" they had been from God at one time! *Unity*, therefore, is a gift before it is anything else. It is a good which needs to be safeguarded and protected lest we despise the dignity with which we were clothed in our Baptism. This is what Article 21 of the *Statutes* reminds us: "*Their common apostolic vocation and membership in the same Association makes Salesian Cooperators spiritual brothers and sisters.*"

Christ has already ascended to the Glory of the Father. He has been given power over every cosmic sphere. This finds its historical earthly expression in His Body, in that Perfect Man, who testifies in history to the universal extent of His Dominion; therefore, the gifts of the Lord Who ascended into Heaven which have been offered to believers have a specific finality and purpose. This purpose is expressed in an original (and slightly daring) interpretation of Psalm 67/68. Alluding, perhaps, to Pentecost, Paul shows that the One Who has ascended into Heaven now enriches the Church with gifts which allow Her to live as both an earthly and a celestial reality at one and the same time. Christ's triumph over death bears a fecundity which concerns all created reality. He ascended above the heavens "to the fullness of all things." The riches of life which Christ has poured out on all have a universal and cosmic extension. The Church does not exhaust the fecundity of this salvific action but makes of it a sacrament: inasmuch as She is united to Christ, the Head, She, too, is called "His Body, the fullness of the One who is the perfect fulfillment of all things" (Eph. 1:23) but She is also invited to "grow in all things, tending to Him, Who is the Head, Christ."

## *United in one heart and one soul alone*

This ideal to which to strive still remains. Placing value on individuals is one of the great conquests of modernity. It has been understood that the person is not a number and that he or she is unrepeatable and has a right to a personal plan. This shows a propitious respect for intimacy and for making free decisions and has augmented dialogue and free, trusting exchange between persons. But sometimes this appreciation for individuality has degenerated into individualism and indifference. Individualists are persons who refuse whatever does not serve them or whatever they do not like. They do not put themselves out or commit to anyone or anything. They refuse to create bonds and their aversion to them is transformed into “an allergy” where commitments made by others are concerned. They find difficulty in sharing projects and plans; they want to take control and do it by themselves; they defend their own plans and ideas and make decisions alone.

Individualism is at the root of divisions within Communities and among peoples. We cannot call ourselves Christians unless we return to a Christianity which has a strong communal significance. It has already been a while that the virus of individualism risks "drying up" Christianity and the life of the Association as well. Freedom understood in this way does not leave room for getting involved in any common project but struggles to commit itself to the good of others. It is tempted to impress upon its relationships a utilitarian logic, centered on its own advantage. Individualism generates loneliness and isolation. The call to care for the following is strong in this chapter:

- communion and collaboration with the other Groups of the Salesian Family;
- the ministry of the Rector Major; and
- the apostolic service of the Delegates.