

VARIA
7

**IMPLANTATION
OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN ASIA**
Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results

edited by
Mathew Kapplikunnel

ASSOCIAZIONE
CULTORI
STORIA
SALESIANA

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**Acts of the Salesian History Seminar
East Asia - Oceania Region
Batulao (Manila), 24-28 November 2008**

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CONTENTS

Introduction	17
Abbreviations	27
Message of the Rector Major Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva	29
Message from Sr Grazia Loparco fma	33

PAPERS

Catholic Church and the Missions in the Twenty Years between the World Wars. Salesian Missionary Strategy

Francesco MOTTO	37
-----------------------	----

<i>Introduction</i>	37
---------------------------	----

I. THE CHURCH CONTEXT	38
-----------------------------	----

1. <i>The Catholic Church and the Missions between 1915 and 1930</i>	38
--	----

2. <i>The Catholic Church and the Missions in the Decade 1929-1939</i>	41
--	----

2.1. Documents and Some Events	41
--------------------------------------	----

2.2. A Catholic Thought on the Evolving Missions	41
--	----

2.3. Particular Mission Fields in Asia	43
--	----

II. SALESIAN ACTIVITY IN MISSION TERRITORIES IN THE DECADE AFTER THE BEATIFICATION OF DON BOSCO (1929-1939)	46
---	----

1. <i>Missionary Formation Houses – a Wealth of Aspirants, Yet not without Problems</i>	46
---	----

2. <i>Missionary Development under Fr Rinaldi and in the First Period under Fr Ricaldone: a Comparison</i>	49
--	----

2.1. Statistics for 1934	51
--------------------------------	----

6 Contents

3.	<i>Visit of Fr Berruti to Asia and his Impressions</i>	53
4.	<i>Approval of the Regulations in GC XIV</i>	56
5.	<i>Difficulty in Approving the Regulations on the part of the PF</i>	58
	<i>Conclusion</i>	61

General Background and the Expansion of the Salesian Work in the EAO Region in the 1950s

Gregorio BICOMONG	65
-------------------------	----

<i>Introduction</i>	65
---------------------------	----

1.	<i>General Background before the 1950s</i>	65
1.1	<i>Colonialism</i>	65
1.2	<i>Communism</i>	66
1.3	<i>The Second World War</i>	67
2.	<i>General Background in the 1950s</i>	68
2.1	<i>Independence from Colonialism</i>	68
2.2	<i>Colonial Association</i>	68
2.3	<i>Menace of Communism</i>	70
2.4	<i>Political Peace and Political Change</i>	72
2.5	<i>A Church in Transition</i>	73
2.6	<i>A Particular Need after WW II</i>	74
2.7	<i>Houses opened in 1940s, 1950s and 1960s</i>	76
	<i>Concluding Observations</i>	78

Growth of the Salesian Charism in the EAO Region: Religious Institutes Founded by Salesians

Nestor C. IMPELIDO	81
--------------------------	----

<i>Introduction</i>	81
---------------------------	----

1.	<i>Sisters Announcers of the Lord (=SAL)</i>	83
1.1.	<i>Bishop Luigi Versiglia and the "Vergini Indigeni"</i>	83
1.2.	<i>The Sisters Announcers of the Lord</i>	85
1.3.	<i>The Chronicle of the FMA of Hosai</i>	86
1.4.	<i>Founder but not Originator</i>	88
2.	<i>Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki</i>	91

2.1.	Fr Cavoli's Foundation	91
2.2.	The Kyugoin and Fr Antonio Cavoli	94
2.3.	Things started to happen	96
2.4.	The Kyugoin in its Chronicle (1933-1937)	98
3.	<i>The Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary</i>	104
3.1.	"Buone Figliuole"	104
3.2.	The Auxiliatrices	107
3.3.	Annual Reports	109
4.	<i>The Daughters of the Queenship of Mary</i>	112
4.1.	"Congregatio non grata"	112
4.2.	Requests to Leave	116
4.3.	The DQM, a Secular Institute	118
4.4.	"Return to Don Bosco"	118
	<i>Conclusion</i>	120

**Implantation of the Salesian Charism in China (1906-1936):
Ideals, Challenges, Answers and Results**

Carlo SOCOL	123	
<i>Introduction</i>	123	
1.	<i>Fr. Ignaz Canazei and Fr. Carlo Braga, the Will and the Heart</i>	126
2.	<i>The "Don Bosco System"</i>	130
3.	<i>A Change in Scenario</i>	135
4.	<i>Challenges at the Vigil of the 1927 Extraordinary Visitation</i>	139
5.	<i>Evaluation by Extraordinary Visitor Fr. P. Berruti in 1937 and the Test of Further Development and Policies</i>	144
5.1	The House of Formation	145
5.2	The Preventive system adapted to the local situation: Freedom of Religion, Catholics and pagans	147
5.3	The Oratory as Symbol of the Don Bosco System	149
5.4	Clash of Mentality and Methods in the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow	150
<i>Conclusions</i>	152	

**First 30 Years of the Implantation of the Salesian Charism
in the New Cultural Environment of the Kingdom of Siam**

Enrico DANIELI	155
<i>Introduction</i>	155
I. THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SITUATION IN THE KINGDOM OF SIAM IN THE PERIOD 1925-1960	155
1. <i>Brief History of the Kingdom before 1932</i>	155
2. <i>A Volatile Period (1932-1945)</i>	157
3. <i>Stability and Growth (1948-)</i>	159
4. <i>The Catholic Mission in Siam</i>	160
II. SALESIANS IN THE KINGDOM OF SIAM	161
1. <i>The Arrival of the Salesians</i>	161
2. <i>Goals and Challenges</i>	163
3. <i>Mission towards full Vicariate</i>	163
4. <i>The Work in the South</i>	165
5. <i>The Salesian Province of Siam</i>	166
6. <i>Ever-increasing Difficulties and Persecution</i>	168
7. <i>The Post-war Period (1946-1960)</i>	170
III. THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN THE MISSION	171
1. <i>Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians</i>	171
2. <i>St. John Bosco</i>	174
3. <i>Activities for the young</i>	175
4. <i>The Printing Press</i>	178
5. <i>The Schools</i>	181
5.1. <i>The Existing Schools</i>	182
5.2. <i>Salesian Work in the Schools</i>	183
5.3. <i>Other Achievements of the Salesians</i>	184
5.4. <i>Schools Opened in the Period 1946-1960</i>	185
<i>Conclusion</i>	186

Salesian Charism in Vietnam. 39 Years of Sowing and Growth in the Stormy History of the Country

John NGUYEN VAN TY 187

Prologue 187

Introduction 188

1.	<i>Brief History of Salesian Presence in Vietnam (1952-1991)</i>	190
1.1.	Arrival of the Salesians of Don Bosco	190
1.2.	Transplantation	191
1.3.	Growth	191
1.4.	Communist Revolution	193
1.5.	Strengthening Efforts	195
1.6.	Taking root in Silence	197
1.7.	Celebrations amidst Hardships	200
2.	<i>How the Salesian Charism was Implanted and Developed</i>	204
2.1.	Predilection for the Young	205
2.2.	Care of Vocations	208
2.3.	Work and Temperance	211
2.4.	Joyfulness and Optimism	213
2.5.	Creativity and Flexibility	216
2.6.	Family Spirit.....	218
2.7.	Community life	219
2.8.	Sense of the Church	223
2.9.	The Preventive System	225
2.10.	Prayer Life – Union with God	226
	<i>Conclusion</i>	228

Implantation of the Salesian Charism in India: Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results

Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL 231

Introduction 231

1. *Don Bosco Comes to India* 232

2.	<i>The Ideals</i>	236
2.1.	Trust in God	237
2.2.	Love for the Heart of Jesus	238
2.3.	Devotion to Mary Help of Christians	239
2.4.	Love and Attachment to Don Bosco and the Congregation	240
2.5.	Missionary Zeal	243
2.6.	Predilection for the Poor	244
3.	<i>Challenges, Answers, Results</i>	245
3.1.	Lack of Personnel	246
3.1.1	Answers	248
3.1.2	Results	253
3.2.	Insufficient Finance	255
3.2.1	Answers	257
3.2.2	Results	258
3.3.	Hardships of Missionary Life	259
3.3.1	Answers	261
3.3.2	Results	262
3.4.	Internal Differences	264
3.4.1	Answers	265
3.4.2	Results	266
3.5.	Difficulties Posed by World War II	268
3.5.1	Answers	270
3.5.2	Results	273
	<i>Conclusion</i>	276

Witness of Fidelity, Rich in Hope. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results of the First 30 Years of FMA in Thailand

Anna GRASSI - Teresa PHARKSUWAN 279

Introduction 279

1.	<i>An Overview of FMA History in Thailand</i>	282
1.1.	Term of Mother Luisa Vaschetti (1924-1943)	283
1.2.	Term of Mother Linda Lucotti (1943-1957)	283
1.3.	Term of Mother Angela Vespa (1958-1969)	284

2.	<i>Implantation of the Charism: Ideals and Challenges</i>	286
2.1.	As Women Consecrated to God: the Ideals	288
2.1.1	Life of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience	288
2.1.2	Practice of Christian Virtues	294
2.2.	The Challenges as Salesian Educators	302
3.	<i>Answers and Results</i>	310
3.1.	The Village of Bang Nok Khuek	310
3.2.	Banpong, the First FMA Institution in Thailand	311
3.3.	School for the Blind, Bangkok	312
3.4.	Haad-yai, the Third FMA Institution in Thailand	314
3.5.	Bangkok – Hostel and New Provincial Office	316
3.6.	Udonthani, the First FMA Presence in North-East Thailand	317
4.	<i>A Particular Instance of Sharing and Transmitting the Charism</i>	318
	<i>Conclusion</i>	319

Implantation of the FMA in Northeast India vis-à-vis the Service of Education: Ideals, Answers, Results

	Bernadette SANGMA	321
	<i>Introduction</i>	321
1.	<i>The FMA in Northeast India</i>	321
2.	<i>The Sources</i>	322
3.	<i>The Role of the FMA in the Field of Education</i>	327
4.	<i>Salient Features of the Style of Education</i>	329
4.1.	The Role of Religion	329
4.2.	Human Formation in Preparation for Adult Life	340
4.3.	Education to Cheerfulness	346
4.4.	Educational Continuity Offered to the Past Pupils	349
4.5.	Motherly Tenderness as a Distinctive Trait in Care and Relationships	352
4.6.	Some Aspects Regarding Culture and Beliefs	357
	<i>Concluding Observations</i>	361

COMMUNICATIONS

Implantation of the Salesian Charism in the Philippines in the First Thirty Years (1951-1981)

Remo BATTI.....	367
<i>Introduction</i>	367
1. <i>Origin of the Salesian Work in the Philippines</i>	368
2. <i>Challenges and Corresponding Answers</i>	369
2.1. <i>Socio-Political Situation</i>	369
2.2. <i>Educational Situation</i>	370
2.3. <i>Ecclesiastical Situation</i>	372
3. <i>Development and Expansion in the First Thirty Years</i>	374
4. <i>Results</i>	375
<i>Conclusion</i>	376

Implantation of the Salesian Charism in Japan. Reflections of Fr Cimatti on the Formation of Personnel *in loco*

Gaetano COMPRI	377
<i>Introduction</i>	377
1. <i>Two Letters of Fr Cimatti</i>	378
2. <i>The Text</i>	379
2.1. <i>Letter to Fr Pietro Ricaldone, Rector Major of the Salesians</i>	379
2.2. <i>Letter to Fr Pietro Berruti, Vicar of the Rector Major</i> .	387
<i>Conclusion</i>	396

Winding Road... Steady Steps. Salesian Charism in the First 30 Years of FMA in China

Laura CHAUPUI HAR	397
<i>Introduction</i>	397
1. <i>Background Briefing</i>	398
2. <i>Defining the Boundary</i>	399

3.	<i>Winding Road... Steady Steps</i>	399
3.1.	The Torn Yellow Earth, the Running Stream	399
3.2.	A Tale of Two Cities (non-fiction): Vicariate Apostolic of Shiu Cho – Shanghai	403
3.2.1	To Be or Not to Be	403
3.2.2	“Da mihi animas, cetera tolle”	404
	<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	408

Salesian Charism in SIHM’s Life and Mission in the Local Church

	Maliwan PARAMATHAWIROTE - Paranat PHENGPINIT	409
	<i>Introduction</i>	409
1.	<i>The Historical Context</i>	410
2.	<i>The Implantation of the Salesian charism in SIHM’s life</i>	411
2.1.	Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Founder	412
2.2.	Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Missionary	413
2.3.	Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Salesian	413
3.	<i>The Role of the Salesians of Don Bosco</i>	414
4.	<i>The Role of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians</i>	414
5.	<i>Absorbing the Salesian Charism from Life Experiences</i>	417
5.1.	Cooperation in the Foundation and Formation of the SIHM	417
5.2.	Devotion to the Eucharist and Solemn Liturgy	418
5.3.	Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus	419
5.4.	Filial Love to the Blessed Virgin Mary	419
5.5.	Contemplation in Action	420
5.6.	Family Spirit	420
6.	<i>The SIHM in the Local Church</i>	421
6.1.	Preparation for the Mission (1937-1938)	422
6.2.	Presence in the Local Church	423
6.3.	The First Perpetual Professions	424

7.	<i>The Mission after Bishop Gaetano Pasotti</i> <i>(1951-1957)</i>	424
	<i>Conclusion</i>	425

Nurturing of Vocations on the Journey of Implanting the Salesian Charism in the First 30 Years of the FMA in Vietnam
 Maria HOANG NGOC YEN - Maddalena NGO THI MINH CHAU ... 427

	<i>Introduction</i>	427
1.	<i>FMA in Vietnam: the First Period (1961-1975)</i>	428
1.1	The Challenges	430
1.1.1	Language, the Principal Difficulty	430
1.1.2	Cultural Differences	430
1.1.3	War, Uncertainty and Poverty	431
1.2.	Transmission of the Charism	432
1.2.1	Spiritual Foundations	432
1.2.2	Life in the Aspirantate and Family Spirit	432
2.	<i>The second Period (1975-1990)</i>	433
2.1.	Situation of the Institute after 1975	433
2.2.	The Challenges	434
2.3.	Formation and the Passing on of Charism	434
2.3.1	Through Everyday Life	434
2.3.2	Formative program for the Aspirants, Postulants, Novices	435
	<i>Conclusion</i>	437

Establishing the Salesian Charism in Japan in the Process of Founding the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki

Maria MUKAI YUMIKO

Introduction

1.	<i>The Missionary Work of the Salesians in the Field of Welfare Services</i>	440
2.	<i>The Process of Writing the First Constitutions of the SCM</i>	445
	<i>Conclusion</i>	449

Unity of Life in Fr Vincent Cimatti, Founder of the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki

Fiace PARK.....	451
<i>Introduction</i>	451
1. <i>The Ideals of Fr Cimatti</i>	451
2. <i>The Challenges of Work</i>	452
3. <i>The Response: Industriousness</i>	454
3.1. <i>Originating from Don Bosco</i>	454
3.2. <i>In the Spirit of St. Francis de Sales and Don Bosco</i>	457
3.3. <i>Correspondence to the Fulfilment of One's Duties</i>	457
3.4. <i>Characteristics</i>	458
3.5. <i>Spiritual Dimension</i>	459
<i>Conclusion</i>	460

The Seeds of Mornese in Timor. FMA Contribution to the Implantation of the Salesian Charism

Marivic SOMBERO	461
<i>Introduction</i>	461
1. <i>Brief Historical Background of East Timor</i>	462
2. <i>Religious Values of the Timorese</i>	463
3. <i>The FMA in East Timor-Indonesia</i>	465
4. <i>Opening of New Missionary Presences</i>	467
5. <i>FMA Communities in East Timor-Indonesia Today</i> ..	469
<i>Conclusion</i>	474
List of Participants	477
Seminar Time-Table	479
Evaluation of the Seminar	485
Index of Names of Persons	491
Index of Names of Places	498

INTRODUCTION

From 24 to 28 November 2008 there took place at Batulao, Manila (Philippines) the Second Seminar on Salesian History of the East Asia - Oceania (EAO) Region on the theme, "The Implantation of the Salesian Charism in the Region: Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results". This seminar, organized under the aegis of the ACSSA (*Associazione cultori storia salesiana*) is a sequel to the first one held four years ago in Hong Kong on "The Beginning of the Salesian Presence in East Asia".

The celebration of the Mass of the Holy Spirit, presided by Rev Fr Andrew Wong, the Regional of EAO, placed the entire proceedings under the protection of the Almighty. Rev Fr Eligio Cruz, Provincial of the Philippine Province of Manila, formally inaugurated the seminar. The Seminar, attended by 33 participants from 9 countries and consisting of SDBs, FMAs and members of two other Institutes founded by Salesians in the Region, saw this time also the participation of India. A total of 17 papers, made up of three key-note addresses, seven conferences and seven communications painted the diverse scenarios of implantation of the Salesian charism in the extremely varied cultural, social, political and religious setting of the different countries of Asia and threw light on the challenges the missionaries encountered, the solutions they devised to surmount these and the final outcomes.

On the first day the three keynote addresses by Fr Francesco Motto, Fr Gregorio Bicomong and Fr Nestor Impelido on the missionary stance of the Church and the Congregation during the twenty years between the two World Wars, on the general background and Salesian expansion in the pre and post 1950's and on the foundation of the local religious congregations by Salesians respectively, provided the

background setting for studying the theme earmarked for the Seminar. Presentation of two papers on the implantation of the Salesian charism in China and in India by Fr Carlo Socol and Fr Mathew Kapplikunnel respectively, and the contribution of Fr Gaetano Compri on the perceptions of Fr Cimatti on vital issues related to the implantation of the Salesian charism in Japan completed the input for the first day. On the second day two papers were on the implantation of the Salesian charism in Thailand by Fr Enrico Danieli and in Vietnam by Fr John Ty. Two others dealt with the contribution of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in planting the Salesian charism in Thailand by Srs Anna Grassi and Teresa Pharsuwan, and in North East India by Sr Bernadette Sangma. The third day was reserved to seven communications. The first one by Fr Remo Bati presented the implantation of the Salesian charism in the Philippines. Two others by Sr Maddalena Ngo Thi Minh and Sr Laura Chau narrated the experience of the FMAs in Vietnam and in China respectively. There were also three communications by representatives of the local congregations founded by the Salesians. One of the communications by Srs Maliwan Paramathawirote and Paranat Phengpinit spoke of the Salesian charism in the life and mission of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Thailand). Two others by Sr Yumiko Mukai of Japan and Sr Park Min Sook of Korea witnessed to the influence of the Salesian charism on the congregation of the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki. Finally, Sr Marivic Sombero FMA, Filipina missionary in East Timor briefly narrated the history of the foundation of the FMA in the former Portuguese Colony, which recently became a nation after a tumultuous war.

Besides serious scientific work in aula, a pilgrimage to Caysasay, the first and principal Marian Shrine of the Philippines, and a historical tour of Manila offered the participants a taste of Philippine culture and religiosity. The seminar came to a close with the concluding Eucharist presided by the Salesian Bishop, Rt. Rev. Patricio Buzon of the Diocese of Kabankalan.

The seminar days were intense moments of learning from the experience of the pioneering missionaries who faithfully communicated

the Salesian charism to the various countries of Asia, as also a lived experience of the richness and youthful vitality of the Salesian charism as it continues to make present the apostolic zeal of Don Bosco to the youth of EAO region today. Below is a synthesis of the themes studied in the Seminar.

General Background of EAO Region

Colonialism (foreign Imperialism in China) as the dominant way in which the West related to East Asia, communism taking root and becoming a viable way to break the stranglehold of colonialism and the outbreak of World War II were the situations or turns of events which shaped much of the pre-1950's political landscape.

From World War II there emerged a different scenario: independence from colonialism, the association of the missionary endeavour with colonial powers as a corollary of newly found independence, the menace of communism and the creation of the communism vs. capitalism scenario, the absence of war.

The Church Scenario

Under the impact of the scandalous counter witness displayed by Christian (= European) countries during World War I, when mission societies that worked side by side in the missions identified themselves more with the national interests of their own countries than with the mission of the Church, the Holy See decided to radically change course and ask the missionary societies to phase out congregationalism (= working for the interest of their own institutes) and work instead for the *Plantatio Ecclesiae* – the setting up of local Churches manned by local people.

The transition heralded by the pontificate of John XXIII – a transition that was not that stark or sudden, because it had been prepared for by pre and post war reflection – and clear indications (such as those coming from the Filipino episcopate regarding technical education), ushered in a period of changes, some seemingly

unfavourable, which did, however, actually create a favourable scenario within which the Salesians found opportunity to plant and develop new presences.

Situation in the Salesian Congregation

The Salesian Congregation had begun its missionary expansion in Asia before the events mentioned above and kept expanding in response to solicitations coming from the Holy See. As this new direction was being put into place, with the Rectorship of Fr Rinaldi, i.e., on the occasion of the 1922 General Chapter, the Salesian congregation began a new course that would govern its missionary policies until well into the 1960's – that of sending young trainees (novices or post novices) to mission lands.

The Beatification and Canonization of Don Bosco apparently did not directly influence the obvious expansion of missionary work in those same years, but it did give the Salesians great self-confidence in that their way of evangelization was valid, timely and universally applicable because officially recognized in Don Bosco by the Church.

Implantation of the Salesian Charism by the Salesians

Notwithstanding difficulties and pitfalls and the challenges arising from the vastly varied socio-political and religious situations, the Salesians found ways to assess what their chances and possible contributions could be, to review their mentality and gradually learn and develop new sensitivities and adopt new strategies suitable for a variety of situations. The lessons taught by the post war developments offered the necessary tools and set the background against which the second wave of Salesian expansion in East Asia took place.

The implantation of the Salesian charism in China, India, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines exhibit similarities and contrasts, the most striking comparison being between China and India. The two missions were born at the same time, faced common ecclesial and intra-congregational problems, and yet had strikingly different

outcomes. The implantation of the Salesian charism in India can be termed a success story, while the attempts in China, instead, a martyrdom that demanded the sacrifice of the lives of both missionaries (Versiglia and Caravario are not alone) and local confreres (some died in jail, others were imprisoned for lengthy periods of time). The differences are to be found not only in the political events (the civil war, the Japanese aggression, Mao's liberation in China) but perhaps in the civilization, the culture and the psyche of both Indians and Chinese. Take the religious factor, for instance: while the vast majority of Indians are deeply religious, the vast majority of Chinese consider themselves agnostic.

The Japanese experience as perceived from two letters of Fr Cimatti highlighted some vital issues that bore upon the implantation of the Salesian charism and specifically on the formation of local confreres and foreign missionaries, as also the delicate, and yet very real and very influential issues of Japan's self perception vis-à-vis other neighbouring cultures.

The volatile and at times turbulent political, social and religious situation of Thailand did not deter the Salesians from their goal of the education and care of the young, and the struggle to keep up and develop the mission territory. In spite of unfavourable conditions, the Salesians ultimately succeeded in implanting the Salesian charism and typical Salesian apostolates.

The implantation of the Salesian charism in the stormy history of Vietnam presents similarities and contrasts in relation to China and Thailand. Similarity in the climate of political hostility and contrast in the way the charism was able to survive in the adverse conditions in Vietnam and flower into the most fruitful mission in the EAO region and probably in the whole congregation, as attested to by the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, during his 2007 visit. The Vietnamese situation presents a unique case in any part of the world in that, after sowing the Salesian charism and being tended by missionaries from various countries for roughly 23 years (1952-1975), with the political turmoil of the unification of entire Vietnam (1975) under the communist

regime, the Vietnamese confreres were “abandoned” to fend for themselves for about 12 years (1975-1991) and take care of their own survival. A new period was opened in 1991 when the communist regime changed policies and adopted the free market, thus enabling the Vietnamese confreres to come in contact with the rest of the Salesian world and thus begin a new phase of growth and development.

The Salesian pioneers in the Philippines were awaited for sixty long years before their arrival in 1951 and the majority of them consisted of missionaries expelled from China by the communists. They have the merit of bringing technical education to the Philippine youth, through their timely response to the needs of the nation and the call of the Philippine Church on behalf of deprived and economically emarginated youth. Through their specific contribution to evangelization following the method of Don Bosco in the various settings such as schools, oratories, youth centres, training centres, hostels and parishes the Salesians succeeded in implanting the Salesian charism and passing it on to the subsequent generation.

Contribution of the FMA in the Implantation of the Salesian Charism

Alongside the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians too contributed to implanting the Salesian charism in different countries of East Asia and India through the work of education and evangelization. Sharing the same socio-political and religious platform as the Salesians, the sisters were able to give the Salesian charism a distinctively feminine touch and quality in Asia, and in particular in North East India, Thailand, Vietnam, China and East Timor – in their case too with striking similarities in the milieu in which they worked and marked differences in the outcomes.

In fidelity to their Constitutions, through their personal, community, ecclesial and apostolic life the FMAs strove to implant the Salesian charism. Their apostolic services took on traditional forms as well as new ones as the needs of the time and place demanded.

The sisters were fully engaged in active missionary and community services, and this, within the turbulent socio-political conditions that characterized most of the countries. They engaged themselves in schools of different levels and grades, orphanages, boarding houses, crèches, training centres, oratories, catechism and services for the church, clinics, hospitals and shelters for the physically impaired, care of refugees etc., whether these were “works proper to the institute” or a response “to the particular needs of the local church and area” (FMA Const. 76).

In the adverse socio-political conditions of war, poverty and communist repression the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians manifested courage and fidelity, determination and resoluteness in their commitment. In extremely trying situations such as in Vietnam, the formation of local vocations was given priority, thus laying the foundations for future development. Genuine Salesian qualities such as family spirit, joy, fraternity, loving kindness, spirit of sacrifice, mutual trust and help, promptness in obedience were learnt at the practical school of life through the witness of the first missionaries.

Faithfully applying the educational system of Don Bosco in their various educational settings, the FMAs translated the loving kindness of Don Bosco in feminine terms as “motherly tenderness” to alleviate and heal the sufferings and pain of their charges.

Role of Institutes Founded by the SDBs in the Implantation of the Salesian Charism

Charisms are by their very definition gifts from the inexhaustible richness of the Spirit and are by their very nature capable of finding new expressions as new challenges demand fresh answers. So we find, especially in Asia, the original Salesian trunk sprouting into a variety of branches and flowers.

The need the Salesians felt of having local collaborators on account of the little confidence in their own ability in working with girls and approaching the female world in general in a totally different cultural, social and anthropological milieu inspired them to found

congregations of indigenous women who could better respond to the local exigencies. The fact that the FMA sisters, with a well-established identity received from their founders and matured in a different cultural environment, were not fully prepared to give a timely response to the most pressing needs of the missions such as medical care in clinics and hospitals, catechesis in villages and family apostolate, prompted apostolic minded Salesians to found new congregations of indigenous personnel, imbued with the Salesian spirit and charism and specifically formed to respond to the particular needs of the time and place.

Of the several local congregations founded in Asia by Salesians, from Thailand the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (SIHM) and from Japan and Korea the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki (CSM) delineated their original founding charisms. Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, leader of the first missionary expedition to Thailand founded the female indigenous congregation of the SIHM “to be Thais to serve the Thais” by openly engaging in works of charity on behalf of the female population.

Fr Cimatti and Fr Cavoli, the founders of the CSM, communicated to the sisters the Salesian charism characterised by pastoral charity and the preventive system, the family spirit, work and temperance, Eucharistic and Marian piety, which were ideals they themselves lived in the first place. The Caritas Sisters take care especially of the sick, the children, the aged and the poor in virtue of Fr Cavoli’s challenge that “charity be their way to faith”.

It is evident that the Salesian charism is a multi-faceted reality capable of taking on a variety of shades and colours, but with a common face and inspiration – Don Bosco. Indeed, the Salesian charism has ceased to be a seed. It has grown into a sturdy tree with flourishing branches spread out all over Asia.

Conclusion

The seminar proved to be a boon at the level of content, offering much interesting and useful material both for the ordinary listener as well as for the scholar. At the level of methodology, considering the

fact that many of the papers were the work of beginners (in research work, though tested missionaries), there is great disparity in the formal “scientific” character of the articles; their efforts, however, are to be encouraged.

The papers highlighted the fact that the one Salesian charism is capable of adapting itself to different socio-political, cultural and religious settings – even hostile and repressive ones – without diluting its essence or losing its originality, viz. passion for youth, passion for souls. Despite their European formation and culture the first missionaries – the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians – succeeded in implanting the Salesian charism in the different Asian countries with their rich, ancient and varied cultures, and transmitting the same to their local confreres and sisters and even to other indigenous institutes founded by them.

Nevertheless, the complexity of the situation and the factors connected with the insertion of the Salesian charism in the EAO region are so vast and unexplored that research has to continue. There is a lot we do not know yet and much that needs to be looked into: for instance, the issue of inculturation, the impact of our educational services, the practice of the preventive system in a non-Christian context are areas that call for continued study. Further investigation is required on how much inroad has been made into the non-Christian cultures of the region by the Christian message, what has so far been achieved by Salesians as evangelizers of youth and promoters of values and what has been the contribution in this of the local religious congregations founded by the Salesians.

Mathew Kapplikunnel

ABBREVIATIONS

ACSSA	Associazione Cultori Storia Salesiana
ADQM	Archives Daughters of the Queenship of Mary (Bangkok, Thailand)
AGFMA	Archivio Generalizia Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (Roma)
AIC	Archivio Ispettorica Cina (Hong Kong)
AIT	Archivio Ispettorica Thailandia (Bangkok)
ASC	Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Rome)
ASIHM	Archives Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Hua Hin, Thailand)
BS	Bollettino Salesiano
CMT	Cimatti Museum Tokyo
CSM	Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki
DQM	Daughters of the Queenship of Mary
EAO	East Asia - Oceania
FMA	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice)
GM	Gioventù Missionaria
ISS	Istituto Storico Salesiano (Salesian History Institute)
MB	Memorie Biografiche di Don/del Beato/di San Giovanni Bosco
MEP	Paris Foreign Missions (Missions Étrangères de Paris)
SAL	Sisters Announcers of the Lord
SCAST	Suore della Carità Archivio Storico Tokio (Tokyo, Japan)
SDB	Salesians of Don Bosco
SIHM	Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco
Via della Pisana 1111, 00163 Roma

21 November 2008

To the Participants of the Second EAO Seminar
Batulao, 24-28 November 2008

Dear Confreres, Sisters, Members of the Salesian Family,

It is with great joy that I'm sending you from Rome my most heartfelt greetings and wishes for your Second ACSSA Seminar of East Asia - Australia, which this time includes also the participation of India.

The theme you have proposed for this Seminar of Batulao (Manila), *The Implantation of the Salesian Charism in the Region. Ideals, Challenges, Answers and Results*, in logical continuity with that of the preceding one in Hong Kong (2004), *The Beginning of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*, is of great importance, not only for knowing what the pioneering Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have done in these lands so far removed from Turin and Mornese, but also to understand better how they inserted themselves as bearers of the Salesian charism into extremely different contexts in terms of culture, language, religion, traditions etc. The original Salesian charism has been so fecund as to give life to other Charisms – those proper to the Institutes represented by you and are today members of the Salesian Family.

As the theme of your Seminar suggests, the highest spiritual *ideals* that motivated the missionaries to go to unknown and at times dangerous lands met with unexpected *challenges* in the hard realities

of everyday life, to which they had to give *answers* in fidelity to their vocation and the expectations of the youth and the people to whom they were sent. With what *results*? As we wait for the historians to document them, we already have an answer in the numerous Salesian activities present in your countries and the validity of the educative, pastoral and developmental work carried out there in the oratories, boardings, homes, nurseries, schools, parishes, missions and social works of various kinds.

These are the delicious fruits of the apostolic passion of hundreds and hundreds of generous Sons and Daughters of Don Bosco who, with the backing of benefactors and cooperators, have given their lively youth, their mature years, the wisdom of their old age for the “glory of God and the good of souls” in these ancient mission lands.

Some of their names are well-known. Who does not know pioneers like Msgr. Mathias, Msgr. Pasotti, Msgr. Carretto, Msgr. Coppo, Fr Braga, Venerable Fr Cimatti, the holy Martyrs Versiglia and Caravario – to mention just a few? But if they succeeded in the *plantatio ecclesiae* and *plantatio Familiae salesianae* in many places to the admiration of everyone today, they owe it to the active collaboration given by many “anonymous” confreres and sisters, despite the inevitable human weaknesses which Salesian history does not conceal.

This is our past, both human and divine at the same time, without which there is no future; this is the spiritual legacy that our “fathers” have left us, that scholars like you are invited to make known, that the entire Salesian Family of Asia and Australia is called to live and build up.

With your hidden work in the archives and libraries you are already an answer to the recent GC 26 which invited the Rector Major with his Council to invest “adequate resources of personnel” for the Institute of Salesian History and the Centres of “study and diffusion of Salesianity”. Even if not so evident, you are perfectly in tune with the recent GC 26 that has urged us to “restart from Don Bosco” for opening up “new frontiers”; in fact, with the success

stories and otherwise of the past, you indicate, on a closer look, the foundation and the itinerary to be followed.

Thank you very much, therefore, for the service you as ACSSA are intending to render during these days of intense work to the Salesian Family in Asia, Australia and the other continents.

Almost at the same time as you the Provincials of Europe will be meeting here at the Generalate to “reshape the Salesian presence in this continent with greater incisiveness and efficacy”. To you who are mostly the fruit of the apostolic endeavours of European missionaries, I request a prayer that the Salesian charism may always bear abundant fruits in this continent that has given much and can still to the Church and the Congregation.

My thanks also to your Provincials and Superiors who have facilitated your participation in this Seminar.

In Don Bosco,
Fr Pacual Chávez Villeneuve,
Rector Major.

MESSAGE FROM SR GRAZIA LOPARCO FMA

Rome, 22 November 2008

Dear and esteemed brothers and sisters, participants of ACSSA Seminar,

Though unable to be present physically at this event, I would like to extend to each and every one of you my cordial greetings and wishes for a fruitful Seminar in view of a better knowledge of Salesian history through the participation of the different Congregations represented, and a wonderful experience of communion in the common charism.

My thanks to Fr Carlo Socol, Fr Nestor Impelido and all those who have actively collaborated in making this Seminar a reality, as well as to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and their Provincials who have whole-heartedly accepted the invitation to encourage studies in view of the Seminar and participation in the same.

It is an excellent opportunity to begin a well-documented reflection on the implantation of the Salesian spirit, both in its masculine as well as feminine expressions, up to the birth of other local Congregations sharing the same spirit, in Countries rich in culture and traditions, but little imbued with the evangelical values in the advancement of education, especially among the common class.

The present Seminar is a natural evolution of the previous one held in Hong Kong in December 2004. Fulfilling the commitment taken on that occasion despite the many difficulties that always crop up, is a clear sign of our faith in the value of this venture and our intention to improve the quality of our studies, convinced that we can derive cultural, educational and spiritual benefits from it for the Salesian Family itself and also for others who may be interested.

I will be following with great interest the progress of the Seminar and also strive to draw the attention of the FMA sisters, student-members of the communities attached to Auxilium, our Faculty of the Sciences of Education here in Rome, to the importance of this event. At the return of the ACSSA Councillors we shall evaluate the experience and decide on follow-up programmes, having contacted also the new FMA Superiors, from whom we expect fresh guidelines in this respect.

I wish you all days of fruitful work. Thank you very much for your dedication – witness of your vitality and love.

With lively fraternal greetings,

Sr Grazia Loparco fma.

PAPERS

CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE MISSIONS IN THE TWENTY YEARS BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS. SALESIAN MISSIONARY STRATEGY

*Francesco Motto**

Introduction

This paper could be considered precisely the second part of the one presented at the previous seminar¹. It is my intention to present a general framework within which many of the other papers that follow will find their place – at least those which will directly or indirectly refer to the third decade of the XX century. The study is divided into two parts: the Church context and the Salesian context, or, the missionary “policy” of the Catholic Church and the missionary “policy” of the Salesian Society.

There is a wide-spread opinion that the period between the two wars was the best period for the Christian missions, in particular the Catholic ones, both in terms of the number of personnel involved and the quantity of resources, and on account of the increase in the number of conversions (at least in some countries) and the amount of specialised literature. Among the Salesians too there are those who consider this period of twenty years as the central part of the “classical period of the expansion of the Salesian missions (1910-1965)”, in which the Salesian ideal “experienced a particularly strong vitality”².

*Salesian, Director of Salesian History Institute, Rome, and professor of Salesian Studies at Pontifical Salesian University, Rome.

¹ Francesco MOTTO, *Salesian Missionary Activity while Blessed Filippo Rinaldi (1921-1931) was Rector Major with Particular Reference to Eastern Asia*, in Nestor C. IMPELIDO (ed.), *The Beginning of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Vol. I. (= ACSSA - Varia, 2). Hong Kong, [no publisher] 2006, pp.15-32.

² Morand WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai nostri giorni*. Roma, LAS 2000, p.378.

With regard to the twenties, even though they were treated in the previous seminar, nevertheless we consider it useful to present here a quick summary, insofar as it may help us to understand better the developments of the thirties, to which naturally we shall devote more space.

I. THE CHURCH CONTEXT³

1. The Catholic Church and the Missions between 1915 and 1930

Missionary activity was resumed vigorously after the forced break caused by the World War (1914-1918). The conflict had resulted in immense damage to the Catholic missions through the forced departure of the missionaries, the impossibility of sending them back, the military occupation (most unwelcome to the local populations) of European territories/colonies, through the destruction of long-standing institutions (churches, schools, hospitals...), through discriminatory attitudes between civilised countries and those not considered such. The war also changed the way of thinking of those colonised and of the Christians in the young churches, and led to expressions of nationalistic tendencies (in China, in Korea, in Africa...).

The short pontificate of *Pope Benedict XV* (1914-1922) was a rich period for the history of the missions. From the point of view of Institutions, with the creation of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (hereafter "PF") could concern itself more with evangelisation. The Missionary Union of the Clergy, founded locally in 1916, became world-wide (1919) with headquarters in Rome. The previous year the Pope had appointed as Prefect of the PF Cardinal W. Van Rossum, an energetic Dutchman determined to uproot nationalism from the missions. From the point of view of conversions, in some countries they increased, as

³ Reference may be made to any relevant "History of the Church"; it is needless to indicate particular works. Bibliographies on the Catholic missions in general and on the individual geographical areas are readily available.

in Belgian Congo, Uganda, Nigeria, Rwanda, southern India and also in China, where the shortfall of missionary personnel was matched by the foundation of the daily newspaper in Tientsin, *I Che Pao*, "The Public Good", of a University (Yenching in Peking, 1919), of several boardings and schools. The Holy See had hardly any influence in the drawing up of peace treaties; but the Treaty of Versailles (1919), entrusting the German colonies to the victors under the form of mandates, requested the church to maintain the missionary schools. The Saint-Germain Convention of the same year guaranteed freedom of conscience, of worship and of the foundation of activities in the nations that were members of the League of Nations.

From the point of view of documents, concerned that the national sufferings might be stronger than the shared faith for Christians, with the Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*, on 30 November 1919 Pope Benedict XV reminded them that evangelisation was a constitutive part of the life of the Church. He therefore invited the heads of the missions to undertake a serious self-examination and allow access to new Christians to responsibilities within the Church, with a sound formation of the indigenous clergy. He encouraged them not "to let themselves be drawn too far by the love of one's own Congregation [...] but rather, know how to look "at things with certain breadth of vision".

In spite of some determined opposition, PF implemented the Apostolic Letter and in 1920 asked the missionaries to keep their distance from politics and not to give up the languages of the place for their own national language. In November 1919 he had also allowed the Prefects Apostolic to appoint Vicars.

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) continued along the path of his predecessor with the centralisation of the institutions as the guarantee of the freedom of the Church. In May 1922 he decided to transfer the Work of the Propagation of the Faith from Lyons to Rome, to the displeasure of the French Catholics. In 1924 Archbishop Celso Costantini, the Apostolic Delegate in China from 1922, promoted the first Plenary Council of China at Shanghai, where the fifty or so Bishops

present looked forward to the setting up of a Church that was Chinese in its leaders and in its artistic expression. In the 1925 Holy Year a great missionary exhibition was organised in Rome, which then became the Lateran Ethnological Missionary Museum.

Developing the ideas of his predecessor in 1926 Pope Pius published the encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* which contained all his missionary teaching and a vast programme of activity, including the formation of local native clergy, the setting up of autochthonous Churches and the foundation of contemplative orders.

The call by the encyclical to plant the Church in China, where the local clergy ought to have its own leaders was greatly appreciated in China, especially by Archbishop Costantini⁴. The Missions should constitute a transitory phase, a simple means to achieve the end.

In June of the same year 1926 in the face of an anti-Christian movement in China, Pope Pius XI wrote a letter to those in charge of the Catholic Church in China to show that the Catholic missionaries were not the instruments of imperialism, even though unfortunately, for the present the Church was still “in collusion” with the European powers.

In the same year he established World Missions Day and consecrated six Chinese Bishops in a ceremony that had world-wide repercussions and delighted the Chinese, who “saw their dignity upheld”⁵, even though with some rumblings from the Missionaries who saw their future role confined to being “guests” rather than “masters of the house”. Japanese and Vietnamese Bishops were to follow. In 1927 he proclaimed as patron of the missions St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, canonised two years earlier; the same year the “Apostolate of Prayer” proposed each month a missionary intention and the *Fides* agency began to provide a weekly service of news from around the world.

⁴ Celso COSTANTINI, *Con i missionari in Cina*. Vol. I. Roma, 1946, pp. 232-335.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

2. **The Catholic Church and the Missions in the Decade 1929-1939**

2.1. *Documents and Some Events*

In the decade which we are now considering there are no documents comparable in importance to those mentioned above. One can recall some which are of particular interest also to Salesians. On 8 December 1929 PF published an *Instruction* about norms and the competence of Vicars Apostolic and Superiors of the Institutes to which mission territories were entrusted. In 1933 norms were laid down that every five years a precise account of the state of the mission should be drawn up according to the Code of Canon Law. In 1937 a further *Instruction* already expected in 1926 was issued on the foundation of native Congregations. Between 1935 and 1940 a certain number of *Instructions* of PF put an end to the dispute about rites: acts that had been considered superstitious had only a civil significance with the passing of time, missionaries from then on were dispensed from swearing an oath. In the meantime Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi had been placed at the head of PF (until 1940), assisted by the Secretary Mgr. Costantini (between 1935 and 1953). Both maintained perfect continuity with the “missionary policy” of their predecessors.

As regards the more significant activities of the Holy See, in 1932 the faculty of Missiology was established at the Gregorian University, in 1933 the Scientific Missionary Institute at the Urban University in Rome began and in 1937 a World Exhibition of Christian Art was planned to be opened in 1940. On 29 October 1939 the Pope consecrated twelve Bishops from mission countries, including the first African Bishop and the first Madagascan Bishop. In fact a Delegation for Africa (and for China) came into existence in 1929.

2.2. *A Catholic Thought on the Evolving Missions*

Missionary literature addressed to the wider public in the period between the two wars continued for the most part along the lines of the exotic and the crusades launched in the XIX century, with many

accounts of barbaric or picturesque customs of the peoples to be civilised and evangelised, and with the Catholic missionary constantly at odds with the other religions and the other Christian confessions. On 9 June 1939 PF felt the need to intervene with an appropriate *Instruction* to remind writers, preachers, and speakers to show respect for the cultures and the traditions of the local populations among whom the missionaries were working⁶.

On the other hand, missionary way of thinking, refined and developed towards the end of the twenties⁷, progressed in an even more positive way in the thirties, thanks to the beginning also in the Catholic world of a “science of the mission”, which ranged over the fields of theology, history and knowledge of non-Christian cultures.

From the many authors, reviews and institutions we refer to only a few names.

In the German context there was a famous school of missiology in Munster (with the distinguished names of Joseph Schmidlin and Thomas Ohm OSB). In Rome the German Oblates Streit and Dindinger were continuing with the publication of the *Bibliotheca Missionum*, while the publication of the *Missionary Bibliography* was started in 1933. The initiatives of Gregorianum and Urbanianum have already been mentioned. In Belgium the Centre for Catholic Missiology in Louvain had as its main driving force the Jesuit P. Charles, whose lectures were gathered together in *Dossiers of Missionary Activity* (1938-1939). The “Society Supporting the Missions”, founded in 1926 by Father Lebbe, developed with a female branch and the two societies offered to autochthonous Bishops, priests and religious help on a temporary basis. Beginning in 1923, Missiology Weeks in Louvain offered each year reflection on practical problems of the missions

⁶ The *Instruction* was published in Latin and Italian in the “Acts of the Superior Council” 95 (1939) 76-77.

⁷ One tangible sign of this was the founding in London of the Society for the languages and the civilisations of Africa (1926) in which Protestant and Catholic missionaries collaborated. Then in order to speak with a united voice they founded the Missionary Conference of Africa (1929).

(culture, economy, society...). Less structured but numerous were the initiatives in France. In 1931 at Lille the *Ad Lucem* movement began: lay students decided to set out to bear witness to the faith, exercising their professions as doctors or teachers in mission lands. Courses in missiology were started in various Catholic Institutes in France with mixed fortunes. In Paris Georges Goyau taught the history of the missions between 1924 and 1939, founded the *Review of the History of the Missions*, and wrote a great number of missionary monographs. The Social Weeks in Marseille (1930) and in Versailles (1936) dealt with the problems of the colonies and the missions. In Lyons outstanding in the field of missiological reflection were Swami Jules Monchanin, passionate about India and Fr De Lubac, who in 1941 gave a course on the "theological foundations of the missions".

To these could be added the numerous missionary linguists and ethnologists, the museums founded by them, and even the production of films about missionary life⁸. Just to recall one of them – Father Francis Aupiais of the African Missions from Lyons, who in 1930 made several films about the lives of the missionaries in Dahomey (now Benin) and on the religions and traditional practices, also with the intention of rehabilitating "the blacks": "We are the barbarians, who for centuries have shackled them, bought and sold them, treated in an inhuman fashion".

2.3. *Particular Mission Fields in Asia*

In the first place is obviously China, where at the beginning of the thirties there were 2,500,000 Christians in a population of 450 million inhabitants⁹, with 14 indigenous missions, a Higher Institute and two Universities, many foreign mission societies (also with Chinese personnel, though not in positions of responsibility¹⁰), very few

⁸ Also the Salesians produced some films on the Salesian missions (on Bishop Versiglia, on the Bororos in Brazil).

⁹ C. COSTANTINI, *Con i missionari...*, I, p. 255.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 359-361.

autochthonous, either male or female. Many of them had more than doubled their numbers in twenty years. The faithful too would double between 1914 and 1947; at this latter date there were 3,251,000 baptised, assisted by 2,500 Chinese priests and 3,000 foreign priests. If to this number are added the Protestants (1,300,000) and the Orthodox (300,000), mainly present in the large cities, the total would come close to 5 million (1% of the Chinese population); most of the Catholics in China are in the countryside, even though one can hazard a guess at a greater increase in the cities in the post-war period.

Already in the thirties some were surprised at the very limited result of such commitment in terms of men and institutions, taking into account some specific events: the first Chinese Council (1924), the first autochthonous Bishops (1926), the conversion to Christianity of some distinguished people (the diplomat Celestino Lou who became a Benedictine; General Chang kai-shek, President of the Republic, who with his wife became Protestant), the start of Catholic Action, the adoption of Chinese art, the end of the dispute about rites, the interest in western culture by intellectuals. Instead many intellectuals turned to Marxism, and anticlerical associations began to challenge confessional groups. The Kuomintang Government, allied briefly with the communists, set out to build dams against European imperialism and to restrict Christian proselytism in the schools (1928). The civil war between communists and the nationalists of Chang kai-shek (between 1926 and 1937) was very damaging for the missions, the Christians and the missionaries; many priests and lay people lost their lives (including Versiglia, Caravario).

In Japan the number of Catholics was growing slowly: 100,000 in 1930 (more or less the same number as Protestants). Catholics were more numerous in the south (Nagasaki and Hiroshima) and they had Japanese Bishops from 1927. The Christians emphasised an intellectual apostolate (Sofia University, Tokyo, in 1922) but during the thirties the nationalist reaction revived Shintoism which opposed Christianity and its foreign preachers, seen and considered, rightly or wrongly, as intent on destroying the ancient beliefs and institutions of

the Empire to replace them with those of Christianity. In 1940-1941 all the Bishops in Japan were autochthonous and the archbishop of Tokyo went so far as to justify the intentions of the war.

In many other countries of South East Asia the fact of being a foreign religion and having ties with the colonisers, especially the French, created not a few difficulties for the penetration of Christianity.

In India, in the thirties Christians were little more than six million (less than 2% of the population). Most of them were in the south, in particular on the west coast, where the ancient Christians of the Syro-Malabar rite were living. There were a certain number of conversions in the regions to the west of Calcutta (Ranchi), among the populations still animists. Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants preferred to develop schools. In Ceylon the percentage of Christians was above 8%; but Buddhism was being progressively presented as the national religion.

In this panorama of Christianity in Asia the Philippines need to find their place, even though properly speaking they did not belong to the mission fields, insofar as being a former Spanish colony conquered by the United States in 1898, 90% were Christians (with a Muslim and animist minority). The Philippines, moreover, represented about two-thirds of all the Christians in Asia¹¹.

¹¹ The situation in Africa was different where colonisation determined an economic evolution which had repercussions on the traditional religious ways of thinking. The European missionaries continued for a long time to be the majority; in 1939 in the Belgian Congo African priests numbered scarcely 78, out of a total of 1233; in the whole of French Africa there were only 27. Local circumstances and the attitudes of the colonial administrations gave to each Church a particular image; however, features common to the whole of Africa were not lacking, as for example, concern for schools even though the teaching was done through the language of the colonisers. In the French Colonies the mission schools co-existed with the official schools, although much less numerous; in the Belgian Congo on the other hand the Church had practically the monopoly of public instruction. The development of grammar schools or technical schools – quite a burden on the missions – was sometimes to the detriment of the formation of catechists; but the Christian Churches were able to spread their influence through clinics which treated people of all religions without distinction.

II. SALESIAN ACTIVITY IN MISSION TERRITORIES IN THE DECADE AFTER THE BEATIFICATION OF DON BOSCO (1929-1939)

We have already seen how the decade of Fr Rinaldi's term as Rector Major (1922-1931) was one of great missionary splendour in the Salesian Congregation, with the solemn celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first missionary expedition, the opening of various houses for missionary aspirants, the launching of a missionary movement among the young through missionary associations and magazines, the setting up of a missionary museum, the celebration of Congresses for Cooperators, the promotion of a missionary crusade to collect a thousand missionary scholarships etc. Certainly, it cannot be said that in the following decade there were any totally new initiatives launched, especially as in the first five year period (1929-1934) the Salesians were very much engaged with the solemn celebrations of the beatification and canonization of Don Bosco. On the wave of enthusiasm evoked by these events there was an attempt to give new impetus to what had already been set in motion, especially since the promoter and also the protagonist of the missionary initiatives had been Fr Ricaldone, Prefect/Vicar General responsible for the Missions until 1931 and the new Rector Major from 1932.

1. **Missionary Formation Houses – a Wealth of Aspirants, Yet not without Problems**

The Salesian Bulletin of March 1934, at the time of the canonization of Don Bosco, spoke with justifiable pride of a glorious decade that was coming to an end, referring in particular to the ten Missionary Institutes founded between 1923 and 1933.

In fact, the Cardinal Cagliero Institute in Ivrea (Turin) had already in 12 years sent to the mission lands over 500 young men under 25 years of age. The Pius V Institute in Penango Monferrato (Asti) with a grammar school was preparing young men under 17 years for the missions. The Salesian House at Foglizzo Canavese

had been opened from 1926 for both aspirants to priesthood and brotherhood (who would head Departments or Work Shops). For the latter the new agricultural school of Bivio di Cumiana was opened in 1927 and accepted boys who had completed elementary school. From 1929 the house at Gaeta accepted missionary aspirants from southern Italy and the islands. The one at Bagnolo Piemonte (Cuneo) was doing the same from 1930 for those under 15 years of age who wanted to attend grammar school. While the Salesian Institute at Castelnuovo Don Bosco was accepting students for the course preparatory to grammar school, that at Becchi, facing the saint's house, opened its doors from October 1935 to young men between 16 and 30, who wanted to help the missionaries as catechists, in addition to being domestic helpers for the house and the fields. From 1925 the novitiate at Villa Moglia (Chieri) was a missionary novitiate. Finally there was the Count Rebaudengo Technical Institute, which offered to youngsters who had completed the elementary studies, courses in tailoring, shoe-making, carpentry, mechanics etc. It had been inaugurated in April 1934 in the presence of a host of national, regional and local dignitaries, two Cardinals and several Bishops and Archbishops. Living there at the time were 150 aspirants (with 24 novices) and fifty or so professed Brothers who cherished the missionary ideal. Outside Italy one needs to add the houses of Shrigley (England) from 1930¹² and of Astudillo (Spain) from 1926.

In the thirties these houses were flourishing and brought together hundreds of boys and young men who were sent to the mission lands after a brief period of study and probation.

Was sending very young people to the missions a successful and far-sighted strategy, a deliberate plan, or simply responding to the need to fill in for the lack of priests already formed? As far as the numbers go this remains an open question in the absence of documentary evidence. What, however, is certain is that the decision

¹² Cf Peter ROEBUCK, *The Foundation Decade at Shrigley*. (= Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 24). Roma, LAS 2004.

forced the Provinces in the mission lands to grow and organise themselves, though at the cost of enormous sacrifices in terms of finance and personnel. The lack of suitable houses and the insufficient preparation of the formation personnel produced such weak results in qualitative terms that the consequences obviously persisted for decades.

Their preparation in Europe too was not without its difficulties: to start with the consent of the parents for minors to leave their own country, the human-religious-Salesian formation to be imparted according to the age and experience of the candidates, the economic aspect as the vocations generally came from families unable to meet the costs of their clothing, studies and upkeep. Then these costs were doubled since, in order to be sure to have one missionary, it was necessary to maintain at least two, according to the judgement of the Salesians¹³. There was recourse therefore to the “thousand” missionary scholarships, of which in fact several hundred were collected in a few years, thanks to the contributions of the missionary circles which prepared sacred vestments, medicines, helps of various kinds, and of individual benefactors to whom the prices of things were indicated in the Salesian Bulletin.

Once all embarked the ship – the fifteen year olds and those almost thirty, already hardened by military service and work experience – after weeks of voyage they disembarked in the mission lands they had been allocated to a few months earlier. There they were received into the formation houses where they would continue their formation, learn the local language, become accustomed to the food, the climate, the surroundings, the local difficulties. In a word, they would be more directly and specifically prepared for missionary activity through studies, with a little typical Salesian apostolate (games, singing, even assistance in the orphanages and oratories, with direct contact with older Salesians). Among these suffice to mention Louis Mathias, Sante Garelli, Carlo Braga, Gaetano Pasotti, Ignazio Canazei,

¹³ Precise statistics are still to be compiled.

Luigi Versiglia, Vincenzo Cimatti. In the early thirties the clerics and the students guided by them had just or almost reached the goal of the priesthood.

2. **Missionary Development under Fr Rinaldi and in the First Period under Fr Ricaldone: a Comparison**

In the decade 1930-1940 the Salesian Congregation maintained its constant and rapid increase in numbers, passing from about 7,000 Salesians to almost 12,000 and from 629 houses to 852¹⁴, thanks also to the recognition afforded the Congregation by the beatification and the canonization of Don Bosco. The Salesian Bulletin in those years constantly reported the celebrations held in all the cities and countries where the SDB, the FMA and the Salesian Cooperators were present. The missionary formation houses mentioned above obviously benefited from such fervour as the statistics in the tables below indicate.

The first table¹⁵ shows how in both decades in the period following the war, on an average over 200 missionaries left for the missions each year. But in the first period when Fr Ricaldone was Rector Major (1932-1939) there were over 20 missionaries (over 10%) more each year with respect to that of Fr Rinaldi (1922-1931); at the same time the number of priests and brothers was halved compared to the clerics, who increased by 24 percent. Clearly the missionary aspirantates were doing their duty.

	Priests	%	Clerics	%	Brothers	%	Total	Years	Per year
Fr Rinaldi 1922-1931	584	31.3	723	38.7	561	30.0	1,868	9	207.5
Fr Ricaldone 1932-1939	282	17.4	1,018	62.8	320	19.7	1,629	7	232.7

¹⁴ M. WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai nostri giorni...*, p. 531.

¹⁵ ASC A8150234 *Atlas of the Work of the Venerable Don Bosco, with appendices*; ASC A8160101 *Statistics*. It should at once be said that the greater part of the statistics given here are merely indicative due to the uncertainty regarding the criteria used in the compilation.

The table below, comparing the missionary expansion between 1929 and 1939, indicates different percentages in growth. While the Salesians were increasing by a third and their houses by over a quarter, Salesians in the missions tripled in number, both on the whole and in each category (priests, clerics, brothers).

	SDB	Houses	Missions entrusted to SDB ¹⁶	Dependent missions ¹⁷	SDB in the missions	priests in the missions	brothers in the missions	clerics in the missions
1929	8,016	604	16	31	901 ¹⁸	356	228	317
1939	12,881	850			2,770 ¹⁹	1,167	646	957

As regards their nationality, of the 2,770 Salesians on the Missions, the Italians were also the considerable majority: 1,701 (61%) followed by the "Germans" 177 (6.3%), by the Spanish 132 (4.7%), by the Poles 118 (4.2%), by the French 73 (2.6%), by the Czechoslovaks 69 (2.4%), by the Belgians 68 (2.4%). All the rest together totalled less than 40, with minimal percentages (1% or less).

It is also interesting to note the percentage of Salesians in mission lands with respect to their compatriots in their countries of origin. It emerges that 28% of all Italian Salesians, 21% of Czechoslovak Salesians, 19% of "Germans", 17% Belgians, 16% Spanish, 14% of Hungarians and Poles, 13% of French and 10% of English Salesians were in the missions.

¹⁶ Those in South America (Brazil, Chile, Equator, Paraguay, Venezuela), Asia (China, Japan, India, Thailand) and Belgian Congo in Africa.

¹⁷ By dependent missions are to be understood Salesian missions in missionary territories entrusted to other missionary institutes, particularly in Asia (India, China, Japan), Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Belgian Congo, Cape Town), Middle East (Turkey, Palestine) and Australia (Sunbury).

¹⁸ Salesian Institutes in missions entrusted to other religious Congregations.

¹⁹ Of these, 1240 were working in missionary circumscriptions entrusted to the Congregation, while 1550 were missionaries in works located in non-Salesian circumscriptions; 532 clerics and brothers were in formation houses.

The final table presents the continent-wise distribution of the 2,770 missionaries in 1939. Over half were in Latin America (62.9% including North America), while in Asia only 28.4%. Of these 34.5% were clerics, 23.3% brothers and 42.1% priests.

	Priests	Clerics	Brothers	Total	%
Asia	263	358	166	787	28.4
Africa	125	25	75	225	8.1
USA and Canada	143	119	83	345	12.6
Latin America	628	453	314	1395	50.3
Australia	8	2	8	18	0.7
Total	1167	957	646	2770	

2.1. *Statistics for 1934*

On the occasion of the canonization of Don Bosco the Rector Major promised the “Pope of the missions” “a more intensive missionary work” by sending that year a larger number of missionaries²⁰. The appeal launched to the Salesians was effectively taken up by them, so that 226 Salesians (and 125 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) left for the missions, a figure much higher than the 151 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Missions (1925) and the 181 in the year of the beatification of Don Bosco.

That same year, thanks also to the repercussions around the world in all the countries wherever the SDB and FMA were present, there were 36 new foundations of which 12 of the FMA²¹. The list of those outside Europe is the following: the Metropolitan seminary in Belem (Brazil); the house in Kambikila (Belgian Congo) with a public church, elementary schools and 72 mission stations; the parish with chaplaincies, elementary schools etc. in Perambur, Madras; another parish in Madras (church of the Refuge); in Thailand the residence at Rajaburi, with 2 chaplaincies and evening schools. For the FMA

²⁰ ACG 66 (1934) 165.

²¹ *Il Sacerdote Pietro Ricaldone ai Cooperatori ed alle Cooperatrici Salesiani*, BS LIX (gennaio 1935) 3.

the novitiate in Caracas and two new houses in China (Lok-Chong and Shanghai)²².

According to the tables below²³, with the exception of those in South America, there were 640 Salesians in the houses of the Missions entrusted to the Salesians (including a few dozen clerics in Hong Kong), while 435 other Salesians were working in Salesian centres (boarding schools, day schools, hostels, studentates, parishes, oratories) located in the Missions entrusted to other Religious Institutes²⁴.

Salesians in "Salesian Missions" proper
(with the exception of northern Patagonia, southern Patagonia and the central Pampas where 246 SDB e 202 FMA were working; these territories were elevated to a Diocese in 1934)

	N.	Priests	Clerics	Brothers	Total	Houses
South America	7	83	104	79	266	33
Asia	7	119	110	48	317	59
Africa	1	18	12	17	47	7
Total	14	220	276	144	640	97

²² The *Salesian Bulletin* of February 1935 recalled that on 25 February 1930, less than a year after the beatification of Don Bosco (2 June 1929), Bishop Luigi Versiglia, the Vicar Apostolic of Shiu-Chow (China), and the young confrere Fr Callisto Caravario had been killed; and that in the year of Don Bosco's canonization (1 April 1934), on the 59th anniversary of the first missionary expedition on 11 November 1934 two other Salesian priests Fr Giovanni Fuchs and Fr Pietro Sacilotti were killed by the Chavantes in the Mato Grosso: *Il cruento olocausto dei nostri Missionari, D. Fuchs e D. Sacilotti, fra gli Indi Chavantes*, BS LIX (febbraio 1935) 36.

²³ ASC A8150146, *Printed sheet*.

²⁴ The *Salesian Bulletin* of May 1935 indicated the overall number of Salesians in mission lands as 969 (the FMA 302), again excluding Argentina. The people cared for in the missions formally entrusted to them were 275,000 faithful (out of a total of 23,000,000 inhabitants). Here too it should be remembered that the statistics are relative as they were reported by missionaries, who, having spent some time at home later returned to the same mission or to another which could even have been in another continent. Cf. *Statistica ufficiale delle missioni affidate ai Salesiani al dicembre 1934*, BS LIX (maggio 1935) 154.

Salesians in "dependent missions"
 [in territories entrusted to other missionary institutes],
 excluding South America

	N.	Priests	Clerics	Brothers	Total
Asia	8	35	61	39	135
Middle East.	8	45	51	43	139
Australia	1	6	3	9	18
Africa	17	76	35	33	144
Total	34	162	149	124	435

3. Visit of Fr Berruti to Asia and his Impressions

In 1932 the new Rector Major of the Salesian Society, Fr Ricaldone, began the *Extraordinary Visitation* of all the institutions of Don Bosco and gave the members of the Superior Chapter the task which would occupy them for six long years. Fr Berruti visited Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego during the first six months of 1933, then Uruguay, Paraguay and the Patagonian Province of Saint Francis Xavier, going as far as Mato Grosso in Brazil (between February and November 1936), and finally Asia (between April 1937 and January 1938). In fact Fr Ricaldone had entrusted to Fr Antonio Candela the canonical visitation of India, Thailand and Japan and to Fr Berruti only that of China, but with the obligation of also presiding at meetings of Rectors and those responsible for the missions in the nations visited by Fr Candela. Throughout the journey from Port Said to China, passing through Thailand and Vietnam and from China to Turin, passing through Japan, the Philippines and India, he met confreres, sisters, prelates, ministers, Italian consular authorities and others, apostolic delegates.

Obviously the first impression was the positive one of the immense zeal and heroism of the missionaries, their tireless work in the administration of the sacraments, the catechesis, the visits to the dozens and dozens of villages spread across places far distant from

each other. In addition there was the approach to the pagans, their preparation for baptism, the infinite assiduous efforts to preserve them in the Christian life and the complicated formation of the catechists. The missionaries then had to maintain a correspondence with benefactors and make propaganda, so as to obtain the necessary means to live and to develop the work. The results in the area of the *missio ad gentes* were such that where in 1922 the Salesians had in the Far East a Vicariate Apostolic just beginning, 5 houses and some residences with 30 Salesians, after 15 years they were in charge of an Archdiocese, two Dioceses, a Vicariate Apostolic and two Prefectures Apostolic. The houses of the SDB and FMA were about a hundred and the missionaries had reached an overall number of over 650. It is more difficult to give the statistics of the Christians. In the diocese of Shillong alone the 5,000 Christians at the time the mission was entrusted to the Salesians had become 54,000 in 1937 and the number of conversions was increasing rapidly.

Equally appreciated were the efforts specifically in the field of Salesian education in colleges, schools and oratories...; the results obtained in terms of quantity and quality seemed even more admirable in spite of the humanly speaking insurmountable psychological difficulties to which we will now refer.

In the background there remained always the fundamental question: after four centuries of missionary work in those lands in which there were altogether more than a thousand million inhabitants, why were the Catholics less than 7 million?

Don Berruti found an explanation in the extraordinary difficulties of various kinds, the first among them the religious one²⁵. In his judgement the "pagan" religions were profoundly rooted in the soul of the Orientals, to the point that it made them indifferent to what the missionary was promising them. The Indians and the Siamese, stoically resigned to suffering and poverty, remained so even in the face of the riches and the joy of heaven of which the missionary assured them in

²⁵ [Pietro BERRUTI], *Nove mesi in Estremo Oriente*, BS LXII (aprile 1938) 82-84.

exchange for the sacrifices required by Christian life. The Chinese, extremely well-mannered and gracious, but jealous of their traditions, had family customs that made the children dependent in everything on the parents, and these on the Family Council which was almost always adamantly against anyone who abandoned the religion of their ancestors. Japan, finally, a great nation organised and intellectual, very much industrialised, with highly organised schools at all levels and very conscious of their own merits, considered themselves second to none. It was therefore extremely difficult to open to a religion, such as Christianity, imported by people to whom they felt superior.

In addition to this difficulty of a religious and psychological nature, there were others of different kinds. The oriental mentality was very different from that of the west: ideas, principles, models of common life in the west were inadmissible, indeed inconceivable in the Orient, with the consequence that the missionary, the western educator, always felt himself inadequate, when not indeed totally powerless. In addition to these there were the difficulties of learning languages that were hard from the phonetic point of view, besides being excessively numerous (in India even more than in China); organising missionary journeys in areas where there were few roads; bearing the extreme heat, the torments of the mosquitoes and other insects, the simply endemic presence of malaria...

Rather different was the analysis made just for China a decade earlier by the Apostolic Delegate Mgr. Costantini:

“What has been missing in the China missions? There has been no lack of holiness [...] There has been no lack of martyrdom [...] There has been no lack of work and zeal [...]. Study has not been lacking. In some missions there has not lacked wealth [...] Diplomatic help has not been lacking [...] Some Missionaries speak about the nature of the Chinese, cold, insensitive to religious propaganda. Certainly the Chinese people are not mystical, but this is not sufficient to explain the lack of an abundant apostolic harvest. *The Chinese people are no further from the Christian religion than were for example the Roman people.* What has been missing in the

past is a greater trust among the Missions and a more docile acceptance of the directives from Rome [...] The apostolic method has been missing. The Missions have been planted, but not the Church. The Missions have been mistaken for the Church. What has been missing is not a native clergy but the Hierarchy from the native clergy – a very different matter”²⁶.

4. Approval of the Regulations in GC XIV

At the level of the summit or the Centre of the Salesian Society – the subject of our concerns – even a cursory glance at the documentation preserved in the Salesian Central Archives would seem to lead us to affirm that the widest reflection on the missionary “policy” of the Salesian Society, apart from the promotion of vocations, missionary propaganda, the gathering of funds, was undertaken according to the “Regulations” for the Missions.

There had already been an extensive sample of this in GC XIII (1929), of which, after ample discussion, a text approved *ad experimentum*²⁷ was issued and published with some slight modifications on 24 October 1929 in the *Acts of the Superior Chapter*²⁸.

Less than two months later, from the PF there came out, as has already been mentioned, an *Instruction* which determined the relationship between the ecclesiastical superior and the religious superior in mission territories. Fr Berruti, just elected Prefect of the Salesian Society, received from the new Rector Major Fr Ricaldone the task of producing a definitive version of the Regulations, taking into account the aforementioned document, the Code of Canon Law, the observations of the more experienced missionaries and of some expert jurists, and also the Regulations of other Orders and Congregations.

²⁶ C. COSTANTINI, *Con i missionari...*, I, pp. 483-484.

²⁷ Cf. the text quoted in note 1, pp. 28-29.

²⁸ ACS a. X, 50 (1929) 814-820.

By the end of 1935 Fr Berruti was in a position to present to the Rector Major a text *ad experimentum* for three years so as to be able to arrive at a definitive approval on the occasion of GC XV planned for 1938. In the Salesian Central Archives there are numerous drafts, hand-written copies, proof sheets with corrections and observations *aliter*²⁹. The last of these, designated the fourth draft, was corrected and approved in the course of GC XIV.

In that Chapter the two articles of the 1st part on the “missionary spirit of our society” were approved without any problems, as were also the two articles of the 2nd part, “missionary vocations, missionary formation houses”. Also the 21 articles of the 3rd part, “Missionary Life”, were approved after a small modification to art. 14 about activities not necessary or useful for the ministry.

The four articles of the 4th part on “Missions, their form and apostolates” were then approved without difficulty. The latter was divided into two categories: one, strictly *missionary* – missionary residences (erected or not into parishes or quasi-parishes), seminaries, travelling missions, centres for catechumens, hostels or schools for catechists and the like; a second, “*auxiliary*” – hospitals, leper colonies, clinics, orphanages, hospices, boardings, technical and agricultural schools, festive oratories and others³⁰.

Then came the 5th part, “the most delicate and controversial of the whole document,” which included sixteen articles regarding the “Ecclesiastical Superior. Religious Superior. Their Relationships”. After quoting the words of the Archbishop of Calcutta who, on the basis of his own experience, had said that the real solution lay not so much in the precision of the norms as in the “charity” and “humility” of both sides – Fr Rinaldi had come to the same conclusion in GC XIII – all the articles were approved.

²⁹ ASC D601, D602, G00015.

³⁰ It is clear that most of the latter belonged to the religious Congregation, rather than to the religious jurisdiction (Archdiocese, Diocese, Prelature, Vicariate Apostolic, Prefecture Apostolic, independent Mission or Mission).

Regarding the last of the five articles of the 5th part, “Goods of the Mission and goods of the Society,” Fr Berruti read the minutes of GC XIII in which it was said that it had already been approved and the Moderator Fr Vincenzo Scuderi recalled that in relation to the 3rd article, the Pope had said to him never to leave a missionary to live and work alone. Even in cases where the Ecclesiastical Superior did not want to agree, the religious Superior would have to insist, himself provide a companion, and not give up the right of the Congregation to provide for the spiritual welfare of the confreres, bearing in mind that as religious they were called to community life, even more so given that the Church both in ancient times as well as in more recent and difficult ones has insisted on the community of ecclesiastics even in Christian Europe. The Chapter Commission was therefore asked to find a formula that would indicate that the missionary ought never to remain alone in his residence. The Chapter also found it convenient not to establish fixed times for a return home by the missionaries and recalled the norms already in force about a temporary return to the homeland and a definitive one to one’s own Province.

5. Difficulty in Approving the Regulations on the part of the PF

The text approved by the GC15 became the “fifth” draft, the definitive one, a typewritten copy of which was sent to the PF and was returned on 8 May 1939 with additions and exclusions of considerable weight and value.

On receiving it both Fr Berruti and the Procurator General Fr Francesco Tomasetti were astonished and attributed the fact to the intervention of some adviser of the PF, without previously consulting the Cardinal Prefect and the Secretary³¹.

On 17 May Fr Berruti appealed against the corrections, and re-presented a new typewritten text to the Congregation, after having

³¹ ASC B5760246 *Letter Berruti-Ricaldone, Napoli, 9 May 1939.*

asked for and obtained a talk with Archbishop Costantini³². He appeared to be aware of the reasonableness of the Salesian position and attributed the objections to a lack of understanding on the part of the revisers, being unaware that the Salesian missionary praxis was different from that of other religious. Not to be excluded was also the possibility of two different Regulations: one for internal use, simply approved by the Salesians, and one for external relationships, approved by the PF.

PF caused the new draft of the Regulations to be reconsidered; on 10 June 1939 it was sent back considerably corrected and with another summary of the observations which re-confirmed the previous ones, though in a mitigated form.

Very quickly, on 30 June 1939, Fr Ricaldone made a new and broad-based appeal. He pointed out that some norms were impossible to implement, some others imposed restrictions and obligations not included in common law or in the *Instructions* of the PF and not even imposed on other Institutes, some suppressed articles and dispositions were “copied” from other Statutes approved by the PF itself³³. In addition he showed that some additions and modifications were simply quotations from the *Instruction* of the PF, an integral part even though in an appendix to the Regulations. Finally he pointed out how the decisions of the consultants of the PF placed the Rector Major in the position of having to decide personally what according to the Constitutions was strictly the competence of the General Chapter. Fr Ricaldone concluded that the Regulations if modified as requested by the PF would no longer be those approved by GC XV (and not even a Statute of the PF, insofar as not an act proper to the PF) and hence there would be the need to await another General Chapter so that it could make its own the modifications proposed. Then the PF examined the documents more attentively and eight months later, in a letter dated 26 February 1940, once again reduced its observations.

³² ASC B5760247 *Letter Berruti-Ricaldone, Roma, 18 May 1939.*

³³ Among them those of the Dominicans (1933), Capuchins (1929), Servites (1930), Oblates of Mary Immaculate (1934), Redemptorists.

It is not possible here to give a detailed account of this arduous process lasting a decade, since the historical-genetic edition of the entire Regulations is not yet available.

However, one could say that the Salesians, while in all honesty ready to accept the dispositions of the PF – *mordicus*, Fr Ricaldone had written on 30 June 1939 – would ask for that freedom of action which their missionary experience and their particular needs required, especially as, acting “according to the Salesian spirit” they considered themselves indeed in harmony with the Church which had approved the Salesian Congregation and made its founder a saint. In their favour there was also the fact that the Regulations of other Orders and Congregations, approved in those same years by the PF, were different among themselves with respect to both the praxis and the texts, and that other religious had appreciated the Salesian model of sending out very young aspirants, and even considered doing the same especially for the formation of lay personnel³⁴.

The major *punctum dolens*, as has been noted, both within and outside the Salesian Congregation, was with regard to the relationships between the Ecclesiastical Superior and the Religious Superior, on account of which the superiors in Turin remained very attentive to defending their own autonomy and that of the Provincials. There was danger of their rights and duties being somehow taken over, first by the Holy See and then by the local Ecclesiastical Superiors.

It seems the Salesians did not consider themselves a missionary Institute like others, inasmuch as they had in territories outside Europe a number of educational and charitable institutions (schools, orphanages, colleges, hostels, leper colonies...) often more numerous than the parishes or semi-parishes strictly aimed at the *plantatio ecclesiae*, for which the Vicars and Prefects Apostolic were financed by the PF.

In particular, the Salesian superiors in Turin rightly considered it impossible for the very young missionaries to learn the language

³⁴ Fr Ricaldone had declared this in the course of GC XV.

“before leaving” or to give them a sound missiological preparation at home since most of those destined for the missions were not confreres but youngsters, and certainly it was not possible to introduce specialised courses in their secondary school studies. Further, their names were not known to the superiors until they made their request³⁵, after which if they were considered suitable, they were immediately sent to the Missions.

The PF was then asked not to weigh down the Regulations with too many additional explanations; to bear in mind that, perhaps unlike other Orders and Congregations, the Salesians had many schools “not belonging to the Missions” (and therefore not subject to the Ecclesiastical Superior); not to introduce female Congregations in the Missions entrusted to them without the consent of the Religious Superior. If in cases of dispute, according to the Regulations, the Ecclesiastical Superior had the last word, this was to be understood “in the spirit and according to the methods of the Salesian Society”.

Conclusion

What was affirmed of the previous decade under Fr Rinaldi could be reiterated of this decade too. In the numerical increase of Salesians and Salesian houses one also sees the process of development in the mission lands. The beatification/canonization of Don Bosco and their world-wide repercussions – thanks above all to the Salesian press and propaganda – in parishes, seminaries, youth groups, religious houses and Catholic families, resulted in a continuously widening expansion of enthusiasm for the saint himself and for the work which had its origin in him. The Canonization, held on Easter Sunday itself (1934), sealed the indissoluble link between Christ and his “faithful servant”, between the Church and the Salesian Congregation. Even

³⁵ In GC XV Fr Ricaldone pointed out that in spite of the tradition of sending to the missions only those who make a request, the Rector Major could in fact send anyone in virtue of the vow of obedience since the Missions were one of the scopes of the Congregation. Fr Berruti confirmed that such had been his case with Don Rua.

the “Reconciliation” between the Italian State and the Church in Italy in 1929, seen in a favourable light in very many countries in Europe and beyond, made the position of overseas missionaries less difficult, especially in those places where there were Italian emigrants.

Faced with the numerical increase, Fr Ricaldone was concerned about fidelity to the charism of the founder, whose canonization gave him the opportunity to emphasize very strongly that the mission of the Salesians was to “poor and abandoned youth,” that there was no need to “borrow ideas, directives or methods from elsewhere” given that they possessed “a treasure of rules and traditions” for which others envied them.

Such fidelity to their own traditions considered always valid, could easily pave the way for their own view of the mission to clash with that presented by *Maximum Illud* and *Rerum Ecclesiae*. Therefore while declaring itself open to the official dispositions of the Holy See, the Salesian Congregation seemed to want to justify its stance that its own by now fifty years old model of mission (schools, oratories, hostels...) could not easily be applied in the Missions in the strict sense, subject as they were to the PF.

For this type of missionary model it was considered sufficient to pay great attention, whether at home or *in loco*, to the practical-organisational aspect, and less to the cultural, spiritual, and professional formation of the personnel being sent. Perhaps precisely for this particular choice of the field of activity – Salesian educational world rather than the Missions *ad gentes* in the strict sense – all the theoretical reflection on the missionary problem in general and on the missions in Asia-Africa in particular that distinguished the missionary ecclesiology of the day, does not seem to have had any particular impact on the preparation of Salesian missionaries. In fact even in Latin America the *missio ad gentes* of the Salesians in reality concerned only fringe elements of the mass of native population.

The religious and cultural formation imparted in the welcoming atmosphere of the formation houses *in loco* (novitiates and post-novitiates), in the three years of practical training at the side of

experienced missionaries and during the theological studies undertaken in the countries of their destination was adjudged sufficient to prepare sound future educators in institutions reserved for poor boys and for the poor people to whom the Salesians dedicated themselves, and to silence any contrary voices, official or unofficial, regarding such a *modus operandi*, which had been followed since GC XIII in Asia especially, but also elsewhere.

The “Salesian system” seemed to work well, as evidenced by the increase in the number of missionary vocations in Europe, sufficient economic resources even if at the cost of considerable sacrifices, the opening of new works with the constant increase in the number of boys gathered there and the appreciation of the local authorities and of foreign diplomats (colonial, protectorates, Pontifical etc). At the same time the Salesians did not deem themselves distant from the Council of Shanghai which had accepted the school as a place for evangelisation (though with the understanding to pass from the small mission schools to secondary schools of all kinds and levels up to universities, in the big cities, so as to “inculturate” – to use a current term – the Gospel).

The centralisation of decision-making, tempered through the exchange of opinion with the missionaries through correspondence, meetings in Turin and in the individual mission centres, did not create excessive problems, also because this helped to respond to the annual requests of the PF for information to update its own statistics and to send timely and precise information about the missions in writing. In fact in those years a special Mission Office was set up in Turin, with the purpose of following up missionary activity in its various aspects – administrative, cultural, historical, and propagandist. The last sector was to coordinate fund-raising by avoiding strain on the same geographical areas, in particular Italy, on the occasion of the temporary or provisional home visit of the missionaries.

Obviously all this would require an assessment of individual local areas, which is precisely the aim of some of the papers that follow.

THE GENERAL BACKGROUND AND THE EXPANSION OF THE SALESIAN WORK IN THE EAO REGION IN THE 1950s

*Gregorio Bicomong**

Introduction

The scope of this paper is to give a general – and not a comprehensive – background that will help us understand the political and ecclesial situation vis-à-vis the Salesian expansion in the EAO region in the 1950s. Thus the study is limited to those EAO provinces or countries where the Salesians were present in the 1950s. These, with their year of starting, are: Macao 1906, China 1910, Japan 1926, Australia 1927, Hong Kong 1927, Thailand 1927, Timor 1927, Myanmar 1938, Philippines 1951, Vietnam 1952, Taiwan 1952, South Korea 1954.

1. General Background before the 1950s

1.1. *Colonialism*

One of the most significant events in the memory of EAO region, particularly in Southeast Asia, was Colonialism.¹ The 1920s and 1930s was the time when colonial control of the countries of Southeast Asia was at its fullest extent, but it was also the period when the foundations of foreign rule in the region came under considerable strain. It was a period when modern nationalist movements became important. And not least, it was a time when there were major revolts against foreign rule: British colonial

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¹ Cf. Peter CHURCH (ed.), *A Short History of Southeast Asia*, Singapore, John Wiley and Sons (Asia) Pte Ltd, 2006.

government in Burma; France ruled over Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao states, with these three colonial possessions known as French Indochina; Dutch ruled the territories that were to become Indonesia; America was the colonial power in the Philippines; in Macao and East Timor, the Portuguese maintained a tiny colonial presence; Britain ruled over the Malayan Peninsula, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

In the 1920s calm seemed to be the general, though not absolutely complete, order of the day. The colonial governments had encountered resistance to their rule. The Dutch, for example, had fought bitter colonial wars as they expanded their hold over the Indonesian islands particularly in Aceh region and northern Sumatra. In Burma, it took years of what the British called “Pacification”, which was in effect a small-scale colonial war before peace was established. In Vietnam resistance to the French was almost continuous. In some parts of Southeast Asia, however, the nationalist stirrings were not so apparent. In Cambodia and the Lao states, for example, there simply were no significant nationalist movements. In the Philippines the Filipinos by and large accepted the promise of the United States that it was, indeed, determined to grant independence under generally benign American control.

As the 1930s drew to a close, the idea of independence was generally not even discussed by the colonial rulers particularly in the British, Dutch and French colonies. In Indonesia, for example, known as Netherlands East Indies, Governor-General de Jonge firmly insisted in the 1930s that the Dutch would be ruling their colonial subjects for another three hundred years!² It was this context that explains why Communism and the Second World War had such a shattering impact on Southeast Asia and on the other regions.

1.2. *Communism*

Following the 1917 Communist Revolution in Russia, it’s not surprising that some saw the revolutionary theories of communism as

² Milton OSBORNE, *Exploring Southeast Asia*, Crows Nest, NSW (Australia), Allen & Unwin 2002, p. 145.

a way of gaining independence. If a political group acting in the name of the workers of Russia could overthrow a corrupt, authoritarian monarchy, perhaps embracing communism could lead to the overthrow of colonial regimes. The role of communism in the developing anti-colonial movements was most important in Vietnam but also had its followers in Indonesia and played a small but significant role in the Philippines.³ Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, probably the best-known of all those who sought independence from a colonial power through revolution, had already embraced communism as the answer to the major political problems of the world, including colonialism.

1.3. *The Second World War*

The Second World War in Southeast Asia and the surrounding regions, heralded by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, marked the point that the European dominance could be defeated and the myth of European superiority could be demolished.⁴ Japanese victories showed that the arguments of the various nationalist groups in the colonies had been right – the colonial powers and their representatives could be defeated by Asians. With the old colonial masters removed and their prestige damaged, the people in much of Southeast Asia found that they now had new colonial masters, Asians this time, it's true, but in other ways, occupying the same sort of position as those they had just defeated. The Japanese surrender on 2 September 1945, meant the victory of the colonial powers that had controlled Southeast Asia before the Second World War, but it also meant that the colonial era could never again be reinstated without challenge. For all the countries of Southeast Asia, the next decades were dominated by the issue of independence from the colonizers who returned after the war, whether it would be granted or resisted and how it would be gained – through violence or by peaceful means.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

2. General Background in the 1950s

2.1. *Independence from Colonialism*

By the late 1950s, almost all of Southeast Asia gained their independence in different ways and over an extended period of time. In some cases, notably in Indonesia and Vietnam, independence was gained only after prolonged armed struggle against the colonial powers. Malaya gained independence while still fighting an ethnically based insurgency. Burma gained its independence from the British at the end of the Second World War but not without internal political squabbling. Laos gained independence with a fragile compromise of integration between the Communist Pathet Lao troops and the country's army. Cambodia gained its independence through the persuasion of King Norodom Sihanouk but not without political tension between the monarchy and conservative politicians. The Philippines had gained independence politically from the United States at the end of the Second World War but somehow dependent economically on the United States. Indeed it was the start of the breakdown of colonialism, before the end of the 20th century, but without political stability in all the colonized countries in the 1950s.

Those countries that gained their Independence more or less in the 1950s were: Korea 1945, Myanmar 1948, Laos 1949, Vietnam 1954, Philippines 1946, Indonesia 1950, Cambodia 1953, Malaysia 1957, Singapore 1965.

2.2. *Colonial Association*

With the collapse of colonialism in the years immediately before and after the 1950s, the feeling of animosity towards Christianity as a western or foreign religion was present in some EAO countries.⁵ This feeling was the fruit of their experience of the pains of colonialism itself as in Cambodia, Burma and Vietnam; the attacks by Western

⁵ Cf. Hubert JEDIN (ed.), *History of the Church. The Church in the Modern Age*, Vol. X, London, Burns and Oates 1981, pp. 751-777.

powers as in Japan. In *Cambodia* the Catholics in their small mission Church were branded as agents of a foreign religion. One who had himself baptized a Christian was called a traitor. In the *Malay Peninsula* the 1950s was the time when Rome desired to give new stimulus to the Catholic mission by taking into account the ethnic circumstances, introducing the transfer of church government to native hands; by removing the causes for the ever louder complaints that the Catholic Church was biased, that it was not supranational but bound to the Western colonial powers; and by showing the people that the Holy See understands and fosters the struggle of colonial peoples for independence. In *Thailand* though the country was never colonized by foreign powers, on account of black propaganda against the French colonial power in the 1940s, the Catholics were also persecuted by some groups of fanatics in some parts of the country. The situation improved after World War II. In 1953 there were among 18 million inhabitants, at most 85,000 Catholics, mostly Vietnamese and Chinese, seldom Thais. In *Myanmar* residence permits were withdrawn from all missionaries, especially from foreign missionaries who had entered after 1948, the year of independence. The state claimed the sole right to educate the youth. In an effort to accommodate the strong national consciousness of the population and to remove prejudices against the Catholics, Rome pushed from 1954 for the transfer of the direction of the Church to native Bishops. This strong sentiment toward the Catholic Church as foreign religion restricted evangelization mostly to the animistic mountain tribes of the population and to the immigrant Indians and Chinese. In 1955 there were among 16 million inhabitants only about 150,000 Catholics, scarcely any of them Burmese who had professed Buddhism exclusively. In *Japan* even though great progress was made by Pope Pius XI solving the problem of the Japanese rites in 1936, by allowing Japanese Catholics to share in the patriotic and civil ceremonies, the animosity towards the Catholic Church was not completely erased in the 1940s and 1950s. The slogan of the anti-foreign Japanese nationalistic movement was: Christianity is a foreign religion, hence not for the Japanese. To curb this nationalistic perspective towards

the Church Rome hastened to turn over all ecclesiastical territories, to a great extent governed by foreign prelates, to Japanese prelates. Some foreign missionaries voluntarily relinquished their position to the Japanese clergy. Transforming the ecclesiastical hierarchy to its native leadership was somehow a solution against anti-foreign sentiment towards the Catholic Church. Much earlier than Japan a similar solution happened in the *Philippines* to curb any anti-foreign Filipino nationalistic movement, particularly the schism of the Aglipayan church from Rome in 1902. Although the indigenous Aglipayan church may not be seen as a nationalistic movement against the Catholic Church, nevertheless it was an offshoot of the Filipino fight for justice and freedom from the Spanish clergy and the colonizers. Their demand was to give to Filipinos all the bishoprics and other ecclesiastical dignities in the country. In 1960 all the seven archbishoprics and fourteen residential bishoprics were governed by Filipino Archbishops and Bishops with only two exceptions because both were missionary territories (Diocese of Surigao and Archdiocese of Cagayan). With this growth and development in the Philippine Church, the Aglipayan church had no reason to exist. It was in the 1950s and 60s that a new responsibility devolved on the Philippine Church: the evangelization of Southeast Asia. At least, the Filipino missionaries were not exposed to the suspicion that they were emissaries of Western "imperialism". In 1958, the Conference of the Bishops of Southeast Asia decided to establish a radio station in Manila, known today as Radio Veritas for evangelization of Southeast Asia.

2.3. *Menace of Communism*

Though colonialism contributed to the antagonistic attitude towards the Catholic Church as a foreign religion, in the 1950s Marxist Communism, was the primary antagonist of Christianity. Communism had extended its influence from Russia into most of Eastern Europe, central Asia, Vietnam, North Korea, China and other parts of EAO region. The communist victory in China would make Southeast Asia a major theatre in the Cold War. This Cold War between 1940s and

1960s made the superpowers manipulate newly emerging Southeast Asian countries, which were faced with a choice between the conflicting role models of *communism* and *capitalism* as the means of achieving national unity and general development. The United States, which had survived the crash of Wall Street (1929) emerged as the prominent political, economic, military and ideological power in the Cold War against Communism.

In China, foreign missionaries were expelled after the decree of June 1950 by the Communist regime on the suppression of “counterrevolutionary activity”. In 1957 the regime tried to construct a National Chinese Church separated from Rome by appointing bishops without papal approval. From 1957 to 1962 alone, a total of forty-five bishops were appointed by the state.⁶ This persecution of the Catholic Church stifled all development and expansion of the religious congregations, particularly of the Salesians in China. By 1957, all the ten settings in China were closed.

Communism was also a threat in the Philippines. In 1951 the Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Msgr. Egidio Vagnozzi (successor to the Salesian Apostolic Delegate from 1922-1948, Msgr. Guglielmo Piani) wrote to Fr Renato Ziggiotti begging with insistence and encouraging the Salesians to come:

“It is true that there is the political situation that can arouse some preoccupations, the nearby conflict in Korea and the uneasiness about the Huks in the country. But this is also a Catholic nation, the only one in the Far East, that needs to be saved from communism... At any rate, the situation in these islands is not all desperate. We are defended by the sea and by the jagged configuration of the archipelago, as well as by the American forces... Above all, there is the protection of God and of the Most Holy Virgin whose title of ‘Mary Help’, so full of meaning and promise, reached here also”.⁷

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 755.

⁷ Gregorio BICOMONG Jr., *The Arrival of Don Bosco in the Philippines, Requests made to the Salesians, 1891-1951*, Makati City, Don Bosco Press Inc. 2001, p. 144.

2.4. *Political Peace and Political Change*

In many countries where there was “political peace” after the Second World War, the growth of the work of the Salesians was apparent in the 1950s. Political peace here is not the absence of political instability but rather the absence of major wars both from internal and external factors or absence of political coercion. It is a general trend that where there was political peace, the beginnings and expansion of the Salesian work was facilitated in the 1950s. In Korea, for example, after the three-year *Korean War* (war between North and South Korea, 1950-1953), the concrete proposal in 1953 from the Bishop of Kwangju became the seed of the start of the Salesian work through the coming of Fr. Archimede Martelli in 1954.⁸

In Vietnam although there were the initial work of Fr Francisque Dupont in the 1940s and the arrival of the Salesians, Fr Antonio Giacomino and Fr Andrej Majcen in Hanoi in 1952, an initial development of the Salesian work occurred only after the *Indochina War* of 1954 (known as the First Indochina War where the Vietnamese fought against the French for Independence) which culminated with the signing of the Geneva agreement that divided Vietnam into two: the north to the communists, and the south to the nationalists. It was only after the *Vietnam War* (1960s-1975) (also known as Second Indochina War, where North Vietnam fought against the south and Americans), that most of the Salesian Houses were founded in spite of the communist control.⁹

In the Philippines, despite the many requests for the Salesians before the *Second World War*, nothing was realized until the war was over. Msgr. Piani, the Salesian Apostolic Delegate to the

⁸ Cf. Michael CHANG, *A Concise History of the Salesian Korean Mission* in Nestor C. IMPELIDO (ed.), *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*, Vol. I. Hong Kong, ACSSA 2006, pp. 179-183.

⁹ Cf. John NGUYEN VAN TY, *The Beginning of the Salesian Work in Vietnam. The Patriarchal Story and Exodus* in N.C. IMPELIDO, *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence ...*, I, pp. 165-177.

Philippines, also cites the several years of war which afflicted and devastated the Far East as one of the reasons why he did not succeed in starting the Salesian work in the Philippines.¹⁰

However, if political peace can help develop the work of the Salesians, political change could also help its expansion. In China, for example, after the collapse of Chiang kai-shek rule on the mainland, the communist People's Republic of China was officially established in Peking. This political change brought about the expulsion of Salesian foreigners from China especially in 1954 and their transplantation to other countries like Vietnam, Philippines, Korea and Taiwan. Other Salesians who were destined to go to China before the communist take-over of Salesian works were also diverted to other countries. It answered the problem of the lack of personnel in the early development of their works.

2.5. *A Church in Transition*

In the Catholic Church too the 1950s were known as the period of transition. It was a transition from a defensive, and anti-ecumenical Catholicism of the first half of the century to a period of openness to dialogue with zeal for the unity of Christians. We recall that until the 1950s the Catholics were still cautioned about association with Orthodox and Protestants and forbidden to attend the World Council of Churches meetings without permission from the Holy See. The monitum *Cum compertum* of the Holy Office in Rome, issued on 5 June 1948 made reference to the regulations of Canon Law (Canon 1325, par.3) that participation in discussions of faith with non-Catholics was allowed only with the previous permission of the Holy See.¹¹ In 1950s the last eight years of Pius XII's pontificate were still characterized by a growing conservatism. In 1958, with the election of Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncali who took the name of the controversial Pisan Pope, John XXIII, and widely known as the

¹⁰ G. BICOMONG, *The Arrival of Don Bosco...*, p. 97.

¹¹ H. JEDIN, *History of the Church...*, p. 469.

“Pastor”, change had come to the Catholic Church. In 1959, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Pope John XXIII announced at St. Paul’s Outside the Walls that there would be an ecumenical council for the Catholic Church. In 1960 the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity was established. This ecumenical council, known as the Second Vatican Council, was opened in 1962 and paved the way for the passage from an “intransigent” Church to a “liberal”, open Church.

If change had happened in the 1950s discarding the defensive attitude of the Church towards ecumenical movement, the same happened when it came to dialogue with non-Christian religions, in which majority of the countries in the EAO region are non-Christian countries, with the exception of the Philippines, East Timor, Australia and Papua New Guinea. Historically, until the 1950s, Catholic understanding was that in order to be saved one *had to belong to*, one *had to be a member* of the Catholic Church. From the third century theology of St. Cyprian, through *Unam Sanctam* of Pope Boniface VIII, through the profession of faith sworn to by the Fathers of Vatican Council I, the teaching was explicit: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*: “Outside the Church, no salvation”. In Vatican Council II, opened by John XXIII, the documents Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - *Lumen Gentium*, the Decree on Ecumenism – *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian religions – *Nostra Aetate*, conceded that God did indeed work through religions and churches other than the Catholic Church alone. With that allowance the whole new interreligious dialogue and ecumenical horizons were opened.

2.6. *A Particular Need after WW II*

The weapons and machines used during the Second World War were indications of tremendous progress in industrialization, particularly of the industrialized nations. These modern machines echo the need for an accelerated social and economic development particularly for the developing countries in the 1950s through the opening of the

technical schools. In 1952 the Congregation too took up Professional, Technical and Agricultural Schools as the main topic for the 17th General Chapter.¹² In answer to this need some EAO countries heeded the sign of the times to help the poor young people learn a trade and contribute to the economic progress of the country.

In the Philippines, for example, on 31 January 1951 the Catholic Hierarchy issued a pastoral letter on the need of Vocational Schools in the education of the country:

“A serious regard for the needs of the country as well as a sane spirit of patriotism demands that vocational training be given stress in the educational system. For lack of vocational training the Philippines, according to many critics, is fast becoming a nation of lawyers, accountants and typists...”¹³

It was because of the statement by the Church hierarchy that Fr Carlo Braga, the Provincial of China, was encouraged to write a letter to the Rector Major, Fr Pietro Ricaldone, saying that it was the propitious moment for the Salesians to come to the Philippines.

In Myanmar the best modern school of the area known as “Don Bosco Technical School” was set up in 1957 through the zeal of Fr Bordin. It was envisioned to have a grand Polytechnic Institute in an industrial quarter of Rangoon. Unfortunately in 1965 the government confiscated the entire school and “nationalized” it.¹⁴

In Thailand two Technical Schools were founded: one in Bangkok in 1947 and another in Surathani in 1959.

In Korea, although a little late, a Vocational Training Center was also established in 1968.

¹² Santo Russo, *I primi venticinque capitoli generali, 1877-2002. Società di San Francesco di Sales, Salesiani*, Catania, La grafica editoriale-edizioni di Nicolò 2007, p. 55.

¹³ J. BICOMONG, *The Arrival of Don Bosco...*, p. 110.

¹⁴ The source is an unpublished article entitled *The Salesian Congregation in Myanmar* written by Joachim Ye MAUNG.

In Vietnam, because of the ravages of French Indochina War, the Salesians felt the need to accept the Boys Town with about 450 boys in Hanoi in 1952.¹⁵ This was eventually transferred to the South of Vietnam after the Geneva agreement in 1954. In the Philippines the Salesians started their work in Cebu Boys' Town for the street children in 1954, and in Sydney, Australia, in 1952.

2.7. *Houses opened in 1940s, 1950s and 1960s*¹⁶

Houses opened in the 1940s (20 houses)

<i>Macao 1906</i>	(1940 Colegio; 1942 Yuet Wah; 1943 Coloane)
<i>China 1910</i>	(1946 Peking; 1943 Su Chow)
<i>Japan 1926</i>	(1946 Kokubunji; 1947 Nakatsu-Osada Koen; 1947 Tokyo-Meguro; 1949 Osaka)
<i>Australia 1927</i>	(1940 Melbourne; 1946 Adelaide; 1947 Hobart; 1947 Oakleigh)
<i>Thailand 1927</i>	(1947 Bang Nok Khuek; 1947 Banpong; 1947 Bangkok; 1947 Haad Yai; 1947 Hua Hin)
<i>Timor 1927</i>	(1946 Dili; 1949 Fuiloro)

Houses opened in 1950s (27 houses)

<i>Macao 1906</i>	(1951 Macao – Stampa)
<i>Japan 1926</i>	(1950 Chofu; 1952 Hita; 1955 Saeki; 1959 Tokyo – Yotsuya)
<i>Australia 1927</i>	(1952 Sydney – Boys Town; 1957 Port Pirie)

¹⁵ Cf. John NGUYEN VAN TY, *The Beginning of the Salesian Work in Vietnam* ..., pp. 170-172.

¹⁶ Cf. *Elenco Generale della Società di San Francesco di Sales 1940-1963*, [Editrice SDB, Torino].

- Hong Kong 1927* (1951 Hong Kong – Shaukiwan; 1952 Hong Kong – Kowloon; 1957 Cheung Chau)
- Thailand 1927* (1957 Udonthani; 1959 Surathani)
- Myanmar 1938* (1954 Rangoon; 1957 Anisakan)
- Vietnam 1952* (1952 Hanoi – 1955 Thu Duc; 1955 Go Vap – *Training Center*; 1957 Dalat)
- Philippines 1951* (1951 Tarlac; 1952 Victorias; 1953 Mandaluyong; 1954 Makati; 1954 Cebu Boys Town; 1956 Muntinlupa; 1956 San Ildefonso; 1958 San Fernando)
- Taiwan 1952* (1952 Taipei)
- South Korea 1954* (1954 Kwanju; 1958 Torimdong)

Houses opened in 1960 (23 houses)

- Japan 1926* (1960 Nakatsu; 1961; Tsukumi; 1963 Kawasaki)
- Australia 1927* (1961 Chadstone; 1964 Ferntree Gully; 1964 Lysterfield)
- Hong Kong 1927* (1965 Hong Kong – Wanchai; 1966 Hong Kong – West Point)
- Thailand 1927* (1964 Bangkok; 1964 Betong; 1964 Yala; 1965 Ron Phibun)
- Timor 1927* (1960 Ossu; 1962 Baucau; 1964 Fatumaca)
- Myanmar 1938* (1965 Anisakan)
- Vietnam 1952* (1962 Tram Hanh)
- Philippines 1951* (1960 Canlubang – *Rizal Inst.*; 1963 Canlubang; 1968 Don Bosco Tondo)
- Taiwan 1952* (1963 Tainan; 1964 Taipei)
- South Korea 1954* (1963 Seoul)

Although a good number of houses were opened in the 1950s in the EAO region, all the houses in China were closed because of Communism in 1957. In the 1950s, however, one can see that the Philippines had the most number of houses opened. This was the result not of the expulsion of the missionaries from China by the communists but of the *persistent and numerous requests* before and after the 1950s (since 1891!) for the Salesians from civil authorities, ecclesiastical authorities, benefactors and Salesian Cooperators.¹⁷ Negotiations regarding pending requests were going on after the war, in particular in Tarlac and Victorias (1949), even before the expulsion of the Salesian foreign missionaries from China. The first three Salesians who arrived in the Philippines in 1951 were not expellees from China: Fr Anthony Di Falco and Fr John Ruthkowski from the Western Province of the United States and Fr Guido D'Amore from Hong Kong. Fr Braga later, knowing the political situation getting worse in China, wrote to Fr Ricaldone in 1951 saying, "*The Philippines is opening for us its doors and it would be good to channel our energy towards it.*"¹⁸

Concluding Observations

By way of conclusion, I would like to outline the following challenges facing the Salesian historians in the EAO region:

1. Most of the provinces have not written their history until the 1950s. Some have just mentioned works that were opened in the 1950s but not in a detailed and scientific manner. The challenge is to write the history, if the archives are open, in the light of the political, ecclesial and social changes of this period.
2. For those EAO countries colonized by foreign powers and where there was a strong presence of ancient religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism, Christianity was associated with the foreign, western, colonial rulers. Did the

¹⁷ Cf. J. BICOMONG, "*The Arrival of Don Bosco...*, p.1-11."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

change of attitude of the Church towards the non-Christians and our separated brethren in the 1950s and 60s favour the development of the Salesian works in our region? What was the effort of the Provinces to remove this impression of a Church that is “western” or “colonial”? What was the effort on the part of the Provinces to prepare local vocations for positions of leadership from the 1950s onwards?

3. In most of the EAO region, Catholics are in the minority vis-à-vis the great ancient religions. Was this a great obstacle in the expansion of the Salesian work? If so, it is good to delineate in the history of these Provinces how they tried to overcome this obstacle. What efforts were made on the part of the Provinces for interreligious and ecumenical dialogue especially in the 1950s and 1960s?
4. When the Vietnamese became independent from France in 1954, they changed the names of the streets in Saigon (and the name Saigon itself to Ho Chi Minh City in 1975) in an attempt to erase the traces of French colonization. The famous Rue Catenat, so well-known to journalists, was renamed Thu Do (Freedom). There were, however, two streets named after Frenchmen which the Vietnamese did not change. One was named after Pasteur, the great scientist to whom the whole world is indebted. The other was named after a French Jesuit missionary, Fr. Alexandre de Rhodes, whose Vietnamese name was Da-clo.¹⁹ This was a tribute to the man to whom the people of Viet Nam owe their modern script through the publication of his Dictionary in Annamese language (Annam is the central kingdom) in 1650. This missionary approach of de Rhodes in Viet Nam, similar to Ricci in China, was based upon a profound respect for the native language, native ideas, native costumes

¹⁹ Cf. Miguel A BERNAD, *Five Great Missionary Experiments and Cultural Issues in Asia*. (= Cardinal Bea Studies XI). Manila, Ateneo De Manila University 1991, p. 57.

etc., all of which constituted the soil on which they wished to build the Christian edifice.

A great Salesian missionary in Japan, Fr Vincenzo Cimatti, used to say: “If you wish to be a missionary in Japan, either you become Japanese upto the marrow of your bones or you don’t accomplish anything.” “I would like to die here, in order to become Japanese soil.”²⁰ Such was the testimony of Cimatti on missionary methodology and spirit of inculturation. What was the effort of the Provinces, at the beginning of the post-colonial era from the 1950s onwards, in inculturating the Salesian Spirit and the Gospel in the native context?

²⁰ ENZO BIANCO, *Diventare Terra Giapponese. Il Servo di Dio Don Vincenzo Cimatti* (= Collana Santi Salesiani 13), Roma, Editrice SDB 1979, p. 4.

THE GROWTH OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN THE EAO REGION: RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES FOUNDED BY SALESIANS

*Nestor C. Impelido**

Introduction

The Salesian Society made a commitment in its last General Chapter to return to Don Bosco and start afresh from him. Seeking to be in line with this thrust given by the General Chapter, this study-contribution to the regional seminar can perhaps help to recover and to return to Don Bosco in the East Asia - Oceania (EAO) Region, where Salesian Missionaries who came to China, Japan and Thailand, sowed the charism of Don Bosco and saw among the fruits it bore the religious congregations founded by some of their fellow missionaries. At the root of their sowing was the spirit of the *da mihi animas, cetera tolle* of Don Bosco, lived in the style of the preventive system, directed to the young characterized as poor and abandoned, and now shared and sown likewise by the natives of the places where the Salesian seed was planted.

This study also aims to present the various congregations founded by some of the Salesian missionaries who worked in the East Asian region of the known Salesian world. It focuses briefly on their pre-history and immediate history, including their founders, purposes, and manner in which these congregations were established. Although it is largely based on primary documents collected from archives of the respective congregations, the Salesian Central Archives remain the primary source of this study. The period in which the study is collocated is the latter part of the first half of the 20th century, which covers the foundation of the Salesian missions in China (1910),

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Japan (1926), Thailand and Hong Kong (1927). The relevance of this study is reiterated by the strenna of the Rector Major for 2009, calling on these Congregations to rally together as solid branches of that one tree called Don Bosco. The study of the history of these congregations can give us insights into the evolution of Don Bosco's charism in the EAO Region.

The study and writing of the history of each of the Congregations referred to in this article should be the prerogative of these Congregations.¹ Due to the current lack of clear and scientific histories of these Congregations, this work is rather incomplete.

Being pioneers in their mission territories and in their direct ministry, Saint Luigi Versiglia and Bishop Ignazio Canazei, Venerable Vincenzo Cimatti and Fr Antonio Cavoli, Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, Fr Carlo Della Torre were not only Salesian missionaries in East Asia but also founders of female religious congregations made up of natives. Some of them were leaders of the missionary expeditions and religious superiors of their confreres (Versiglia, Canazei, Cimatti, and Pasotti); some held ecclesiastical offices as Apostolic Vicars (Versiglia, Canazei, Pasotti) and Prefect Apostolic (Cimatti). All of them were Italian in origin, coming from the northern part of Italy: Lombardy (Versiglia, Pasotti and Della Torre), Emilia-Romagna (Cimatti, Cavoli), Trentino - Alto Adige (Canazei). These were Salesians who had known personally Major Superiors in Turin, most specially the Rectors Major who personally knew Don Bosco and lived his spirit. The religious congregations founded by these Salesians were all born in their assigned mission territories at the advent of the Salesian work:

¹ In the East Asia - Oceania Regional Seminar on Salesian History conducted in Hong Kong from 4 to 6 December 2004, the following studies related to the Congregations founded by Salesians were presented: Maria Mukai YUMIKO, *Brief Historical Notes on the Foundation of the Sisters of Charity of Miyazaki*; Maliwan PARAMATHAWIROTE, *The Identity of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Thailand*; Anna Saksri NGAMWONG, *History of the Origins of the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary*. Cf. Nestor C. IMPELIDO, *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Vol. 2. (= ACSSA - Varia, 3). Hong Kong, [no publisher] 2006.

Shiu Chow (China), Miyazaki (Japan), and Rajaburi (Thailand). The need of immediate indigenous collaborators adept at working with the female constituents of the Salesians' missionary work arose, because the Salesians lacked sufficient preparation to work with native girls. The religious congregations whose members came from abroad were surely incapable of meeting the demands of this particular sector of the mission work, at least in the beginning.

The decision to found congregations by some Salesians in East Asia was inspired by the teachings of the Popes of the period: Popes Benedict XV (1914-1922), Pius XI (1922-1939) and Pius XII (1939-1958). The *magisterium* of the papacy regarding the missionary work of the Church guided and gave the Salesians-founders reasons on the relevance of giving origin to congregations: the apostolic letter of Benedict XV *Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919) on the propagation of the faith throughout the world, the encyclical of Pius XI *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 February 1926) on the need of more missionaries and the involvement of the faithful in the work of evangelization, and the apostolic constitution of Pius XII *Provida Mater Ecclesiae* (2 February 1947) concerning secular institutes. The period in fact was in need of a direction, if only to launch the missionary zeal of the Church, especially for those who were earnest about extending the Kingdom of God to those who were receptive to it.

1. Sisters Announcers of the Lord (=SAL)

1.1. Bishop Luigi Versiglia and the "Vergini Indigeni"

A year after his Episcopal appointment (1920) as Apostolic Vicar of Shiu Chow, Bishop Luigi Versiglia had sent a report to Lyons regarding his jurisdiction. He reported that he had opened a house and a school for the formation of *vierges indigenes* or *catechistesses*.² He also wrote that in Lin Chow there was also a school of young aspirants to the religious life who awaited the opening of their formation

² Archivio Salesiano Centrale (ASC) A351 *Versiglia [fasc. 3]- Relazione del lavoro dell'anno [1920-1921] [21 November 1921]*.

house in Shiu Chow. This was under the care of a lady who left the comfort of her own house to live with the so-called aspirants in a house rented by the Mission. In another district of the Mission there were some of these *Kuneong* or *Vergini Cinesi* who taught needy children and lived in the *Kuneong Tong* or *casa delle vergini* (house of virgins).³ In 1921 he reported that the catechists in the formation house near the Salesian College of St. Joseph were already constructing a school to be entrusted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (=FMA).⁴ Addressing the Mission's need to approach the female class, the FMA augmented the pastoral workers in the Vicariate Apostolic⁵ as requested by Bishop Versiglia. They were also entrusted with a school to take care of the female catechists, which was taking definite form and increasing in number through their work.⁶ By 1924, Bishop Versiglia was drafting the rules in order to make the growing Institute of the *Kuneong* a true religious institute as the members were completing their formation and beginning to serve in the various districts of the Vicariate.⁷ In order to help them learn to be catechists themselves, the FMA would bring with them one or two *Kuneong* to accompany them in their catechism of the families.⁸

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ ASC A351 *Versiglia [fasc. 3] - Relazione [1921-1922] [15 October 1922]*. In fact, in Hosai the Salesians also bought another terrain sometime in 1922, not far from the College of St. Joseph, as future residence for the FMA.

⁵ ASC A352 *Versiglia - Report on Vicariate Apostolic of Shuchow 1920-1921*.

⁶ ASC A351 *Versiglia [3] - Relazione [1922-1923] [8 December 1923]*. Sr Onorina Gallo FMA stated that already since 1920 the Salesians had thought of starting apostolate for the girls. For this they had acquired a small house and a playground in front of their College of Hosai, which they furnished as a future institute for "Suore indigene". In fact, there they began to gather immediately "alcune ragazze desiderose di abbandonare il mondo, per servire Dio e la missione come catechiste", a work which slowly consolidated. As early as 1925 ca. Msgr. Versiglia was formulating a special regulation, in order to make the institute "un vero Istituto religioso". Cf. Archivio Generalizia Figlie di Maria Ausiatrice, Roma (AGFMA), *Memoirs of Sr Onorina Gallo FMA*, Turin, SEI 1925).

⁷ ASC A351 *Versiglia [3] - Relazione [1923-1924] [30 August 1924]*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, *Resoconto del lavoro [1924-1925] [1 October 1925]*.

1.2. *The Sisters Announcers of the Lord*

Based on Fr Mario Rassiga's reply to the inquiry of Fr Giovanni Raineri, the real name of this Congregation was *Suore Annunziatrici del Signore* (=Sisters Announcers of the Lord). Bishop Versiglia wanted to call this group with a truly Chinese name: Hin (=Annunciare, Manifestare) Ciu (=Signore) Wui (=Società, Congregazione).⁹

The August 1968 issue of the Salesian Bulletin provides certain historical indications regarding the origins of the *Kuneong*.¹⁰ The *Primum Concilium Sinense* held in the Church of St. Ignatius in Shanghai (14 May to 12 June 1924), in Title XLII, article 196, provided an explanation of these girls to which Bishop Versiglia patterned the institute that he intended to establish in his Vicariate Apostolic. The *Virgines* were described as servants in the homes, serving the Missions under the direction of the Ordinary or of the Missionaries. There were other so-called *Missionis adiutrices*, who gathered in pious societies in the manner of religious and helped in the Missions, taught children in school, lead prayers in homes, baptized dying infants or adults and showed good example to all, whether Christians or pagans. These were supposed to be pious women of mature age, with proven experience, good name and sound doctrine. Some of them would make vows according to some rules.¹¹

Focusing himself on this direction after the Chinese Council, Bishop Versiglia saw the need in China for women to be prepared to do apostolate among their peers. Thus he opened a school for adult Christian catechists to whom he would give an intensive program and

⁹ ASC SAL 121 *Rassiga to Rainieri, Hong Kong, 10 June 1972*. In the 1970s this Congregation was present in Hong Kong, Macau and Formosa. It had one handicap: few of them understood and spoke English.

¹⁰ *Famiglie religiose fondate da Salesiani*, BS XCII (agosto August 1968) 16-17.

¹¹ *Primum Concilium Sinense* (1924) Title XLII "De *Virginibus catechistis*", 196, 1-5: "Virgines de quibus est sermo, in domibus suis virginitatem servantes, Missioni inserviunt sub directione Ordinarii aut Missionariorum. »

provide a priest to follow them up, expecting that in a few months, they would be at the level of helping the missionaries and of intensifying the work of evangelization.¹² He offered this course for female catechists in Hosai, in the place of the FMA, hoping that from this initiative, the future sisters of the Vicariate would sprout.¹³ Bishop Versiglia wrote that the house of formation of the young catechists was full and that he hoped that at the end of 1927, a group of them would soon be of help in the Vicariate. He considered them prepared in study and piety.¹⁴ However, writing to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide on 26 October 1929, he declared that the school of catechists could not yet be independent.¹⁵

1.3. *The Chronicle of the FMA of Hosai*

The chronicle of the FMA house of Hosai provides an early and important account of the beginnings of the SAL. As early as 1923, it recorded that seven girls, labelled by the chronicle as *Kuneong*, arrived on that Tuesday of 30 July, to sleep in a big room at the second floor of a house.¹⁶ Finding themselves at ease and in unity with the Sisters, they participated in the Eucharistic celebration and benediction. The chronicler expressed a prayer: that the Lord and the Blessed Virgin might help them to make these *Kuneong* good religious or at least exemplary Christians.¹⁷ They were provided a schedule by their FMA supervisor to follow.¹⁸ One of the sectors of the FMA house in Hosai was called a studentate for the *Kuneong*.¹⁹ Nonetheless, even

¹² ASC A351 *Versiglia [3] - Resoconto del lavoro [1925-1926] [24 October 1926]*.

¹³ *Famiglie religiose fondate da Salesiani*, BS XCII (agosto August 1968) 16.

¹⁴ ASC A351 *Versiglia [3]- Resoconto del lavoro [1926-1927]*.

¹⁵ ASC A352 *Versiglia to Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Shuchow, 26 October 1929*.

¹⁶ AGFMA *Chronicle of Hosai*, 31 July - 1 August 1923.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 August 1923.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27 August 1923.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 December 1927. At another date in 1928, one the sectors of the FMA work in Hosai was a "Casa di formazione Kuneong indigene", with ten formandi.

if Bishop Versiglia asked the FMA to receive and supervise the *Kuneong*, the Salesians were directly involved in providing formation to these girls. Taking time to personally form these *Kuneong* whom he had recruited, he came and talked to them in the FMA house on 8 September 1923 in Hosai. He also gave a conference to the FMA Sisters at the invitation of the superior.²⁰ Later that year, he was already giving conferences “to the girls”.²¹

On 17 August 1924 Bishop Versiglia came to begin a triduum for them. Returning two days later to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, he distributed to the girls “the regulations to be studied”.²² In 1927, three days after the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Bishop Versiglia decided that the native *Kuneong* should take Mary Immaculate as their patroness.²³ Other Salesians took turns to help form them. Fr Carlo Braga went to the house of Hosai in order to give evening lessons of Catechism and Church History to the *Kuneong*.²⁴ Fr Larena came to bestow to some *Kuneong* the Carmelite scapular.²⁵ Later, Fr Giovanni Guarona, Pro-Vicar of the Diocese of Shiuchow, gave two retreats to this particular group from 2-3 April 1930.²⁶ Several years earlier, he began to give classes of catechism twice a week to these girls.²⁷

Bishop Canazei continued from where Bishop Versiglia had left off and took charge of the formation of the *Kuneong*. As it was the custom of his predecessor, after his conferences to the FMA in Hosai, he took the chance to speak to the *Kuneong* as well. To help them advance in their formation, he spoke to them regarding the vows,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 September 1923.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 28 December 1923.

²² *Ibid.*, 19 August 1924.

²³ *Ibid.*, 15 December 1928.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27 February 1928.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20 July 1929.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3 April 1930.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 August 1923.

taught them how to recite the Office of the Blessed Virgin during spiritual exercises and preached retreats to them.²⁸ It was on the occasion of an exercise for a happy death that he announced to them and to the Sisters the opening of the *Kuneong Tong* the following month of May 1932.²⁹ They took every possible chance in order to have a personal colloquy with their founder and to receive advice from him.³⁰

On 16 February 1930, a *Kuneong* named Pang Lucia left for her first field of mission and then stayed in Hosai to learn some trade.³¹ After Bishop Versiglia had just preached an exercise for a happy death for them,³² three *Kuneong* left on 21 February for the districts they were assigned to. The *Kuneong* Then Kala proceeded to Lien Chow with Bishop Versiglia, who was bound there for a pastoral visit.³³ Three days later, on 26 February, the FMA received the news that Bishop Versiglia and Fr Caravario, together with the *Kuneong* Then Kala and two other girls, were taken as hostages by pirates while they were on their way to Lin Chow. The next day, the FMA received a telegram announcing the death of the two Salesians. However, there was still no news about the three girls who were with the two missionaries. By March the news arrived stating the girls were finally free. One of the FMAs, Sr Elena, in fact, had gone to Lien-Kong-Heu to bring them back to Shiu Chow.³⁴

1.4. *Founder but not Originator*

Bishop Versiglia never had a chance to realize the foundation of the congregation which he had initiated, on account of his death on

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 December 1930, 12 July 1931, 2 September 1932.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 January 1932.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 November 1929.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16 February 1930.

³² *Ibid.*, 14 February 1930. Bishop Versiglia had also preached at the beginning of the new year 1930. Cf. *ibid.*, 2 January 1930.

³³ *Ibid.*, 23 February 1930.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-28 February 1930.

25 February 1930. However, his successor, Bishop Ignazio Canazei, continued to strengthen the congregation which his predecessor had originated. In his annual report of 1931 Bishop Canazei³⁵ stated that one of the projects for the following year was the foundation of a female native religious congregation. He hoped to finalize their house of formation and to finally begin their first year of novitiate.³⁶ Consequently in 1932 Bishop Canazei put the initiative for native religious as the first among the works going on in the Vicariate Apostolic. The house was almost ready and the first group of novices hoped to enter by Christmas of that year. Bishop Canazei considered this as something that would bring joy to all, inasmuch as this venture realized the desire of Pope Pius XI.³⁷

Earlier, on 5 March 1931, Bishop Canazei spoke to Sr Palmira Parri, the FMA superior in Shiu Chow, expressing his plan to start the construction of the house of formation of the native religious. He asked Sr Parri to express her ideas regarding the female indigenous congregation for which he thought of asking her collaboration. Fr Kirchner declared that the SAL was the “apple of the eye” of Bishop Canazei.³⁸ It was from St. Ignatius’ motto *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*,³⁹ that Bishop Canazei took the name of the Congregation he was founding.⁴⁰ It was to be an association of native religious of

³⁵ The annual reports of Bishop Ignazio Canazei are catalogued among the documents labelled “Versiglia” in Salesian Central Archives. His annual reports, together with those of Bishop Versiglia’s, refer to the diocese of Shiu Chow.

³⁶ ASC A351 *Versiglia [3]- Relazione del lavoro compiuto [1930-1931]*.

³⁷ ASC A351 *Versiglia [3]- Relazione del lavoro compiuto [1931-1932]*. In the same year 1932, Msgr. Canazei stated that in Hosai, Shiu Chow, the FMA administered “un Ospizio per fanciulle povere”, whom they taught Christian doctrine and other domestic and manual work. “Tra di queste fanciulle quelle che hanno più attitudine, saranno poi catechiste di missione, altre che si sentiranno chiamate, si faranno religiose, altre ancora rimarranno con le Suore come donne di servizio.” Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁸ ASC SAL 121 *Kirchner - Annunciatrici del Signore*.

³⁹ ASC SAL 121 *Rassiga to Rainieri, Hong Kong, 10 June 1972*.

⁴⁰ ASC SAL 121 *Rassiga to Rainieri, Hong Kong, 10 June 1972*.

diocesan right, like other diocesan institutes. There would be regulations approved by the Vicar Apostolic which would govern the formation of the Congregation's postulants and novices, as well as the direction of its professed members. The house that the Vicariate Apostolic intended to build was supposedly destined exclusively as house for the native postulants, novices and professed members.⁴¹

Furthermore, since it was the desire of his predecessor to entrust to the FMA the initial care of the Congregation, Bishop Canazei asked if the FMA were disposed to assume the formation and direction of the Institute, at least in its initial stage. If the answer to his request was affirmative, he would then ask Sr Parri if she would be willing to be superior and mistress of novices of the new Institute.⁴² Sr Parri's response to Bishop Canazei's letter came two days later, on 7 March 1931.

Sometime in May 1931, Bishop Canazei wrote to the Propaganda Fide, asking permission to establish the Congregation according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law, canon 492. Propaganda Fide responded affirmatively to the request on 30 May 1931.⁴³ However, there were difficulties with regards to the establishment of a novitiate in Shiu Chow for the new congregation. Nonetheless, by 1936, Bishop Canazei had obtained from the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide the permission to erect a novitiate of the Institute in Shiu Chow. The Bishop of Canton, Antonio Fouquet MEP, sent a native sister of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Canton to be the mistress of novices of the new Congregation.⁴⁴

⁴¹ AGFMA 13.65-114 *Canazei to Parri, Shiuchow 5 March 1931.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ ASC SAL 121 *Kirschner - Annunciatrici del Signore.*

⁴⁴ ASC SAL 121 *Zen to Cuevas, Hong Kong, 26 November 1986.*

2. Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki

2.1. Fr Cavoli's Foundation

Fr Antonio Cavoli admitted in his autobiography that he decided to found the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki (CSM) by virtue of obedience to his superior. Fr Luigi Lonfernini, the parish priest of Fr Cavoli at San Giovanni in Marignano in Rimini, Italy, said that this autobiography was to bring to light some of Fr Cavoli's exceptional merits,⁴⁵ one being the foundation of the CSM. The situation in Japan, which was under the strong influence of nationalism to the point of fanaticism, simply pointed the direction towards the foundation of the CSM. Spying upon all foreigners, the militaristic government was strongly pressurizing the Apostolic Delegate in Tokyo to substitute all foreign Bishops and Prefects Apostolic, as well as all foreign directors of schools, with local ones. For this Fr Cavoli, the real director of the Hospice, had to resign making the superior of his sisters to act as head in front of the civil authorities. However, it was he who directed the Hospice, as all respected and subjected themselves to his directives.⁴⁶

Fr Cavoli and his superior, Fr Vincenzo Cimatti, had seemingly two different ideas concerning the foundation of a female religious institute. Fr Cavoli had as *prima idea* the creation of a lay association without vows and religious habit, possibly since he began to recruit volunteers to work for the Hospice which he started sometime in 1929.⁴⁷ Instead, Fr Cimatti, one day in 1937, expressed to Fr Cavoli an idea which he considered very convenient: "... to found a female religious congregation".⁴⁸ One could ask why Fr Cimatti had to suggest the idea to Fr Cavoli, when perhaps he could have decided himself to found a religious congregation by himself. Fr Cavoli stated in his

⁴⁵ Cf. Antonio CAVOLI, *Dall'Italia al Giappone. Autobiografia di un missionario*, Rimini, Stab. Tip. Garattoni 1959, p.5.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. CAVOLI, *Dall'Italia al Giappone*, p.95.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

account that the suggestion of Fr Cimatti was dutifully linked to that which he had actualized and what he was doing – the Hospice. Fr Cimatti saw that a religious congregation would be beneficial and capable of administering the actual Hospice and of expanding elsewhere.

The Superior of the Mission, who was also Prefect Apostolic of Miyazaki, gave two reasons why he found it convenient to found an indigenous female religious congregation: the time was ripe to found one, and it was good to comply with the directives of Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) who had issued the encyclical *Rerum ecclesiae* about ten years earlier.⁴⁹

Fr Cavoli's first reaction was of great surprise because he believed he was incapable of founding a religious order. The conversation ended there and then, but not Fr Cavoli's thinking of Fr Cimatti's proposal. He was, in fact, saddened by the possibility that he might have to abandon his missionary work and go back to Italy – this, obviously, if the Japanese decided to send away all foreigners. It was only after the third attempt of Fr Cimatti to persuade him that he decided to heed the suggestion for fear of disobeying. Consequently, he moved to announce to the female volunteers long at work in the Hospice his response to Fr Cimatti's invitation: "... the decision to found a religious congregation".⁵⁰ Fr Cavoli never realized when he consented to the suggestion of Fr Cimatti what cross he was embracing, or, how much good the future Congregation would be operating and what consolation it would give him in his old age.⁵¹ He felt embarrassed when he had to announce to the ladies of the

⁴⁹ Pius XI, *Rerum ecclesiae* (28 February 1926), n. 27: "Perhaps it would be well if you would consider seriously and without admixture of self-interest, if it would not be more advantageous all around to establish entirely new Congregations, which would correspond better with the genius and character of the natives and which would be more in keeping with the needs and the spirit of the different countries."

⁵⁰ Cf. A. CAVOLI, p.95-96.

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p.96.

Hospice of his decision to found a religious congregation.⁵² The ladies, who were initially perturbed, were given time to think of the proposal to join the Congregation eventually. However, Fr Cavoli decided to choose in a gradual manner those who would begin the initial religious formation in order not to jeopardize the on-going work. All those who definitely decided to join the congregation could not become novices all at once, as it would leave no one free to attend to the task of administering the Hospice.⁵³ Consequently, Fr Cavoli and the Salesians began by asking approval from the Propaganda Fide in Rome for this new congregation. It was Fr Cavoli who gave the name “Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Miyazaki” to the new congregation. He was happy to choose the word “*Caritas*” for a reason: that the admonition of Pope Pius XI might be re-lived in a great number of souls through the new congregation and that its members might work and sacrifice themselves for the corporal and spiritual good of innumerable brothers.⁵⁴

Fr Cavoli again opted not to translate the word *Caritas*, because he believed that this word had no equivalent in the vocabulary of a pagan nation. The members of the new Congregation were commonly called *Karitas Kai*. The confreres jokingly called the members *Le Cavoline* in obvious reference and deference to its founder.⁵⁵ He felt the burden of the responsibility of following up the members of

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Cf. Pius XI, *Rerum ecclesiae* (28 February 1927), n. 30: “Missionaries should remember that in preaching to the natives they must follow the same methods which the Divine Teacher used while He was on earth. Before He began to preach to the crowds, He first healed the sick [...] Neither should the missionary ever forget how kind and loving Jesus always showed Himself to babes and little children [...] that the missionaries who preach to the heathens know only too well how much good-will and real affection is gained for the Church by those who look after the health of the natives and care for their sick or who show a true love for their infants and children. All of which only goes to prove how readily the human heart responds to charity and to kindness.”

⁵⁵ Cf. A. CAVOLI, p.97.

the CSM, in their ascetic and apostolic formation. This was not easy, since it required the grace of God for a transformation of the members to be authentic. Consequently, he preached daily and explained the Constitutions and the meaning of religious life. He taught pedagogy, liturgy, ecclesiastical history, the Gospels, catechism; and he wanted to do this for the CSM until his death. For him, the CSM became distinct from the other religious orders in Japan for its solid religious formation and its sharp religious activity, not only because of the grace of God, but also because of the hard work of formation he invested in the new congregation.⁵⁶

2.2. *The Kyugoin and Fr Antonio Cavoli*

The *Kyugoin* (Hospice of Miyazaki, *Giardino della Carità*), was the initiative of Fr Cavoli, who gave his heart and soul to this project. In this work, the first members of the CSM learned the fundamentals of making charity an effective way of believing.

Fr Cavoli, formulating the scope of the new congregation which he founded, claimed that its scope was the happy result of a work, the Hospice, begun ten years previously. “Charity as a way to faith” was the Hospice workers’ first experience which they now sought to make permanent through their commitment as members of the CSM. The *Hospitio Miyazaki* was in fact the *domus primaria* of the CSM.⁵⁷ For, as Fr Cimatti, the religious superior of the Salesians in Miyazaki, ecclesiastical authority of the Apostolic Prefecture of the same province and worthy superior of Fr Cavoli, explained to the Rector Major, Fr Pietro Ricaldone, the scope of the CSM was works of charity, whether corporal or spiritual, to old people, infants and orphans. All these were truly found in the Hospice of Fr Cavoli.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 98-99.

⁵⁷ Archives Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Hua Hin, Thailand (ASIHM), *Cimatti to Ricaldone, Miyazaki, 16 June 1937.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, “*Propagatio Fidei operibus charitatis tam corporalibus quam spiritualibus sive in beneficentiae institutes pro senibus, pro. S. Infantiae pueris, pro orphanis....*”

Fr Vincenzo Cimatti attached a *Pro Memoria* to his letter of request to Cardinal Biondi to begin a new religious indigenous female congregation in his Prefecture Apostolic.⁵⁹ Among the contents of this *Pro Memoria* was a brief account of the origins of the CSM wherein he indicated two important dates and in which he named his confrere, Fr Cavoli, as protagonist and originator, and the Hospice of Fr Cavoli as the source of origin of a new female congregation in Japan.

It was in the year 1929 that Fr Cavoli organized a female circle in honour of the Immaculate which started a discreet activity of visiting the poor. On 1 January 1933, some ladies of varying ages accepted the invitation of the Salesian missionary Fr Cavoli to work gratuitously for the Catholic Hospice of Miyazaki, an apostolate which was started by the same missionary. Later on, other ladies requested Fr Cavoli to take them into the Hospice, where they offered themselves in order to serve God, work gratuitously, live in common and visit the sick in their homes.⁶⁰ Fr Cimatti, writing to Fr Ricaldone on 26 February 1937, said that his suggestion to Fr Cavoli to found a female indigenous religious congregation was his wanting to highlight the importance of charity already aflame at the Hospice, but the lack of which Fr Cimatti definitely found among the Salesians.⁶¹ Fr Cimatti manifested his sad experience of conflicts among some confreres; but he tried to make charity get the better in all of them. It was the best that he could do for the confreres.⁶²

Earlier, on 2 January 1937, Fr Cimatti made his *rendiconto* to the Prefect General, Fr Pietro Ricaldone. He wrote to the Superior in Turin regarding his difficulties as superior. He admitted humbly and sincerely that he was one who was unable to command. Indeed, it

⁵⁹ Cimatti Museum Tokyo, Tokyo (CMT) Lettere, *Cimatti to Card. Fumasoni, Pro Memoria, Miyazaki 17 February 1937.*

⁶⁰ CMT Lettere. *Antonio Cavoli, Pro Memoria, Miyazaki, Giappone, 17 February 1937.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, *Cimatti to Ricaldone, Miyazaki 26 February 1937.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, *Cimatti to Ricaldone, Miyazaki 27 January 1937.*

took him several attempts to make Fr Cavoli heed his suggestion to found a female indigenous religious congregation. The confrere agreed to the suggestion, only out of obedience to his superior. But Fr Cimatti was ready to allow anything good, trusting in the good conscience of the confreres. He admitted to the Superior in Turin, though, that the finances were low, that souls were being lost, that the work was in tilt. He claimed that he was not a strong organizer, incapable of concluding what he began.⁶³ Perhaps, he had another reason for suggesting to Fr Cavoli to found a female indigenous religious congregation.

Fr Cimatti also admitted to the Catechist General, Fr Pietro Tirona, his handicap as a superior. He was not adept with the material concerns of the missions, on account of which he did not want to be distracted from his real concern – the apostolate and the formation of the Salesian personnel of the Mission.⁶⁴ It was in this state of mind that he made his request to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide to begin in his Prefecture Apostolic a female indigenous religious congregation whose originator was Fr Cavoli. Definitely, Fr Cimatti could not afford to be distracted by other initiatives and works from his desire to focus on the Salesians and their formation.

2.3. *Things Started to Happen*

It was during a meeting of the *Circolo Immacolata* in September 1929 that Fr Antonio Cavoli suggested to the young members to visit the poor and the sick (Mt. 11, 5). To facilitate this work, he turned to the Municipal Office and to the Central Police Station, so that he might obtain a list of the poor and the sick that were most in need of attention and help. Nonetheless, it was Fr Cavoli who realized that words were not enough when catering for the poor and the sick.⁶⁵ Consequently, after one of the weekly meetings, he decided to ask

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Cimatti to Ricaldone (Prefect General), Miyazaki 2 January 1937.

⁶⁴ CMT Lettere, Cimatti to Pietro Tirona (Catechist General), Miyazaki 7 January 1937.

⁶⁵ Cf. A. CAVOLI, *Dall'Italia al Giappone*, p.81.

from each of the members a *soldo*, for a total of 21 *soldi*, and told the first contributors that he wanted their work to begin with an act of faith in Divine Providence. Thus, from the following Sunday, “those ladies” went to visit the poor with some gifts in hand. The poor asked who this God who sent gifts was, so that they might thank him. Consequently, the young visitors could make discourses about God, the immortal soul, Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin or Paradise, and the poor, especially the aged, felt the need to go to Church to thank God. Baptism was then administered to those who asked for it out of conviction.⁶⁶

It was Fr Cavoli who decided to open a hospice for the poor. After the celebration of baptism on Christmas of 1931, which was a source of joy for the missionaries, he had a bright idea: to open a place to gather the poor so that they could be better served. Consequently, he thought of two things: buying an old house to welcome 8 or 10 among the neediest, and entrusting these poor to some ladies of good will. Later, in March 1932, he went to the Municipal authorities to present his project of a “poor people’s paradise”. He bought for his project half a hectare of land outside the City in July and construction began in August.⁶⁷ By 18 December 1932 the Hospice was officially inaugurated and the first group of old people entered the Hospice in January 1933.⁶⁸

Fr Cavoli managed to find, after much difficulty and preoccupation, some willing ladies to serve the aged residents gratis and for the love of God. This would, in fact, grow into a lay association marked by a spirit of sacrifice. He would go from the parish residence to the Hospice to say mass for them; he would sometimes give these volunteers conferences, catechism lessons, and other things. By the end of spring of 1933 a new section was added for orphans who

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 82-84.

⁶⁷ Before the midnight Mass Fr Cavoli baptized about 20 poor people and other catechumens. Earlier, he had baptized other poor people in their houses on account of their inability to go to the church. Cf. *ibid.*, p.86-87.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.89.

entered it on 16 August 1933. When he came back from Italy, he saw the need of further expanding the Hospice: a building for the orphans, a section for babies, a church, and a kindergarten. In May 1935, work began once more. By 29 September 1935 the Hospice was inaugurated for the second time. When the Emperor came to Kyushu Island in the autumn of 1935, as originator and head of a unique social work in the whole of Miyazaki, Fr Cavoli was invited by the Prefect of Miyazaki to have an audience with the Emperor. His Hospice, in fact, helped to change the mentality of the civil authorities, who could not imagine a social work with a foreigner as its head.⁶⁹

It is very clear that the Hospice of Miyazaki was an initiative and invention of Fr Cavoli.⁷⁰ He continued to move in the direction of reaching out to the poor, most especially the elderly, who were most in need of attention and respect. Earlier, on 31 January 1937, Fr Cavoli had once more initiated an activity in favour of the elderly in the Prefecture Apostolic, the *Giornata dei Vecchi* (Day of the Elderly). In fact Fr Cimatti wrote to Fr Ricaldone about this activity, which he and the Salesians sought to institutionalize. This was indeed an initiative of Fr Cavoli in the city of Miyakonojo of the Prefecture Apostolic. He considered this project to be in accord with the mind and heart of the Japanese, deeply rooted in the Japanese conscience, and narrated in their legends and stories.⁷¹

2.4. *The Kyugoin in its Chronicle (1933-1937)*

Both the early Chronicles of the *Kyugoin*, as well as the Salesian House of Miyazaki, presented clearly the protagonist of the work at the *Kyugoin*: Fr Cavoli, who initiated it, and did not hesitate to give himself wholly to it. His wartime experience had taught him what commitment was. But one should not forget that it was at the *Kyugoin* that the first core group of the CSM experienced Salesian religious life, as well as charity. The chronicle of the *Kyugoin* for the years

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.92.

⁷⁰ CMT Antonio Cavoli, *Pro Memoria*, 17 February 1937.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, *Lettere. Cimatti to Ricaldone*, 31 January 1937.

1933 to 1937 reveal the involvement of the Salesians in this work, most specially Fr Cavoli.⁷²

Already in March 1933, Fr Cavoli spoke of perfection to the ladies who worked as volunteers at the *Kyugoin*,⁷³ thus introducing them to a more profound idea of commitment. On 24 March 1933 he specified the purpose of the group that he had organized: the members of the group work and minister to the residents of the Hospice out of love. Furthermore, he told the members that they should “pray and work”, striving to be holy, as they lead the beneficiaries of their work of love.⁷⁴

Moreover, Fr Cavoli started to organize the work at the *Kyugoin* which involved both Salesians and lay volunteers, especially the females who were deemed to be more adept and adapted to the work. On 5 September 1933, he, Fr Leone Liviabella, the native catechist Matsuo, Osafune, and the couple Kurita met to discuss how to organize the work.⁷⁵ The Salesians continued to follow up the work, even when Fr Cavoli left for Italy in order to make some propaganda for his initiative.⁷⁶

Fr Cimatti himself shared the zeal of Fr Cavoli and esteemed the initiative of his confrere, whose presence was felt very much at the Hospice. Two days after Fr Cavoli left, he visited the *Kyugoin* and gave a talk to those who ministered there.⁷⁷ He continued to visit regularly in order to animate its volunteers, giving talks about the

⁷² This chronicle is in Japanese. Sr Sophia Oshita CSM, working in Caritas School Don Bosco in Santa Rosa, Laguna, Philippines, provided the English translation of this document on 1 March 2008.

⁷³ Suore della Carità Archivio Storico Tokio, Tokyo (SCAST), *Chronicle of the Kyugoin (1933-1937)*, 18 March 1933.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 March 1933.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 September 1933.

⁷⁶ Fr Cavoli left Miyazaki on 3 October 1933. It was his first return to Italy after he left his native country in 1925. Cf. SCAST *Chronicle of the Kyugoin (1933-1937)*, 3 October 1933.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 5 October 1933.

Mass and the importance of the visit to the Blessed Sacrament.⁷⁸ Fr Liviabella, instead, came to hear the confessions of the volunteers who were Christians.⁷⁹ The following year he was assigned to be director in the absence of Fr Cavoli, thus committing him further to the apostolate.⁸⁰ A certain Matsuo, catechist of the Salesian Parish, instead, came to teach religion to the residents, as well as to the Aisi members and its aspirants.⁸¹ At times the Osafunes substituted him in teaching catechism to the residents.⁸² Even the Bishop of Fukuoka was a visitor sometimes.⁸³ The principals of seven Miyazaki elementary schools came for a visit, as well as the chief of police of Miyazaki and his assistant.⁸⁴ Some City Hall officials of Miyazaki made a survey of the work. Even the ambassador of Italy came to visit the Miyazaki parish and the Hospice.⁸⁵

On 13 April 1935, Fr Cavoli came back from Italy.⁸⁶ As soon as he came back he continued what he had begun and what the confreres who substituted him during his absence did. He returned to teaching at the *Kyugoin*, especially its volunteers. From 3 May 1935 he continued to explain the Bible to the Aisi.⁸⁷ He sent two Aisi members to attend a seminar for nursery teachers.⁸⁸ To prepare for the establishment of a nursery he held a meeting with a committee of the local government at the *Kyugoin*.⁸⁹ On 20 October 1935, he, the

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1934.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 20 February 1934.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, [...] January 1934.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 23 November 1933.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 29 July 1934.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1933, 27 January 1934. On his visit of 27 January 1934, the Osafunes and Mr. Kurita welcomed him.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1934.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 July 1934.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 April 1935.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1935.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 June 1935.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 July 1935.

Osafunes and the Kuritas went to Tokyo to participate in a conference regarding social welfare.⁹⁰

Fr Cavoli made sure that the female volunteers of the *Kyugoin* were followed up in their spiritual journey. From 15 to 17 July, the Aisi members had their retreat.⁹¹ Fr Cavoli even introduced the possibility of the volunteers being members of the Association of Salesian Cooperators, as he sent the Osafunes and the Kuritas to the meeting of the Association.⁹² The serious sickness of one of the Aisi members, Kubo Sewo (later Sr Giuliana, one of the first CSM), drew the concern of Fr Cavoli.⁹³

Fr Cavoli's return from Italy meant financial help which he brought with him, in order to expand the work. In fact, for the feast of St. Vincent de Paul, titular saint of the Hospice, Mass was celebrated in the newly inaugurated chapel.⁹⁴ On 29 September 1935 the new orphanage was inaugurated, with none less than Fr Cavoli presiding over the celebration.⁹⁵ Earlier, on 16 September 1935, the *Kyugoin* had started to learn printing.⁹⁶ The local government seeing the good that was being done, pledged to help. Therefore Fr Cavoli, the Kuritas and Matsuo went to the City Hall on 30 July 1935 officially to receive a subsidy of 1800 Yen. Later on a grant of 4074 Yen was received from the national government.⁹⁷

The *Kyugoin* continued to make news, inasmuch as the good it was doing was noble and significant. A foreigner, who was in-charge

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 October 1935.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 15-17 July 1936. It was practically the same schedule for the next year. Cf. *Ibid.*, 15-17 July 1937.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1-2 February 1936.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8 April 1936.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 July 1935.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29 September 1935. Fr Cimatti and Fr Cavoli celebrated the second anniversary of the *Kyugoin* with the children's department. Cf. *Ibid.*, 29 September 1937.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16 September 1935.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 April 1937.

and who was showing such tremendous compassion for the marginalized citizens of the country which hosted him, continued to receive visitors and their help as well.

Five days after Fr Cavoli returned from Italy, the Governor of the Prefecture of Miyazaki visited the *Kyugoin* and even gave a donation.⁹⁸ It was then the turn of the Prefect of Kagoshima together with two religious sisters.⁹⁹ Thirty-six people, made up of the Mayor of Miyazaki, the committee for the poor and the principal of a school, also came for a visit.¹⁰⁰ On 13 November 1935, the Emperor himself, while visiting Miyazaki, passed by the *Kyugoin* with the people welcoming him along the way. Two days later, the Grand Chamberlain Irie visited too.¹⁰¹ These illustrious visits definitely added further renown and tribute to the good which the Hospice was doing not only for Miyazaki but for the whole of Japan.

Msgr. Breton, the Bishop of Fukuoka, came to visit the *Kyugoin* again on 23 May 1936.¹⁰² Even the Superiors of Turin took time to visit. The Prefect General, Fr Pietro Berutti (1885-1950), who arrived in Miyazaki on 16 August 1937 came to visit the Hospice.¹⁰³ Earlier, the delegate of the Rector Major, Fr Antonio Candela (1897-1961), had also paid a visit.¹⁰⁴

The *Kyugoin* people participated in the midnight Mass of Christmas 1936, and at the early morning mass in the parish two of their residents received the sacrament of baptism.¹⁰⁵ It was another occasion for joy for Fr Cavoli and the Salesians to see their work

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 April 1935. The Governor of Miyazaki came to visit again the *Kyugoin*. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1 July 1937.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1935.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 November 1936.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 13, 15 November 1936.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 23 May 1936.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 17 August 1937.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 July 1937.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 December 1936.

bearing fruits of conversion. It was a prelude to greater things in the following year.

Early in 1937 Fr Cimatti and Fr Cavoli started to move towards the realization of the CSM. To ensure the personnel for such a move the people of the *Kyugoin* also cooperated to find vocations. On 31 July 1937 Osafune had gone to Sasebo for vocation promotion,¹⁰⁶ and returned from her campaign with two new Aisi members, Sasaki Nui and Yamaguchi Mitsue. Along with these two a certain Yamashita Kikue came as an aspirant.¹⁰⁷

The following month, on 5 August 1937, Fr Cavoli went to Fukuoka to request the Bishop to accept the aspirants to the novitiate of the congregation of sisters which the Bishop had founded.¹⁰⁸ A week later Fr Cavoli talked to five Aisi members who had applied for the novitiate.¹⁰⁹ By 22 August 1937 the acceptance of the aspirants to the novitiate was celebrated in the Parish of Miyazaki.¹¹⁰ Fr Cavoli himself accompanied these novices to Fukuoka.¹¹¹ In fact, he would go and visit them several times. The *Kyugoin* people would support their novices, sending whatever help they could.¹¹²

Since he started the Hospice, Fr Cavoli immersed himself in his initiative, making it almost his main concern and preoccupation. He dedicated himself full-time to it, giving the best Salesian contribution possible. However, this did not exclude the contribution of other Salesians to the *Kyugoin*. They continued to help in its development until finally it would be on its own. Nonetheless, the image of

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 July 1937.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 31 July 1937.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 August 1937.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 August 1937.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1937.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 28 August 1937.

¹¹² The *Kyugoin* people would send reading materials (Sunday and weekday reflections) to the novice Sr Vincenzina. They also sent her some blankets. Cf. *SCAST Chronicle of the Kyugoin (1933-1937)*, 13 December 1937.

Fr Cavoli would emerge more and more as the protagonist in the CSM's birth and growth.

3. The Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Before the arrival of the Salesians the Foreign Missions of Paris were already active in Thailand, put up by the Propaganda Fide for the Apostolic Vicariate of Thailand. They also had an indigenous female religious congregation, *Congregazione delle Suore Amanti della Croce*, to collaborate with the missionaries in the work of catechesis. This experience along with his own in China made Fr Gaetano Pasotti, head of the first group of Salesians in Thailand, realize the importance of an indigenous help, characteristically feminine. He, therefore, planned his own foundation of a local female congregation in his mission territory.¹¹³

3.1. “Buone Figliuole”

Fr Pasotti, Prefect Apostolic of Rajaburi, wrote to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda on 12 June 1937 informing him that he had been working for a couple of years (from 1935 ca.) to establish a female native congregation of sisters, useful where the missionaries were already and where they were not yet. He said that there had been a discreet group of *buone figliuole*, which had gathered under the guidance of the most elderly among them and which conducted a life of work and of piety as if they were already religious.¹¹⁴

Cardinal Fumasoni Biondi, Prefect of Propaganda Fide, answered the request of Fr Pasotti on 14 July 1937, giving him permission to start the *Congregazione indigena delle Suore*

¹¹³ Cf. ENRICO DANIELI, *Don Bosco in Thailandia. 75 anni di lavoro missionario e Salesiano (1927-2002)*, 4 volumes, Bangkok (unpublished manuscript). This is a precious work which covers almost the whole history of the Salesians in Thailand. It can very well serve as a basis of study of any specific aspect of the Salesian history in Thailand.

¹¹⁴ Archives Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary [=ASIHM] (Hua Hin), *Pasotti to Fumasoni-Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 12 June 1937*.

Ausiliatrici.¹¹⁵ The Prefect Apostolic, in fact, had asked Propaganda Fide to give him the necessary authorization to initiate this female native congregation.¹¹⁶ The Daughter of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) he had chosen could be both superior and mistress of novices, until such time as necessary.¹¹⁷ Hence on 7 December 1937 he, as Prefect Apostolic of Rajaburi, erected officially the *Congregationem Sororum Indigenarum sub titulo 'Auxiliatricum'*.¹¹⁸

For the formation of the members of the new Congregation, Fr Pasotti asked the help of Sr Clotilde Cogliolo, Provincial of the FMA Province of St. Thomas (*Indiarum Orientalium et Extremi Orientis*), based in Madras, India, to help in this project. Consequently the FMA Provincial sent one of her sisters, Sr Antonia Morellato, as in-charge; she in fact, had been in her assignment since 24 May 1937.¹¹⁹ Later, another FMA, Sr Luigina di Giorgio,¹²⁰ joined her. The FMA, in fact, was the lone female religious congregation present in the Prefecture Apostolic of Rajaburi at the moment.

At the time of the foundation of the new congregation, Fr Pasotti had also erected the novitiate house of the *Auxiliatrices* in Bang Nok Khuek,¹²¹ and had appointed Sr Antonia Morellato FMA¹²² as mistress of novices.¹²³ On 11 December 1937, he expressed his

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Fumasoni-Biondi to Pasotti, Rome, 14 July 1937.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pasotti to Fumasoni-Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 12 June 1937.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Fumasoni-Biondi to Pasotti, Rome, 14 July 1937.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Decree of Erection. Pasotti, Bang Nok Khuek, 7 December 1937.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Pasotti to Fumasoni-Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 12 June 1937.

¹²⁰ Sr Luigina di Giorgio [Udine, 25 April 1900 +Banpong, 14 Sept. 1989]: arrived in Thailand in 17 October 1931; first profession, Conegliano, 5 August 1926; perpetual profession, Bangkok, 5 August 1932.

¹²¹ ASIHM Decree of Erection, Pasotti, Bang Nok Khuek, 7 December 1937. The patroness of the novitiate house was St. Therese of the Child Jesus; previously, Fr Pasotti thought of making the Immaculate Heart of Mary as patroness.

¹²² Sr Antonietta Morellato [Padua, 13 June 1911 +17 Dec. 1978]: first profession, Conegliano, 6 August 1930.

¹²³ ASIHM Decree of Appointment, Pasotti, Bang Nok Khuek, 7 December 1937.

gratitude to the FMA Provincial for the help given. He added, though, that the FMA would not be alone; instead, a Salesian would also help in the novitiate. But he needed the help of the FMA, as he was occupied with other tasks. The work for the new congregation was a delicate one.¹²⁴ Later, he would write to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide and would request him to extend his gratitude to the FMA Mother General, for the work of formation Sr Morellato was doing for the *Auxiliatrices*.¹²⁵

By 8 December 1937 seven aspirants of the native congregation received the investiture. These immediately began their novitiate under Sr Morellato, who was only 26, having been born on 12 June 1911. For this, Fr Pasotti had to request from the Propaganda Fide an exemption. At the same time, he had to get also a sanation for the novices, since they had started the novitiate without the necessary exemption for their mistress.¹²⁶ By 21 November 1938 Fr Pasotti informed the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide that the novices of the new congregation would make their first profession on 9 December 1938.¹²⁷

The FMA house in Bang Nok Khuek which belonged to the Mission was willingly given back to the Prefect Apostolic by the FMA Provincial to serve as novitiate of the *Auxiliatrices*.¹²⁸ The FMA, nonetheless, continued the direction of the novitiate and of the new

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Pasotti to Cogliolo, Bang Nok Khuek, 11 December 1937.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, Pasotti to Fumasoni-Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 29 March 1939. In this same letter, Fr Pasotti informed the Cardinal that the new religious superior of the Salesians in Thailand was Fr Giovanni Casetta. Cf. *Ibid.* Fr Pasotti could now be Prefect Apostolic of Rajaburi full-time.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* Pasotti to Fumasoni-Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 6 January 1938. The dispensation for the age of Sr Morellato and the *sanatoria* for the novices were given on 7 February of the same year. Cf. ASIHM (Hua Hin), *Propaganda Fide, Rome, 7 February 1938*. Sr Morellato would be re-nominated mistress of novices for another three years by Fr Pasotti. Cf. *ibid.* *Reelectio Novitiarum Magistrae, Pasotti, Bang Nok Khuek, 7 December 1940*.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, Fumasoni-Biondi to Pasotti, Rome, 3 December 1938.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, Pasotti to Fiumisano Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 29 March 1939.

congregation. Both Fr Pasotti and the native sisters were sincerely happy to have the FMA with them.¹²⁹

3.2. *The Auxiliatrices*

Fr Pasotti was in need of a rule for the *Auxiliatrices*, but still did not know how to go about it. He wrote to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide on 29 March 1939, asking candidly if the Cardinal could send him some exemplars of constitutions of female congregations, whether native or European, which could serve as a basis for the future rule of his new congregation.¹³⁰ The Propaganda Fide sent him a copy of the constitutions of a Chinese congregation.¹³¹

When he asked permission to found a native female religious congregation in his Prefecture Apostolic, Fr Pasotti provided the Propaganda Fide information regarding the new congregation. It was destined for the Mission of Rajaburi, with an eminent missionary spirit, in which it was to be *Siamenses per Siamenses*. Its scope was to do in the female ambit activities which were within the program of the missionary: propaganda, education, charity. Furthermore, it was also to help the Salesian priests residing in the Missions. Its members would do domestic work; they were to help maintain the decorum of the churches. They were to serve in clinics, assist those in maternity.¹³² The *Auxiliatrices* were supposed to be disposed to do any work, whether material or spiritual: visit the sick, prepare them to receive the sacraments, baptize children *in articulo mortis*, prepare [adults] to receive baptism and first communion, take care of the orphans and girls at risk. They would help spread good literature within the diocese,

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, Pasotti to Fumasoni-Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 29 March 1939.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Fumasoni-Biondi to Pasotti, Rome 15 April 1939.

¹³² *Ibid.* *Auxiliatrices*. Pasotti to Fumasoni-Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 12 June 1937.

they would work for the formation and the development of the female Catholic Action.¹³³

Fr Pasotti's conviction was that the formation of the *Auxiliatrices* should be so complete as to answer the modern demands of the missionary.¹³⁴ Its spirit would be similar to that of the FMA, especially with regards to the education of the female young.¹³⁵ This female native congregation was in fact one of the enduring fruits which Fr Pasotti brought about in his apostolate as first Vicar Apostolic of Ratchaburi. He really needed the help and the collaboration of native sisters, especially in the female environment of the parishes. From the beginning the SIHM committed itself to the dream of its Founder, so that it could grow and develop through the formation received from the Salesians and the FMA. It has always served in the parishes according to the spirit of Don Bosco, giving them a distinct face from other female religious congregations already existing in Thailand. In its General Chapter of 1985, the SIHM clearly spelt out its identity, specifying service to the local Church as its first task and

¹³³ In fact, one of the first professed members of the new congregation was already studying to become a nurse to ensure the social work of the new congregation. Cf. ASIHM *Auxiliatrices*. *Pasotti, Bang Nok Khuek, 12 June 1937*.

¹³⁴ The "*Auxiliatrices*" would become eventually "Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary". The Secretary of Propaganda Fide wrote to Bishop Pietro Carretto on 10 July 1972, informing him that Propaganda Fide had conceded that the official title of the Institute "*Suore Ausiliatrici di Ratchaburi*" could be changed to "*Ancelle del Cuore Immacolato di Maria*". Cf. ASIHM *Secretary of Propaganda Fide to Carretto, Rome, 10 July 1972*. It would also be made into a congregation of pontifical right.

¹³⁵ ASIHM, *Pasotti to Fumasoni-Biondi, Bang Nok Khuek, 29 March 1939*. Later, Bishop Pietro Carretto described the "*Auxiliatrices*" as meant to assist the missionary: "Queste Suore avrebbero dovuto aiutare il Missionario nelle varie residenze", thus freeing the resident missionary from the material preoccupations of the kitchen; they were to give "cure specifiche verso le ragazze e donne". They were to live in communities of at least two (preferably three). Their spirit was similar to that of the FMA. Cf. ASIHM *Carretto to Rizzoli, Surat Thani, 30 August 1972*.

principal aim. For this, the members place themselves at the service of the parishes according to the directives of the Diocese.¹³⁶

3.3. *Annual Reports*

The annual reports of Fr Gaetano Pasotti as Superior of the Independent Mission of Rajaburi and later as Prefect Apostolic and Vicar Apostolic, show the history of how the SIHM came into existence in Thailand.

Fr Pasotti invited the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to help in the missionary work of Thailand. In the year that he was named superior of the Independent Mission of Rajaburi, Fr Pasotti wrote in his annual report of 6 August 1931 of the possible arrival of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians towards the end of 1931. The sisters of this congregation were supposed to be given charge of a school for girls, parallel to the one for boys, and which already had 5 students.¹³⁷ At the same time, in the *Prospectus Status Missionis* of that same year 1931, he also referred to the existence of about 15 *Virgines indigenae* in Bang Nok Khuek who were all Siamese.¹³⁸

In the 1932 *Prospectus Status Missionis* he reported to the Propaganda Fide of the presence of *Sorores*, 13 Siamese *Virgines indigenae*. At the same time, there were now six Italian Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, Fr Pasotti stated in his Annual Report the arrival of six FMA on 16 November 1931. They started to learn the language as soon as they arrived. From early June they began to administer the school in Bang Nok Khuek which

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Msgr. Gaetano Pasotti e l'Originalità della Congregazione delle Suore Ancelle del Cuore Immacolato di Maria Thailandia, 3-4.

¹³⁷ ASC A905 Rajaburi [7]. Pasotti, Annual Report, 6 August 1931.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* *Prospectus Status Missionis* 1931. The Delegate of the Prefect Apostolic was Fr Giovanni Casetta, who in fact signed also the *Prospectus*. Possibly, the "Virgines indigenae" referred to were probably Thai members of a local association of pious women called "Amanti della Croce", which were founded by the MEP when they were still in the Independent Mission of Rajaburi.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* *Prospectus Status Missionis* 1932.

had about 200 students and which had an oratory attached to it. For Fr Pasotti the arrival of the FMA was a step forward to meet the issue of female education, and at the same time he hoped that they would help to lay the base of a female native congregation.¹⁴⁰

In the annual report of 1934, the year in which Fr Pasotti was named Prefect Apostolic of Rajaburi (28 May 1934), he mentioned the opening of a house in Bang Nok Khuek for *Virgines Indigenae*, to provide more space to the FMA who had arrived.¹⁴¹ The following year he mentioned that he had also contacted Capuchin nuns to start a monastery in the Prefecture Apostolic.¹⁴² So, by 1936 there were not only the *Sorores Indigenae* and the FMA, but also five Capuchin nuns from Florence.¹⁴³ It is to be noted, however, that in the same year, there was the on-going formation of mission personnel who were native women. This was typical to places which were mission land, and Fr Pasotti had been working on this for more than a couple of years. He stated that much work had already been done regarding this.¹⁴⁴ In his annual report of 1937 Fr Pasotti wrote that he had been working for a couple of years in order to give life to this congregation and that it was almost complete. He expected the first group to begin regular novitiate and hoped that the personnel in formation might obtain legal titles.¹⁴⁵

The accompaniment offered by the FMA to the members of this congregation was accepted with common satisfaction. At the

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid. Pasotti, Annual Report, 1 August 1932*. In the same report, it was indicated that there was already a school for the formation of catechists where the Rector "tiene una conferenza mensile d'indole morale apologetica, col preciso scopo di concorrere alla formazione di questo prezioso elemento ausiliare". Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid. Pasotti, Annual Report, 1 August 1934*.

¹⁴² *Ibid. Pasotti, Annual Report, 9 August 1935*.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *ASC A905 Rajaburi [7]. Pasotti, Annual Report, 15 August 1936*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid. Pasotti, Annual Report, 19 August 1937*. It is interesting to note how the foundation of a female religious congregation in Thailand was coinciding with the foundation of a similar congregation in Japan and China.

same time the *Auxiliatrices* were asked to obtain a title which would render them capable of teaching at the missionary residences to which they would be assigned.¹⁴⁶ By 1938 Fr Pasotti could officially name the Sisters as *Auxiliatrices*, based in Bang Nok Khuek, with seven novices. There were also 10 aspirants.¹⁴⁷ He further wrote that by December 1938 there would be the first profession of six *Auxiliatrices*; another small group consisting of four was preparing to have the investiture.¹⁴⁸

Eight years later, in 1947,¹⁴⁹ the *Auxiliatrices* numbered 14, with 6 novices, all Siamese of course.¹⁵⁰ Fr Pasotti declared that from the day of foundation on 8 November 1937 he had tried to give a serious religious formation and a solid intellectual culture to them, who were not in any way inferior to other educated persons in the country.¹⁵¹ He also said that the two FMAs who had been guiding the new Congregation were very responsible. They even asked that the native sisters should share the responsibility of taking care of their fellow *Auxiliatrices*, suggesting that two native sisters form part of the Council.¹⁵² Furthermore, he declared that the superior of the elementary and high schools for girls of Bang Nok Khuek was an *Auxiliatrix*. He was indeed optimistic that this Congregation would be a real asset to the general plan of evangelization of the Vicariate Apostolic.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid. Pasotti, Annual Report, 1 September 1939.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid. Prospectus Status Missionis 1938.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid. Pasotti, Annual Report, 15 August 1938.*

¹⁴⁹ The Prefecture Apostolic of Rajaburi became a Vicariate Apostolic on 3 April 1941. Fr Pasotti was named its first Vicar Apostolic.

¹⁵⁰ ASC A905 *Rajaburi* [8] *Prospectus Status Missionis 1947.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid. Prospectus Status Missionis 1947.*

¹⁵² After almost five years of following up the *Auxiliatrices*, Sr Antonia Morellato and Sr Luigina Di Giorgio expressed their desire to Fr Pasotti that some sisters of the new congregation be involved as council members in dealing with the issues of the congregation. Cf. ASIHM *Morellato to Pasotti, Bang Nok Khuek, 24 April 1942.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid. Pasotti, Annual Report September 1947.*

Before long the members of the first group came back to the mother house to prepare themselves for the perpetual profession. While the FMA continued their meritorious work on behalf of the *Auxiliatrices*, two of the recently professed who showed good intelligence were sent to the school of the Ursulines in Bangkok to complete their schooling and to prepare to become kindergarten teachers.¹⁵⁴ Bishop Pasotti's *Prospectus Status Missionis* of 1949, however, did not include any annual report. The fact was that he was counting his days with the congregation which he had founded.¹⁵⁵

4. The Daughters of the Queenship of Mary

4.1. "Congregatio non grata"

The autobiography written by Fr Carlo Della Torre is a source which can tell us why he decided to found a female native congregation in Thailand.¹⁵⁶ The Superiors in Turin, in the words of Fr Ricaldone, wanted that the missionary work in Thailand be a model for the other missionary works by the Salesians: novices and clerics at work in the missions together with priest missionaries.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Pasotti, *Annual Report, August 1948*: The *Adiutrices* were 20 (14+6) professed, but with no novices. The FMA were down to 12 (4 Siamese and 8 Italians) from the previous 16 (they lost 4); they did not have any novice as well. Cf. ASC A905 Rajaburi [8] *Prospectus Status Missionis 1948*.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, *Prospectus Status Missionis, 1949*.

¹⁵⁶ *Archives Daughters of the Queenship of Mary, Bangkok, (ADQM), Rainieri to Della Torre, Rome, 18 January 1979*. Fr Della Torre wrote his autobiography at the request of Fr Giovanni Rainieri, member of the Salesian General Council in Rome responsible for the Salesian Family. The Thai Provincial then, Fr Michael Praphon, and even Fr Luigi Ricceri, the Rector Major, insisted on Fr Carlo to write his autobiography.

¹⁵⁷ ADQM, *Manoscritto di Autobiografia di Don Carlo Della Torre, 167*. Fr Ricaldone, speaking to the neo-missionaries of Thailand, in the words of Fr Carlo, "ci fece capire che era suo desiderio di vedere che la missione del Siam fosse una missione di modello per i salesiani, perche si inizia con la presenza di chierici e novizi insieme ai sacerdoti missionari". Cf. *Ibid.*

When Fr Carlo was still a post-novice, doing his Philosophy, he was given quite an exceptional assignment which was not normally given to clerics. A former army conscript who entered the Salesian seminary when he was already 23 years old, he was more mature than the rest, and definitely must have learned much from life in the army and in the war zones. The cooks of the Salesian seminary in Bang Nok Khuek needed replacement. As a solution girls were appointed as cooks with a *suora indigena*¹⁵⁸ at their head. At this stage (Fr) Carlo was put in charge of the money and of the house register, and was asked to do the marketing as well. So he was not only assistant to the clerics; he became also assistant to the girls who worked in the kitchen.¹⁵⁹ The old sister in-charge of the kitchen girls was one who was always nagging and complaining. Fr Carlo had to intervene to pacify the girls, who said that they were ready to continue but not with the sister in-charge. Fr Pasotti, superior of the mission, seeing that the situation of the food and of the kitchen was bettered, decided to appoint (Fr) Carlo in-charge of the kitchen and a coadjutor to help him. But he also saw other elements which he considered as indicative of God's plans for him. The Salesian priests who were working in the missionary residences complained that there were no sisters to take care of the girls;¹⁶⁰ that they found it difficult to take care of parishioners of varying origins and of both sexes at that. They admitted that already they knew little yet of the Thai language and further they had to deal with the different dialects. The fact was that elderly parishioners spoke Chinese more than Thai.¹⁶¹

(Fr) Carlo had once asked from Fr Pasotti to remove him from the work of the kitchen. But the superior had refused. He interpreted

¹⁵⁸ The "*suora indigena*" was probably one of the "*Congregazione delle Suore Amanti della Croce*" who still remained in Bang Nok Khuek.

¹⁵⁹ ADQM, *Manoscritto di Autobiografia di Don Carlo Della Torre*, 177-178.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 180-182.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

this refusal as a sign from divine providence to make him do good to souls and to take certain resolutions. He claimed that it was in a moment of prayer that he decided to present two projects to his superior Fr Pasotti. The second of the two was to ask Fr Pasotti permission to begin the foundation of a female religious congregation, with few of the girls working in the kitchen as the first possible vocations. He formulated his proposal to Fr Pasotti along the following lines: the parish priests of the Salesian Mission complained that nobody was taking care of the girls in the parishes; the FMA were not yet ready for work in the parishes. Why not attempt to lay the foundation of a female religious congregation, which would later occupy themselves with the girls in their Mission?¹⁶² His superior was said to have agreed to this proposal, for an experimental period.¹⁶³ (Fr) Carlo logically met with opposition on the part of some of his confreres. The subjects of his plan were women; he was only a cleric; some confreres were hostile towards women; the Superior of the Mission was supposedly undecided and easily influenced.¹⁶⁴ Despite this, the personnel of the kitchen were serene and the postulants of the would-be congregation were very promising. Consequently, he started to write a sort of rules for the future native congregation, adapted to the conditions and life in Thailand and at the same time similar to the way of life of the Salesian Sisters. Upon finishing this, he submitted it to his Superior.¹⁶⁵

The young cleric now planned to put up a wall in order to create a sort of *clausura* for the girls of the kitchen, and within the same confines he planned to build a chapel so that the girls did not need to

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 198-199.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, *Manoscritto di Autobiografia di Don Carlo Della Torre*, 203.

¹⁶⁴ It is said that Bishop Pasotti made use of the first girls whom Fr Carlo formed for a future religious congregation as the vocations for the religious congregation he established. Cf. ASC DQM 28, *History of the DQM and request to be member of the Salesian Family*.

¹⁶⁵ ADQM, *Manoscritto di Autobiografia di Don Carlo Della Torre*, 234-235.

go to the Seminary chapel and be a cause of distraction to the seminarians.¹⁶⁶ He stated that it was when he had finally finished the work for the kitchen (about six hours before the beginning of the spiritual exercises in preparation for the priestly ordination) that he was unceremoniously told by the superior that the plan to found a female religious congregation was on hold.¹⁶⁷

On 17 May 1936 Fr Carlo had tried to convince his superior to allow him to follow his plan. He had once thought of not making the perpetual vows and was even ready to ask for dispensation from the vows, if only to achieve what he planned. For seven years, he had struggled to get an approval of his plan, but the Superiors in Turin had not even made any attempt to answer him.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, he had no rancor in his heart towards his superiors.¹⁶⁹ But after having understood the mind of the Rector Major, he decided to ask for the “*indultum saecularizationis*” and to be incardinated in the Prefecture Apostolic.¹⁷⁰ He had tried always to understand and obey his Superiors.¹⁷¹

Later, on 26 December 1936, Fr Carlo told Fr Pasotti of his desire to open a hospital similar to that of Blessed Cottolengo. At the same time he planned to prepare good catechists, who would dress as nurses and go to the houses of the poor sick with medicines.¹⁷² He sincerely believed that the best place to do this was in Bangkok, where there was better possibility of doctors and medicines. At the same

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 253-254.

¹⁶⁸ Archivio Ispettorìa Thailandia, Bangkok (AIT), *Della Torre to Pasotti, Bang Nok Khuek, 17 May 1936.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, *Della Torre to Pasotti, Bang Nok Khuek, 17 May 1936.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *Della Torre to Pasotti, [...], 1 July 1936.*

¹⁷¹ Writing to Pasotti from Thamuang on 5 January 1939, Fr Della Torre recognized the good will of the Rector Major and of the Prefect Apostolic himself. For this, he was still willing to subject himself to their consideration. Cf. AIT, *Della Torre to Pasotti, Thamuang, 5 January 1939.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, *Della Torre to Pasotti, [...], 26 December 1936.*

time he renewed his request to leave the Congregation and become a secular priest.¹⁷³ The Superior continued to ignore his request; he continued to be docile.

4.2. *Requests to Leave*

On 29 June 1937 Fr Carlo was assigned to the Salesian Parish in Tha Muang as an assistant parish priest. Persecution and poverty during the years of the Indo-China War made the lives of the missionaries very difficult. His desire to found a native religious congregation at the service of the parish and of the mission was once more stimulated when he was asked to be parish priest. He renewed his work among the girls working in the kitchen and the helpers in the parish and started to make them live a sort of religious life.¹⁷⁴

Fr Carlo tried to dialogue with his Provincial, Fr Giovanni Casetta.¹⁷⁵ On 30 January 1940 he asked if the latter could help him obtain at least an indult of exclaustation.¹⁷⁶ He felt sure of his motivation: his ideal was not in accord with the requirements of religious life; at the same time he could not renounce his ideal in order to continue in religious life.¹⁷⁷ He renewed his request for exclaustation to the Provincial on 23 May 1943 as suggested by the Apostolic

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, *Della Torre to Pasotti*, [...], 26 December 1936. Fr Pasotti suggested to him to try to obtain incardination to the diocese of Bangkok. Cf. *Ibid.*, *Pasotti to Della Torre*, 29 December 1936.

¹⁷⁴ ASC DQM 28, *Constitutions of the DQM*, 2.

¹⁷⁵ In a conversation with Fr G. Casetta on 14 January 1939 Fr Carlo expressed that he did not want to make the perpetual profession, for he believed that he was destined for some thing else. Cf. AIT, *Transcription of a conversation between Fr Giovanni Casetta and Fr Carlo Della Torre*, 14 January 1939.

¹⁷⁶ On 26 March 1940 Fr G. Casetta informed him that the permission had arrived from Turin for Fr Carlo to look for a Bishop who would accept him in his diocese. Cf. AIT, *G. Casetta to Della Torre*, Bangkok, 26 March 1940.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, *Della Torre to G. Casetta, Thamuang*, 30 January 1940. The Apostolic Delegate writing to Pasotti on 13 February 1940 communicated that the only thing he could do for Fr Carlo was to find a Bishop who would welcome him. Cf. AIT, *Drapier to Pasotti*, 13 February 1940.

Delegate whom he met on 16 May 1943 in the presence of Msgr. Perros, the Vicar Apostolic of Bangkok. If the superiors, however, had wanted him to ask for the indult of secularization, he would have had no problem for that either.¹⁷⁸ After almost 12 years in Thamuang (July 1937 to June 1949) Fr Carlo was finally asked to go to Bangkok, to the land bought for the technical school of St. John Bosco. Fr Pietro Carretto, then Provincial, had earlier written to Fr Carlo from Hua Hin on 31 March 1949. He authorized Fr Carlo to tell the personnel of the kitchen to decide if they wanted to go to Bangkok to prepare themselves for their future. He promised Fr Carlo that he would not place any difficulty to the designs of the Lord, if he wanted a *Piccola casa della divina provvidenza*.¹⁷⁹ Thus, while the future technical school was being constructed, he also started to construct a small house for the girls who had gone with him to Bangkok and who desired to become religious of the congregation that Fr Carlo wanted to found.¹⁸⁰

In Bangkok, however, Fr Carlo insisted on his plans to found the congregation. Hence the superiors obliged him to make the difficult choice of either leaving the Salesian Congregation or the congregation he wanted to found.¹⁸¹ It was during the extraordinary visit of a superior from Turin, Fr Modesto Bellido, General Councillor for the Missions, that he was asked to make his decision. He opted for the second in order to dedicate himself full-time to his institute. He also asked to be incardinated into the diocese of Bangkok, whose Bishop was kindly disposed to accept him. Obviously, with this decision, he and his followers accepted the fact that from then on things would be difficult and different for them.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Della Torre to Carretto, Thamuang, 23 May 1943. Fr Carretto answered him, expressing his availability to help find a solution for the confrere. Cf. AIT, Carretto to Della Torre, Banpong, 31 May 1943.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Carretto to Della Torre, Hua Hin, 31 March 1949.

¹⁸⁰ ADQM, *Autobiography of Fr Carlo Della Torre*, 165.

¹⁸¹ AIT, Carlo Della Torre, Obituary letter, Bangkok, 15 June 1982.

¹⁸² ASC DQM 28, *Constitutions of the DQM*, 3.

4.3. *The DQM, a Secular Institute*

At first Fr Carlo thought of establishing a religious congregation.¹⁸³ But when he realized that this would limit the members to helping only the local churches, he decided to make the members of the religious congregation he started live a lay consecrated life for the apostolate, so that they could be closer to the people. For this he tried to grasp the idea of a secular institute, already exemplified by the Ursulines, founded by St. Angela Merici. On 23 December 1954 Bishop Chorin of Bangkok officially approved the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary, in line with the papal teaching of *Provida Mater Ecclesia*.¹⁸⁴ The year after its canonical erection the first seven members of the DQM made their first profession on 9 December 1955. Almost a year later Bishop Chorin approved the text of the Constitutions on 18 October 1956.¹⁸⁵

4.4. *“Return to Don Bosco”*

When asking to be re-admitted to the Salesian Society, Fr Carlo wrote to the Holy Father on 3 August 1950 giving the reason for leaving the Congregation and being incardinated in the Diocese of

¹⁸³ It is said that in 1950 Fr Carlo was clearer with his idea of founding an indigenous religious congregation of women: “Dare all’ Istituto una norma di vita adatta al paese in cui si vive, tutta basata sullo spirito del vangelo, vita di preghiera, vita santa, e, nello stesso tempo, vita di dedizione e di apostolato, diretta tutta al lavoro di fondazione, di direzione per la conversione della gioventù affidata alle scuole dell’ istituto.” Cf. ASC DQM 28, *Documents on the DQM # 02515*.

¹⁸⁴ *Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII, 2 February 1947*. The secular institute was a society without public vows, with its own “external ways of association, different from the common life of Religious”, “an internal organization with rules and regulations and distributed responsibilities”, and “full membership involves freedom from incompatible commitments”; its members “profess the evangelical counsels” and “have their definite ways of ministry and apostolate.” (n.15)

¹⁸⁵ ASC DQM 28, *Documents on the DQM # 02515*. On 30 April 1982 the Constitutions of the DQM were given definitive approval by Msgr. Michai Kithunchu, Archbishop of Bangkok.

Bangkok “*pure et simpliciter*” as: for motives of apostolate, having founded a secular institute for sisters.¹⁸⁶

It was not difficult for him to be re-admitted. Fr Carlo had always demonstrated his being Salesian in spirit; he had always tried to instill a great love for Don Bosco and the Salesian spirit in the members of the Institute he founded. He had always remained very much attached to St. John Bosco. Fr Carlo had not left the Congregation for reasons of religious discipline. His request to re-enter was sincere and well intentioned. Hence the Provincial and his Council were unanimous in approving the re-entry of the confrere.¹⁸⁷ The Superior of the Thai Province then, Fr Michael Praphon, was precise in his personal opinion and personal judgment of the confrere and his re-admission. He knew the confrere personally. His conduct while he was outside the Congregation and his attachment to Don Bosco and to the Congregation even in difficult times was exemplary. The spirit of work and sacrifice which he instilled in the members of the Congregation he founded was praiseworthy. He had definitely enriched the Salesian Family.¹⁸⁸ Even the Archbishop of Bangkok was very positive towards Fr Carlo regarding his request for re-admission. During the period of his incardination in Bangkok he never gave any reason for complaints; on the contrary, he lived his life as a secular priest in a transparent way. Hence the Archbishop did not have anything contrary to the Salesian’s re-entry to his former religious congregation.¹⁸⁹ On account of his worsening health and danger of imminent death, Fr Carlo renewed his religious profession in the hands

¹⁸⁶ AIT, *Letter asking for re-admission to the Salesian Congregation*. According to Fr Colombini, Fr Carlo had told him that he had remained Salesian in his heart. Cf. ADQM 28, *Colombini to Rainieri, Bangkok, 6 May 1972*. For Fr Bottain, Fr Carlo leaving the Congregation was something imposed on him by way of an alternative. He, however, was “attacatissimo a tutto ciò che è salesiano”. Cf. ASC DQM 28, *Bottain to Rainieri, Bangkok, 20 November 1974*.

¹⁸⁷ AIT, *Estratto del verbale del Consiglio Ispettorale (12 November 1975)*.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, *Parere del Sig. Ispettore, D. Michele Praphon (1975)*.

¹⁸⁹ AIT, *Dichiarazione dell’Arcivescovo di Bangkok [1975]*.

of Fr Raymundo Garcia on 6 December 1981 in the presence of some confreres who were his novitiate companions. On 4 April 1982 at 6.45 p.m., having received the anointing of the sick, Fr Carlo passed to his Creator.¹⁹⁰

Conclusion

The Salesians founded religious congregations on account of the particular needs they encountered along the way in the missions. They saw new frontiers to which they sought to answer through these congregations. They all shared the Salesian charism which was at work in the Church in East Asia. This was the same charism which they sought to radiate further through the newly-founded congregations. These congregations were all home-born and home-grown, founded by male religious but assisted by female counterparts. They did not, however, remain in place all the way. Some sought to transmit the charism they received to others elsewhere; they became missionaries as their founders were. The foundation of these congregations was timely and providential. They were the concrete responses to the particular needs of their times, of the various churches where they originated and to which they belonged. Along the path of history, these congregations asked to become part of the Salesian Family. They indeed became members, if only to prove that the Salesian charism has indeed been deeply rooted in their native soil, that it has grown into sturdy branches. Their admission into the Salesian Family is proof that they have indeed been docile recipients of the spirit of the Founder of the Salesian Society, and at the same time they have ably transmitted to others the spirit of their Founder.

The establishment of these congregations by the Salesians had not always been easy. Definitely, the “Founders-Salesians” encountered difficulties of varying nature with their local superiors and those in Turin, with their confreres, with the local ecclesiastical

¹⁹⁰ ASC DQM 28, *Constitutions of the DQM*, 4. He died after 23 years of religious profession and 46 years of priesthood.

and civil authorities, with themselves as well. At the end though, they came out champions of their desire to live the “*da mihi animas cetera tolle*” of St. John Bosco. In a way, they were stubborn Salesians who did only what they thought was good for the mission of the Church and for the Salesian family.

The “Founders-Salesians” were Europeans who tried to form Asians. They tried to understand the latter; the latter too did not spare efforts to understand them and to make themselves be understood. Perhaps, the founders were unconsciously westernizing their first constituents. But their primary intent was clear: to have local partners in sowing the Salesian charism and native counterparts in making this charism gain roots. Obviously, they were children of their times. In East Asia, somehow, the Salesian ideal was finally inculturated and indigenized.

There is need to interrelate the histories of the congregations founded by the Salesians in East Asia. It would be good to study their common experiences – both difficulties and triumphs. It is good to know how they received the imprint of St. John Bosco and how much of it. This would mean examining the life stories of the protagonists of the various foundations, the projects of life which moved them to found and be part of these congregations. Moreover, it would be good to know the politics of the Superiors in Turin with regards to the founding Salesians and the congregations founded.

This study should somehow provoke the Congregations concerned to examine critically and analytically their histories. Then they can have a more solid basis for the study of the charism of their Congregation, their growth and development. The celebration of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Society of St. Francis of Sales should be a stimulus to these Congregations too to study their respective foundations and especially their founders.

This paper reveals the new frontiers of those times, which the Salesians dared and shared with those whom they encountered. It was clear and urgent for them to recruit vocations, if only to ensure that what they sowed might persevere and bear fruit. The

congregations that were founded as a result were the well proven and valid response of the Salesians to the “new frontiers” of that particular epoch. For the Salesian charism to preserve its validity at the present time, perhaps in the place of those “new frontiers” we would have to look for the “newer frontiers” of today.

The foundation of these congregations reveals the desire of the Salesians to extend the efficacy of their missionary activity through the participation of locals inspired by the same charism. It further expresses their effort, at a time when the Salesians were taught to orient themselves particularly to the male sections, to give the Salesian charism a feminine character and to transform the Salesian charism into a movement with the same intent: the “*da mihi animas, cetera tolle*”. The native female religious congregations helped fill a lacuna – the care of the female sections of society – left by the Salesians, who wanted very much to be missionaries to all, regardless of the gender of the beneficiaries of their apostolic endeavours. They contributed to making Don Bosco belong forever to the places and to the people where his sons worked. At the end, Don Bosco became also East Asian.

The strena of the Rector Major of 2009 – “Let us commit ourselves to making the Salesian Family a vast movement of persons for the salvation of the young” – has a timely relation with the study just presented. We know, nevertheless, that the congregations founded by Salesians have long been dedicated to the salvation of the young. It is, indeed, true that the seed has become a “verdant and robust” tree. But how did it become a “*Bosco*”?

THE IMPLANTATION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN CHINA (1906-1936): IDEALS, CHALLENGES, ANSWERS AND RESULTS

*Carlo Socol**

Introduction

The Salesians landed in Macao on 13 February 1906 to take over the management of a diocesan orphanage and set up a school of arts and crafts, with the aim of expanding gradually into China proper, which they first did in 1911, shortly after the Portuguese republican revolution forced them out of the enclave. For 17 years, from 1911 to 1928, a dozen Salesians (ten priests, a lay brother and a cleric) took turns three or four at a time and worked with some degree of success in the Heungshan district, in Chinese territory just north of Macao, under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop of that city.

In 1916 the Society decided it wanted a mission of its own and gave the local superior, Fr Luigi Versiglia, leave to prepare the paperwork to be submitted to the Holy See. It was a favourable moment: since the 1911 revolution the China missions had entered a new, encouraging phase and the MEP Missionaries, who led the vast Vicariate Apostolic of Guangdong, could no longer guarantee the development of their mission (the pastoral care of existing Catholics and the evangelization of the large 'pagan' population) relying solely on their reduced personnel. The view of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide coincided with that of the Vicar Apostolic, Msgr. Jean B. de Guebriant, regarding the need to parcel out the vast mission territory to younger Missionary Societies or Orders. In 1919, after a period of gradual transition, the Salesians were entrusted the northernmost portion of Guangdong Province, the mountainous region

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of Shiuchow. The territory was erected into a Vicariate Apostolic in 1920 and Fr Luigi Versiglia was elected its first Vicar shortly thereafter.

On 1st January 1923 the Salesian work in China, which up until then had come under the Subalpine Province and was directed by Bishop Versiglia, became a *Visitatoria* and three years later a Province. The newly acquired status pushed the territories ministered to by the Salesians towards a gradual self organization in terms of what a Province needs to function properly.

All along and up to then the work was carried out chiefly under the thrust of the *charism* of Don Bosco, the one motivating force being to make true what the Founder had written in his Testament and seen in his dreams, “*la realtà sognata da D. Bosco*”.¹ It took the Congregation fifteen years of negotiations (1890-1905) before the first group of Salesians could set foot in Macao, and during all this time no one thought of a specific preparation for the China mission: members of the first and other expeditions were selected at the very last moment. Structures, both at local and provincial level, and organization could only have been tentative in the early stages. In 1923, at the birth of the *Visitatoria*, there was one regular house, the *Istituto da Imaculada Conceição* in Macao (1906), the Mission of Heungshan (1911) divided in three sections, and the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow (1920), which comprised four sections/districts and one house, viz., the Istituto (school-orphanage) S. Giuseppe at Hosai (1921). By 1926, when the China Province of Mary Help of Christians was established, two more houses had been added, the Istituto Don Bosco of Shiuchow (1924) and the Istituto S. Giuseppe of Shanghai (1924), and one new mission, viz., the independent mission of Mijazaki in Japan (1926).

These developments imposed the need to seek a *modus vivendi* between the newly born *Visitatoria*/Province and the Vicariate Apostolic. Questions such as the exercise of authority, now there

¹ ASC F156 *Bernardini to Rinaldi 23.09.1923*. Chief archival sources are from ASC (Archivio Salesiano Centrale) in Rome and AIC (Archivio Ispettorica Cina) in Hong Kong.

being two Superiors claiming jurisdiction over the same group of people, the division of property, the management of personnel, the search for vocations, the development of works etc. needed to be thrashed out.

Furthermore, there were more fundamental questions awaiting an answer. The Salesians had all along gradually attempted to establish what one of the missionaries called "a Salesian missionary system" in China.² Fr Versiglia and the first group of Salesians who landed in Macao in 1906 had no experience in running a school. Imperial China (and Macao) did not have a school system they could copy and adapt. The Salesians did, and they were hence free to run the school as they wanted, or as they could and the circumstances allowed. The Orphanage was a kind of shelter, at first for the orphans of the diocese, and later for needy youngsters of the missions tended by the Salesians. These young charges differed greatly in age, cultural background, academic preparation and individual needs. The orphanage, now in the hands of the new arrivals, offered all of them a 'one stop solution' in the best Salesian tradition: a home first of all, then a church, a playground and a school of some sorts.

"The Salesians [...] excel[led] in those fields where they had a free hand and possessed an unmatched expertise to offer, i.e. in creating a religious and moral culture, with the set of rules of life and daily practices that constitute Don Bosco's educative system: daily mass, devotion to Mary Help of Christians, daily catechism, the goodnight talk, friendly advice, a cheerful spirit, sacred songs and ceremonies, the long outdoor walks and the total dedication and continuous loving presence of the educators. In addition a noisy but charming 'western' brass band, the like of which had never before been seen nor heard in the region!"³

² *Inter Nos*, 26.01.1924. *Inter Nos* was the internal monthly newsletter of the Shiuchow meant to help missionaries share experiences and keep in touch with each other and with the world. The leaflet also contained a roundup of Reuter's dispatches.

³ Carlo Socol, *The First Twenty Years of the Orfanato of Macao between Ideal and Reality (1906-1926)*, in F. MOTTU (Ed.), *Insediamenti e iniziative salesiane*

The school of arts and trades took longer to organize from an academic point of view. The years 1912-1918 were years of “growth”, while the 1918-1924 period was one of “development”, with the Orphanage taking on an identity of its own as distinct from the Vicariate, to which it was effectively attached up to 1919, Bishop Versiglia being the only superior of both. The St. Joseph Institute in Hosai had similar objectives: it offered primary school courses to youngsters, eager to obtain a Christian and human formation, hailing from the Shiuchow Vicariate, which was a very poor area.

1. **Fr Ignaz Canazei and Fr Carlo Braga, the Will and the Heart**

The two institutes of Macao and Hosai became grounds for rather different experiments in the application of the Salesian system in China. An interesting source, the “*Memoriale del Consigliere*” (Memorandum of the Prefect of Studies) of 1919 chronicles the efforts of Fr Ignaz Canazei to regulate the academic, disciplinary and, to a lesser extent, pedagogical aspects of the Macao Orphanage and the annexed *Escola de Artes e Officios* or School of Arts and Trades, and thus gives us an insight into the problems the institute was labouring under and the challenges it was facing to adapt to the situation of a Portuguese Colony set at the margins of Mainland China. The Memorandum covers two school years 1918-19 and 1919-20.⁴

The *Escola* was loosely organized along the model of the Trade Schools promoted by the Salesian Congregation in many parts of the world, naturally adapted to local circumstances and with obvious limits, some of which can be traced back to the number and quality of the teaching staff sent from Turin.⁵ The limits were obvious in Canazei’s

dopo Don Bosco. *Saggi di storiografia*. (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Studi, 9). Roma, LAS 1996, p. 292.

⁴ AIC Macao Orfanato – Ignaz Canazei, *Memoriale del Consigliere* (1919).

⁵ Carlo Socol, «Una Istituzione che si occupa della classe operaia»: la scuola de artes e oficios di Macao nel suo primo ventennio (1906-1926), in *L’Opera*

eyes: the School lacked a well organized academic programme perhaps to meet the needs of a body of students widely differing in age, school background and even race or nationality, or perhaps because of lack of knowledge, on the part of school authorities, of the school system then adopted in China. The programme did not meet the minimum requirements to qualify as a recognized primary school. In particular, the time spent in the classroom, especially to learn the Chinese language, was not sufficient. Every teacher decided on his own what programme he would follow. The Prefect of Studies, therefore, resolved to divide students into the 5 classes of the Lower Primary School; on reaching third year, students were allowed to join the Arts and Crafts course, but all had to complete the 5 years curriculum; teachers were asked to draw up a timetable; textbooks were mandated by the school; a system of grading was introduced and diplomas granted; at the end of each semester grades were read in public in the presence of all the staff and prizes were distributed to the best students. Fortnightly outings were organized, classes in good manners were introduced and singing class was enriched with a Chinese repertoire to supplement the Latin songs the students already knew.

“Our youngsters like to sing and learn quickly. Prayer in church is thus enlivened and there is some variety on the occasion of feasts and solemnities. I started from the principle that every nation sings better in its own language, and therefore we have to teach them sacred songs not in the language of the western teacher, but rather in the language of the Chinese pupil. Only in this way will singing be accepted and will serve to arouse a life of faith and piety”.⁶

The Salesian hymn was translated into Chinese and a school hymn was composed. The students were taught the official Chinese National Anthem, as well as the Portuguese Anthem to serve on special occasions, but, as expected, the bigger boys “boycotted” it somewhat.

Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale. (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Studi, 17). Roma, LAS 2001, pp. 424-428.

⁶ AIC Macao Orfanato – Ignaz Canazei, *Memoriale*, p. 5v

Attention was then turned to discipline, the need to tackle disciplinary problems, poor manners, rowdy behaviour, and find suitable punishments that did not contravene Salesian praxis and that were effective on the Chinese, whereas previously fasting was imposed too often, for instance for those who did not apply themselves to learning the Portuguese language, the subject pupils liked the least (taught as a matter of contract with the Portuguese diocesan authorities, and a must for typesetters!). Canazei proposed useful services such as asking the bigger boys to clean parts of the house, or direct smaller (or too numerous offenders) to stand against the wall. Canazei took upon himself the task of imparting Religion lessons, with the exception of Primary I students. It was not just rote learning of the catechism; also lessons in apologetics were given (there was even an “apologetic box”). The Sodality of St. Joseph was reorganized and ‘pagan’ pupils were given talks on religion adapted to their mentality and needs. An innovative way was introduced to help the boys follow Holy Mass: a picture booklet was printed with prayers they would recite and that matched the various moments of the Holy Sacrifice being offered by the priest at the high altar, his back turned to the congregation.

In a long paragraph Canazei lamented the absence of the rector, Fr Versiglia, who was busy setting up the newly established Shiuchow mission, thus missing out on a key element in Salesian pedagogy, to the detriment of both the boys who were deprived of a fatherly spiritual guidance and of the young confreres, who had nobody to turn to for encouragement and advice.

Being particularly sensitive to Chinese patriotic aspirations, Canazei also organized a celebration of the Anniversary of the Republic on 10 October: the national flag was hoisted, the event was explained by one of the teachers, the national anthem was sung together with “the hymn to St. Joseph, Patron of China”. Then the students, who were better dressed than usual, saluted the flag. The recreation was longer; in the evening the students went for a walk and when they returned they were given snacks consisting of tea, peanuts and one-fourth of a mooncake.

Fr Canazei was a man who appreciated things Chinese and who understood the cultural and political climate of China. He had the will and went through the trouble of reorganizing life in the school with innovative and inculturated initiatives.

Fr Carlo Braga treaded a somewhat different path as he tried to apply the spirit and method of Don Bosco in working with his young charges at Hosai against the background of the tumultuous 1920s: civil war, leftist incursions, plundering armies and people seeking shelter within the compound of the Catholic mission. He wrote of this in the *Inter Nos* and in a letter to the Rector Major, Fr Filippo Rinaldi.⁷

Braga began to work with a small band of 24 pupils, of whom seven were boarders, and to them he dedicated his entire self: living together, praying and playing together, together setting up a school and a small community from the scratch, and in the process gradually becoming acquainted with the pupils' physical, moral, intellectual and civil background. It was a matter of "giving a new imprint and a new direction to their lives, their thoughts, their likes and their habits". Given the small number of pupils, it was not too difficult. His greatest effort and success was to manage to see "behind the yellow faces, the inconspicuous noses and the bony physiques, the hearts and souls of our children" and to treat them "as ours, to love them, to excuse them as we would excuse our youngsters, and even more to make appeal to their hearts (*'prenderli dalla parte del cuore'*)". The strategy worked and, with the help of this first group, it worked also with the new comers the following year.

A key point, Braga reminded his fellow missionaries, was to understand and accept the Chinese:

"Often the young Chinese do not know they err, they have no idea they are doing things that the conscience of Christianized Europe would feel thoroughly uncomfortable with. For them, on the contrary, it is the most natural thing

⁷ *Inter Nos*, 11.06.1922; 12.07.1926; ASC F158 *Braga to Rinaldi* 15-26.04.1926.

to do and perhaps it even represents the best of their civilization. Often I ask myself, whether our obsession to Europeanize even the deepest, unchangeable part of the Chinese soul, something that has nothing to do with the salvation of souls, is not blunting our best energies and compromising our work. Taking things with patience the Chinese way won't hurt anyone and it will not diminish our reward in heaven one little bit: be local with the locals, Chinese with the Chinese! For me, in my little and limited experience, there is one useful and practical saying: *Festina lente!* Let us affirm ourselves patiently.”⁸

With these principles in mind he gradually began to organize the Institute. Games, outings, vocal and instrumental music and Church functions were the attractions. The kids preferred life in the boarding school to life at home. Fr Braga began to be known as “China’s little Don Bosco”. Punishments were banned and the school almost resembled a novitiate. Fr Braga dreamt of the day when he could rely on local Salesians to give him a hand.⁹ With the help of the brass band and of sporting activities the school had outshined the richly endowed Protestant schools. If these had money, the Salesians had “the educative system of Don Bosco”. The miracles promised by Don Bosco were slowly becoming a reality.¹⁰

2. The “Don Bosco System”

Fr Canazei and Fr Braga were the first two Provincials of the China Province and, to a considerable extent, by their work of animation they introduced their experience into the life stream of the Province with varying degrees of success.

What Fr Braga wrote about the “miracles” promised by the Founder was not an isolated sentiment. One question the first

⁸ *Inter Nos*, 18.06.1922

⁹ ASC F158 *Braga to Rinaldi*, 15-26.04.1924

¹⁰ *Inter Nos*, 12.07.1926

generations of Salesians tried to give an answer to was: would the "Don Bosco system" work with Chinese youths? The doubt may have been sown in their minds because of the cultural and linguistic gap that existed between educator and pupil, which forced the educators to rely on outside teachers untrained in the Salesian methods of education in teaching and other activities. It became an existential issue, when the very *raison d'être* of a Salesian way of evangelizing was challenged by the more experienced China hands, the MEP missionaries, who had toiled for over 200 years in the mission territory of Shiuchow they were now handing over to less experienced hands, and with whom the new arrivals worked side by side during the first two years of missionary work.

The Salesians certainly discussed, observed and evaluated their methodology and work, which they experimented with and compared with others. Above all, they could not disguise the fact that they were first and foremost Salesian missionaries. The *Inter Nos* bears ample witness to this. The Salesians did take into account the work done by their predecessors, they collected the history and the Catholic geography of the districts where their sparse communities lived. But above all they did what they knew best: spread the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, start small scale oratories and set up mission schools for boys and girls in all major missionary centres; they would surround themselves with noisy young people even in smaller stations, work with zeal and sacrifice for the Catholic population, evangelize non-Catholics... all in a very familiar, Salesian way! And, of course, they observed the results.

The Salesian mission stations were full of young people, whose fervour and zeal, in the perception of the missionaries, would at times surpass that of their European counterparts. It was a way of evangelizing through the young; the missionaries saw the young as a 'power' to conquer China for the Church. Other missionary institutes may have had different experiences which brought them to conclude that the "substratum of the Chinese personality, a mixture of cold aloofness and self-centered interest, would be resistant to the warm

feelings and noble idealism rooted in Christianity”.¹¹ Judging by what the Salesians saw even from the earliest stages, when language was still a barrier and the poor knowledge of it had been the root cause of some misadventures, the only conclusion they could draw was that “where the spirit of Don Bosco, this gentle humanization of God’s love for the young, comes into contact with young hearts, it could only awaken that modicum of idealism that the Creator God had planted in all human hearts, whom He created only for Himself, so that they might know Him and love Him, no matter in which corner of the world they lived”.¹² After seeing with what fervour the young boys of Macao and Hoshi, trained by a young Fr Carlo Braga, made their annual retreat, and indeed observing on a daily basis the experiences these youngsters could count on to grow and mature in the Christian faith, a missionary would exhort his colleagues to “set aside any doubt, any perplexity regarding the efficacy of Salesian work”; it really worked, on condition, of course, that they kept faith to the teachings of Don Bosco and worked untiringly for the greater glory of God.¹³

Had pessimists and doubters, skeptical about the religious future of China, seen a Salesian feast like the Feast of St. Joseph organized in Macao in March 1924, they would have to conclude that “the Chinese are not after all different from our overseas pupils” and perhaps “they would not even have realized they were in China at all!”¹⁴ This is how a missionary described one such feast, the feast of Mary Help of Christian in Linchow in May 1925.

“The afternoon was spent in innocent fun. The youngsters had become masters of the situation and our joy; their rising boisterous shouts and the familiarity with which they moved with us gave us the feeling of being in a small festive oratory.

¹¹ *Inter Nos*, 10.07.1920

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.05.1923

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.03.1924

Towards evening their loud noise gave way to busy preparations for the illumination.

At dusk the courtyard was illumined with multi-coloured Chinese lanterns obtained through the industrious affection of the students. The picture of Mary Help of Christians was at the centre decked with candles and flowers, flanked by as many people as I have ever seen I think in these parts, mostly made up of families of our pupils.

Amidst the joy of the youngsters and the splendour of the light, songs, music, speeches and a short gymnastic display were executed in front of the Madonna of Don Bosco. The entertainment over, all rose for the night prayers. *This is how it was done at Turin, and to be able to reproduce here in China what had evoked in us as youngsters a holy joy and a lively enthusiasm was for us a sweet consolation.* We felt ourselves united with our Superiors, our confreres and the youth of the whole Salesian world in a single thought of love and work; love and work, the holy legacy of our Venerable Father! He had told us to seek youth and to cultivate in their hearts two loves – to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians. We just did this and it gave us a kind of assurance that we would see miracles, which we are actually beginning to see.”¹⁵

It was not just the missionaries. The newly appointed *Visitatore*, Fr Ignaz Canazei, observed developments with cautious satisfaction. The Confreres, as he saw, were well animated and mission work was proceeding in the right direction. Of course, there was the downside to a new situation: missionaries were grouped in small bands in the districts of the Vicariate, with a “*superior minor*” (a local superior) to whose care the confreres working in the district were entrusted. The confreres, however, lived and worked mostly alone, and pastoral work required great mobility as their flock was scattered over vast mountainous areas. Amid the jovial camaraderie of a group of Salesians just out of the trenches of World War I and catapulted at

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.06.1925

short notice into China one could detect certain amount of individualism. Hence this little step forward in the organization of missionary life, i.e., the appointment of three local superiors – achieved through a complete understanding between the Vicar Apostolic (Versiglia) and the *Visitatore* (Canazei) – together with the establishment of the novitiate for a dozen novices from abroad and three local lay brothers, was seen as the most important event of the year of the Jubilee, a double Jubilee: that of the Holy Year and of the Salesian Missions (1925). The *Visitatore* could not fail to spot the great utility these two important steps forward represented for the Salesian Congregation in China “by creating closer bonds of love and brotherhood and giving religious life an exemplary trait of discipline and obedience so as to render us more and more worthy sons of our Venerable Father D. Bosco”.¹⁶

For those who later knew Canazei, a man – as one Extraordinary Visitor put it – “not fatherly” at all,¹⁷ the circular letters he wrote during his first years as Superior are surprisingly heart-warming. He repeatedly visited (on foot!) the missionaries in their districts scattered over a vast mountainous area, happy to meet the “dear confreres and beloved sons of the Congregation”, praying and making sure they lived in fraternal charity and in the love towards the Congregation, full of zeal for souls”. He reminded them of the “souvenir” left them at the end of the spiritual exercises, “spirit of discipline and observance”, a souvenir that would bind them together as “Salesians in China”, and enable them to promote within the limits of one’s sphere, “the good, the advancement, the honour and holiness of the Congregation”. He concluded:

“How much should each of us feel stimulated, in this year which recalls such a glorious event for the Congregation, to continue with zeal the grand programme entrusted to us by our Venerable Father, who was truly inspired by the Lord, and carried out in such a wonderful manner by our elder Confreres during the first fifty years (1875-1925). ‘*Esto quod*

¹⁶ ASC F160 *Circular of I. Canazei, Good Friday 1924*

¹⁷ ASC A868.0207 *Visita Berruti*

diceris', our deceased missionaries exhort us, '*Esto Salesianus!*'¹⁸

The road ahead was clear: work as "missionaries and educators" in mission land and in schools.¹⁹ For this the setting up of a house of formation, the adaptation of Salesian methods and work, the search for local vocations, and an integral inculturised formation were a must. These were issues that were very much at the top of Canazei's priorities. It seemed like a promising start; one can detect, in fact, a reasonable degree of cooperation among the various parties involved: the Superiors in Turin, the Vicar Apostolic in Shiuchow and the *Visitore* (Provincial/Superior of Vice-Province) in Macao. In January 1924 the first group of novices – eight expatriates and three Chinese lay brothers – started their novitiate in Hosai. It was the beginning of a new, hopeful chapter for the *Visitatoria* (Vice-Province).

3. A Change in Scenario

Or so it seemed. In the 1920's the newly born China Province was to go through an extraordinarily rough patch.

1. *Political situation* - An anti-imperialist movement was fuelled by lengthy strikes and boycotts directed against foreign goods first in Shanghai (May 1925), then in Canton (May 30th) and Hong Kong (June 1925). In July the students of Philosophy were removed from Hosai to Macao, and in August, as violence and strife seemed about to flare up, also the novices undertook the same perilous voyage to the Portuguese enclave. The Shiuchow mission was no longer a safe place for the house of formation.²⁰

¹⁸ ASC F160 *Circular of I. Canazei, 24.11.1925*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Domingos LEONG, *The Political situation in China in 1920-1930 and its effects on Salesians*, in Nestor C. IMPELIDO (ed.) *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Vol. 1. (= ACSSA - Varia, 2). Hong Kong, 2006, pp. 33-45.

2. *Ecclesial missionary renewal* - With the appointment of Archbishop Celso Costantini as first Apostolic Delegate in China (1922), the celebration of the Synod of Shanghai (*Primum Concilium Sinense*, 14.05-12.06.1924), the Consecration of the first six Chinese Bishops in St. Peter's (October 1926) China became a laboratory for the new course in mission work: transition from mission to local churches, the preparation of local clergy to assume responsibility to run churches, the decolonization of missions (*ad extra* the issue of the French Protectorate, *ad intra* the issue of Congregationalism), the promotion of local religious congregations, both male and female, inculturation (adaptation), etc. All these were supported by programmatic documents such as the Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 February 1926) in line with the Encyclical *Maximum Illud* (1919), a letter of the Prefect of Propaganda Fide on the renewal of missionary methods (20 May 1923), etc.²¹ The new course coincided with the effort by the new Salesian leadership in Turin to reflect seriously, and for the first time, on the nature of its participation in the work of evangelization and the intent to convince the Holy See that the Salesian mission was "special", different from that of other Missionary Institutes.
3. The creation of the *Visitatoria* and of the Province, as mentioned, created a *dual authority*.
4. The acceptance of *new missions*, which initially came under the jurisdiction of Fr Canazei, while being a sign of deference towards the Holy See, did make things unmanageable: the China Province extended from Tokyo to Bangkok, and from Shanghai to East Timor.
5. *The new missionary policies of the Salesian Congregation*: the need of new personnel to sustain missionary expansion (in

²¹ Francesco MOTTO, *Salesian missionary activity while Blessed Filippo Rinaldi (1921-1931) was Rector Major with particular reference to Eastern Asia*, in N.C. IMPELIDO (ed.) *The beginnings...*, pp. 15-18.

1925 the Salesians were taking care of 13 “huge missionary territories” and 12 “extremely important missionary works”) and to satisfy the demands of personnel-hungry provinces is the reason behind the policy of sending “*ascritti*” (novices) and even senior aspirants to the missions for their formation.²² This meant an influx of considerable numbers of ‘formandi’ to be trained religiously and professionally in mission lands when there were no structures and no personnel *ad hoc*, and at a moment when the China Province was in the middle of a severe political emergency. This meant giving the Province a chance to gradually become a full-fledged institution, with houses of formation and young confreres to help in the houses, a provision universally welcomed, but it also meant shifting the burden of formation to the Province. This, in turn, had to face the problem of wastage and delay in the use of the personnel being sent. Turin no longer sent priests because it did not have any to send.²³

6. *Contradicting opinions.* Fr Rinaldi and Fr Ricaldone encouraged not only Provincials and Rectors, but also single confreres to write to them. Several did so and always received personal answers to their letters, filled with advice and encouragement. The system enhanced paternity and love for the Congregation, but it also had its pitfalls, because – perhaps unwittingly – it encouraged a practice of writing behind the backs of the local superiors – in China’s case both the Vicar Apostolic and the Provincial.²⁴ There was also at least one serious semi-pathological case of a confrere who, to induce

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21; ASC D872 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, IV, 17 and 19 June 1922, pp. 110-111.

²³ “Non mandiamo sacerdoti per la Missione per l’unica ragione che non ne abbiamo. E non ne abbiamo perchè da 12 anni si sottraggono alle Ispettorie produttrici tutti gli elementi giovani, quegli stessi che, se fossero stati lasciati, avrebbero poi domandato di andare in Missione dopo la loro ordinazione sacerdotale”. ASC F156 *Berruti to Braga 13.07.1934*.

²⁴ See for instance ASC F156 *Bardelli to Rinaldi 6.3.1929*.

Superiors to listen to his views, disparaged what the Vicar Apostolic and the Provincial were trying to do. Both Bishop Versiglia and Fr Canazei got perplexing observations from Fr Rinaldi regarding a lack of Salesian spirit and method in China.²⁵

In this situation Canazei began to speak – with increasing insistence – of “indigenous” vocations, the need to study the Chinese language and culture, of resisting the temptation to introduce European ways of Christian life, of the need for mature and committed missionaries, and of doing away with Romantic ideas of mission. All these were issues that other missionaries and, to a certain extent, also the Superiors in Turin shared. Canazei, however, believed in them and worked for them with passion, strong inner conviction and radical choices. He brought up the issues at the GC XIII when the Salesian missions were discussed, only to obtain the opposite effect. Not only was his voice not heeded to, but he was classified as being out of step with the Congregation: “It is convenient that the Chapter members know also this other opinion, or at least the man”²⁶, Fr Rinaldi wrote in pencil at the top of a letter Canazei had written him before stepping down as Provincial.

²⁵ “Mi fece pure un po’ meraviglia un’altra parola nell’ultima Sua dell’ 8 Sett. a.c. Mi permetterà questa libertà di parlare, chè altro non cerco che la verità e il bene delle ns opere in Cina. Mi scrisse in quella lettera: ‘*Speriamo che la casa di Shanghai sarà la prima opera veramente Salesiana e che ci darà mezzo di spiegare il sistema di Don Bosco*’. Ma mi domando: il nostro Orfanotrofio [di Macao], con quasi 230 giovani, e il collegio di Ho Shi, non sono opere veramente Salesiane? Io desidererei che Lei stesso potesse venire qui per persuadersene; ci sono dei difetti e delle imperfezioni, ma ci tengo a dichiarare, che i ns confratelli di Macau dirigono col vero sistema di D. Bosco la loro casa, e lo stesso si deve dire, se non ancora di più, di Ho Shi. Avessimo un po’ più di personale qui a Macau potremmo aprire un oratorio festivo subito; il vescovo già ce lo chiese, ma come si fa, quando tutti i sacerdoti, compresi Direttore e anche il Visitatore, devono assistere e far scuola in casa, oltre il disbrigo dei loro affari ordinari”. ASC F156 *Canazei to Rinaldi*, 11.09.1923. As for Versiglia, see Guido Bosio, *Martiri in Cina*, Torino, Elle Di Ci 1977, pp. 238-239.

²⁶ “Conviene che i capitolari conoscano anche questa campana, od almeno l’uomo” pencilled note on ASC F156 *Canazei to Rinaldi* 5.12.1929.

4. Challenges at the Vigil of the 1927 Extraordinary Visitation

As it turned out, developments in China, in the Congregation and the China Missions, while setting the premises for a richer future, did not make it easy for the Provincial to fulfil his duty. What follows is a picture we gather from a letter of Canazei to Ricaldone, then about to set out for his extraordinary visitation (1927).

1. *Extension and jurisdiction.* The Province was overextended and unmanageable as it included, besides China (Macao, Heungshan, Shiuchow and Shanghai) and Japan, also East Timor and soon also Thailand. It held jurisdiction over three Mission territories and a handful of houses (the Provincial was not sure how many, e.g. whether Japan had one or three!), but the real authority of the Provincial was curtailed by the fact that Japan (Fr Vincenzo Cimatti) and Shanghai (Fr Sante Garelli) retained a high degree of autonomy and reported directly to Turin.
2. *The Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow* worked with Salesian style and spirit, but the structures were diocesan, or at best 'mixed', i.e., diocesan with Salesian characteristics. The missionaries were sort of "incardinated" in the Vicariate. The Provincial described the situation as follows:

"There are no Salesian houses properly so called; rather, there are houses of the Mission where there is a Salesian missionary, just like any other missionary priest (diocesan). The boardings – Don Bosco of Shiuchow City and [St Joseph] of Hosai – are in no way Salesian boardings, but boardings of the Mission directed by Salesians, in which the Provincial has no say whatever."²⁷

The fact that the missionaries lived basically alone and were often on the move (the so called 'mobility' required by a

²⁷ ASC F159 [Ignaz Canazei], *Memorandum da presentare al Rev.mo Signor Don Pietro Ricaldone, Delegato speciale per le Missioni, Visitatore straordinario dell' Estremo Oriente* (1927) 7ff.

missionary situation) and merely grouped in districts under a local superior as a matter of convenience and not as an effective set up, was a fact and an accepted necessity.

3. *Formation of clerics and brothers.* Out of a total of 116 confreres in the Province, there were 26 clerics and 13 prenovices (*ascritti*). Of the clerics, 6 were studying philosophy, 12 were in practical training, 8 'studied' theology; 5 such theology students (including Cl. Callisto Caravario) studied dogmatic and moral theology in Shanghai with the help of untrained professors, while handling all along a full-time job as teachers and assistants in the orphanage; the 6 practical trainees working in Shiuchow had had to interrupt their biennium of philosophical studies to be at their posts but were not in the least concerned about this. Nine of the 25 coadjutors had yet to complete their professional formation.
4. *Forming local vocations.* Given the complexity of the Chinese language and culture, Canazei (by far the best sinologist among the Salesians) had little faith in the ability of expatriates to effectively run good schools, especially now that the Chinese government required recognized diplomas to teach. He felt that only with local confreres he could do so, a conviction that others shared and that we also find reflected in the correspondence of young Callisto Caravario in Shanghai. Hence, for Canazei, the priority was to open a house of formation specifically for indigenous vocations. He felt that putting expatriates and locals together was no way forward: their (foreign) educators would have to put in twice as much work, with the risk (since their Chinese was substandard) of attempting half way approaches that helped neither side and would probably neglect the specific needs of the Chinese, who would thus see their difficulties multiplied and, besides, risked learning European ways rather than growing and maturing in their own native culture. Formation would thus lose its healthy naturalness and become something artificial.

5. *Send practical trainees, not novices.* Given the complexity and cost of running a full formation program and the rather unfavourable political moment in China, Canazei asked the Superiors in Turin to stop sending novices and send practical trainees and healthy young priests willing to consecrate their lives to the missions.
6. *Inculturation.* Work was everywhere carried out with great zeal, but with few consolations. The “religious movement” was very slow; it was time to look at reality squarely, leaving aside “poetical idealism” and “volatile optimism”. It was time to abandon the unconscious desire to “Europeanize” and do a serious and life-long work of inculturation, beginning from language learning – a must not only for priests, but also for lay brothers if they wanted their educative work to be effective.
7. *The Preventive System.* Salesian life was generally good: the Constitutions and Regulations were observed; the Preventive System was practiced “more than before”. Yet he added: “it is undeniable that any educative method, including ours, has to be adapted to the particular condition of the Chinese, who are gifted with much intelligence but with very little heart”. One needed step in the right direction towards adaptation was to offer Christians and ‘pagans’ diversified programs in religious education.²⁸

Fr Pietro Ricaldone, for whom Canazei’s report had been prepared, took the following decisions at the conclusion of his Extraordinary Visitation:

1. He opted for an immediate division of the Province, setting up Japan and the incipient Thai missions as independent entities.
2. To make Canazei’s desire come true, he packed the master together with his entire group of novices off to Thailand right away.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

3. An agenda was set for establishing a house of formation in Hong Kong (eventually started in 1931).
4. He gave Canazei no encouragement in his intent to start a house for 'indigenous' vocations.
5. Solutions to the problems of the Vicariate Apostolic were still far off. The Visitor did remind all that it was a matter of principle that the Institutions that were in the Vicariate ought to depend not on the Bishop, but on the Provincial.
6. Discussions on the issue of adaptation were certainly premature due to divergences between the Turin and the Macao leadership on missionary policies.
7. The line of the Superiors was confirmed and "all agreed" that sending novices and young confreres from Italy to be formed alongside their Chinese counterparts under the same roof was still the best way for the former to learn the language and the culture, and for the latter to gradually absorb the genuine spirit of Don Bosco.²⁹

At a meeting held by Fr Ricaldone with the members of the Provincial Council on 12 October 1927, Visitor and Provincial expressed diverging views regarding the primary objective of the house of formation. For Fr Ricaldone it was primarily for novices from Italy, while for Fr Canazei it was for local candidates. All agreed, however, that competent teachers needed to be assigned to the house, "so that the clerics might receive an adequate formation, completely adapted to China", and "young Chinese aspirants and novices were to receive a complete formation, equal to that of expatriate novices". Fr Ricaldone also promised to send every year three practical trainees to compensate for the loss of the novices sent to Thailand.³⁰ The 1st Provincial Chapter (4-8 April 1929) declared itself favorable to a novitiate and philosophy house for expatriates "on condition that suitable

²⁹ C. Socol, *The Birth of the China Province*, p. 59 ; AIC Ignaz Canazei, *Cronaca Ispettorale*, p. 46-47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

personnel be assigned to form them". The Chapter furthermore expressed the "desire that the programme of studies be geared to missionary life".³¹ Since in spite of the "desires" expressed by the Chapter the difficulties remained, Canazei reaffirmed his views before the Superior Council in Turin on 7 August 1929; he explained that "the House of Formation was the *opus praecipuum* of the China Province". The Province was trying to speed up the project by sending the Provincial Economer on a fund raising tour of the US. As "there were obvious and numerous difficulties to continue sending novices and students of Philosophy from abroad (many have left!)" it might be "easier if for the time being it catered exclusively for local students".³²

In May 1930, after General Chapter XIII, Canazei's mandate as Provincial ended and in the aftermath of the murder of Msgr. L. Versiglia and Fr C. Caravario (25 Feb. 1930), Fr Braga was appointed the new Provincial (1 June 1930). Two months later, to the disappointment of the Superiors in Turin, Canazei was appointed to succeed Bishop Versiglia at the head of the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow, Propaganda Fide having opted for the third name in the list of three candidates submitted by the Society. The event did not bode well for the relationship between the Vicar Apostolic and the Provincial, notwithstanding the latter's conciliatory disposition. The new Provincial fell in line with the central policy. By the end of 1930 he had managed to persuade the Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong to allow the Salesians to have a house of formation in his Vicariate and proceeded to buy some property in the Shaukiwan district. In 1932 the premises were expanded and in 1933 new novices and clerics were accepted, all at enormous personnel and financial cost, due mainly to the lack of well prepared formators and funds for the construction. Five rectors succeeded each other in the first seven years, with Fr Braga himself having to stand in as rector for the year 1933-34. The policy would

³¹ AIC *Capitoli ispettoriali*.

³² ASC D873 *Verbali*, p. 252.

undergo no radical change; in the years to follow considerable number of expatriate young people from different nations would mingle with the few Chinese clerics who began to enter the novitiate, the first five joining the seven expatriate novices who had arrived in 1933. At one stage Fr Braga and the Superiors in Turin dreamed of turning the Salesian Missionary House in Hong Kong into a regional seminary for China, Japan and Thailand. Fr Cimatti was persuaded – somewhat reluctantly – to send his students of theology to Hong Kong (two groups arrived – six in 1933-34 and three in 1934-35).³³ The 2nd Provincial Chapter (1932) was quite divided on the issue of the language to be adopted by the house of studies, hence it opted for the resolution of having a commission draw up a curriculum that included the study of the Chinese and English languages. The teaching language would, of course, be Italian for all, with any notion of an inculturated approach *de facto* taking second place. The great difficulties faced by formators and formandi were to be taken by all as part of the growing pains of a future, well established Province.

5. Evaluation by Extraordinary Visitor Fr P. Berruti in 1937 and the Test of Further Development and Policies

From May to October 1937 Fr Pietro Berruti visited the 21 houses of the China Province and of the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow in his capacity as Extraordinary Visitor, beginning from Yunnanfu (Kunming) and proceeding to Hong Kong, Shiuchow, Macao, Shanghai, and again, after a detour to Japan and Manila, to Hong Kong and Macao. The visit to the house of formation in Shaukiwan, a suburb of Hong Kong, was one of the highlights and was done without haste.³⁴

³³ The experiment did not work; some of the students were suspended and eventually left the Congregation. In 1935 three of them were suspended for three years, others for two. ASC D873 *Verbali*, p. 741. See Fr G. Compri's article in this volume for the views expressed by Fr V. Cimatti.

³⁴ Pietro ZERBINO, *Don Pietro Berruti, luminosa figura di Salesiano*, Torino, SEI 1964, pp. 328-357

5.1. *The House of Formation*

Given the policy of sending almost exclusively young personnel to be formed in Hong Kong, it is obvious that for the decade 1930-1939 formation was and remained a priority in the mind of the Superiors in Turin, while the development of Salesian work was to be put off for some years. For this Turin had to curb Braga's tendency to accept houses too readily and above all make sure that the development was sustainable and that the Province would not incur crippling debts. Qualified formation personnel, however, was scarce and supplied in very small quantities. When he reached China, Fr Pietro Berruti found the following situation:

The *Studentate of theology* had moved to Macao in February 1937 after the first batch of students (which included the missionaries from Japan) had graduated. There were 8 students in 1st year (1 Chinese and 7 expatriates of four different nationalities) with two 'professors': Fr Luigi Ferrari, a BA in theology who had arrived two years earlier, in charge (actually – notes the Visitor – he was more of a prefect of studies and an assistant) and Fr Marian Mielczarek (who had arrived barely two months earlier). They occupied improvised space or used common areas and were considered an appendix of the house. Besides theology, the students had three hours of Chinese language, and three hours of English language a week; no Greek, Hebrew or liturgy (= *cerimonie*).

That the students should have classes in English and Chinese was a decision of the 2nd Provincial Chapter in 1932. The Visitor asked that the English classes be moved to the holidays. As for the Chinese language classes, they could be continued provisionally until the Superior Chapter would rule on the issue.³⁵

Aspirants: The aspirants had moved out of Shaukiwan to Aberdeen in 1936. There were 31 of them divided into 5 classes: 3 years of junior middle school and 2 years of an incomplete high school

³⁵ ASC A868 and B584 P. Berruti's papers regarding the 1937 Extraordinary Visitation to China.

curriculum (in line, apparently, with Italian aspirantates, which provided five years of secondary education up to *ginnasio*). They were “well taken care of” by two priests, one cleric and three lay (external) professors.³⁶

Novices and Philosophy students were housed in Shaukiwan. There were 28 clerics doing Philosophy (13 in 1st year, 7 in 2nd year and 8 in 3rd year). Among them four were Chinese. The classes actually lasted only for five semesters, due to the late arrival of expatriates from abroad. There were also 11 novices, of whom 7 clerics and 4 brothers. Three of them were Chinese.

The management could not agree on a shared and well planned formation method:

“For several years now there are two contrasting tendencies in the formation of clerics: that of the Provincial and the old missionaries, who desire a Salesian formation based on work, sacrifice, trust in the superiors and cheerfulness, at times a bit carefree and a bit too enthusiastic about sports; and that of the rector, who would like the formation to be based more on piety, recollection, reflection and serious interior work. Both currents fell into excesses and lacked essential elements.”³⁷

Salesian formation, even though solid as regards Christian and religious spirit in general, still remained defective, chiefly due to the personality of the rector, who was a cool thinker and did not know how to reach the hearts of the young confreres. There was a lack of enthusiasm, of warm affection and the power of example that move people. The Visitor also observed that:

- Two of the Chinese novices did not understand Italian well; meditation and reading for them were practically useless, and from the conferences they obtained what they could.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

- The curriculum of the students of Philosophy was not organized in such a way as to allow them to obtain the necessary diplomas they would later need to teach. Given the number of Chinese and non-Italian expatriates, the study on textbooks in the Italian language required unnecessary efforts and placed everyone, even the Italians, in the impossibility of acquiring the vocabulary and the method they would need to use in schools later on.

He made the following recommendations:

- The curriculum should be geared to the acquisition of the necessary qualifications: for this a study should be made to see if the academic programmes of the Chinese State in Mainland China could be integrated in the Philosophy curriculum.
- Those who did not know enough Italian, whether Chinese or expatriates, should be imparted the necessary religious and Salesian instruction in the language they knew.
- Time allotted to study was insufficient: the Italians should study more Chinese and English and less Italian; the Germans needed to study mathematics; music classes could be reduced. Besides, science and mathematics textbooks in Italian merely multiplied the difficulties of Chinese and non-Italians, and all ended up ignoring the terminology they would later need to use in the classroom. Could anything be done to avoid repetitive courses and offer diversified formation?

5.2. *The Preventive system adapted to the local situation: Freedom of Religion, Catholics and Pagans.*

Most Salesian schools in China (Macao, Hong Kong - West Point, Hong Kong - Aberdeen, Shanghai, Kunming) had boarders. The need to guarantee religious freedom and offer diversified religious instruction to Catholics, catechumens and 'pagan' boys had been perceived, as we have seen, quite early on, and may well be regarded

as a first effort to adapt the Preventive System to the Chinese environment. A test of the flexibility of the System came when the Salesians began to discuss the opening of the Aberdeen Trade School under the supervision of a Management Committee made up mostly of non-Catholic wealthy gentlemen. In 1924 Fr Canazei accepted a compromise formula that was to be enshrined in the contract: “As regards religion there will be no compulsion, every boy being free to follow his own, provided that the internal discipline is observed”. A perplexed Fr Braga, who inaugurated the school ten years later, could not but ask himself whether the Salesians could effectively work in a Salesian way under such an arrangement.³⁸

Fr Vincenzo Bernardini, the Rector of the Aberdeen school, sided with Canazei in the full confidence that “the Educative System of Don Bosco is such that, if practiced as one is supposed to, young people will spontaneously ask to be admitted to our Religion”. Hence, when addressing government supervisors, benefactors or parents, he preferred to talk about “moral and social education”, rather than religious education being imparted in the school. There were only about 70 Catholics among the 300 boys, all boarders, who attended the first school year. Non-Catholics were offered religion classes twice weekly, which they were free to attend, just as they were free to join morning and evening prayer. 180 of them attended, which means that the remaining 50 were not under pressure to do so. Catholics were given a choice of two Sodalities that they could join, while non-Catholics could enroll in the “Cheerfulness Society”, whose protector was Don Bosco and whose regulations were simple and applicable even to non-Catholic boys: (i) Sincerity, (ii) Constant cheerfulness, (iii) Avoiding foul language and grumbling.³⁹

In other schools the degree of adaptation varied from place to place, a sign that adaptation was dictated by the circumstances, rather

³⁸ Carlo SOCOL, *The Salesians of Don Bosco in Hong Kong (1927-2006)*, in *Conference Papers – Conference on History of Catholic Religious Orders and Missionary Congregations in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong, 2007, p. 675.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 688-689.

than by conviction. In St. Louis Industrial School, for instance, where the boarders were a mere 70 (30 apprentices and 40 students) and the Catholics numbered 58, the tiny minority of 'pagans' attended all practices of piety. Of the 500 day students, only 20 were Catholic; all of them, both Catholic and 'pagan', attended Mass only on solemn feasts. All they did on a daily basis was to say two *Hail Mary's*, one at the beginning and one at the end of the school. At Shanghai's Don Bosco Institute most of the 80 boarders were Catholic, and so the problem did not exist. In Kunming's Salesian Institute there were 25 boarders, 16 of them Christian, 9 non-Christian; all of them spontaneously went to church and said all the prayers together. Fr Berruti added: "Morality is observed. Recreations are lively and traditional games are played (*barra rotta, bandiera, palla avvelenata*). Football is banned".⁴⁰ Was it an indirect snipe at Fr Braga, who was an ardent promoter of football matches?

In Shiuchow 'pagan' students were free to join religious functions and the Sodality of the Immaculate was replaced by Catholic Action, a typically diocesan association, which met in the bishop's house. Bishop Canazei was in command there!

The Visitor made the following recommendations:

- Both sodalities and Catholic Action should be nurtured, as they are seedbeds of piety, morality and vocations.
- Prudently favour participation of 'pagans' to daily sacred functions and above all provide them with religious instruction, making it more attractive (with movies, slides, stories...). Those who do not wish to attend should not be left free, but assisted in either studying or engaged in a "less attractive" occupation.⁴¹

5.3. *The Oratory as Symbol of the Don Bosco System*

Fr Braga took on himself the task of promoting the Oratory as the symbol of the Salesian system. When in mid-1930s he visited

⁴⁰ Berruti, *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Japan with Fr Adolf Tornquist, he put it to Fr Rinaldi that his visit aimed at learning “many things from those dear confreres so outstanding for their (Salesian) spirit and zeal”; and when he saw the success obtained there, he wrote, “I feel terribly ashamed; they have 800 oratorians, and we have not even a hundred!” He stressed the same intent in another letter, as he wrote: “[...] we hope soon to be able to imitate [the Salesians in Japan] and evangelize the Chinese with the Salesian Method, especially by cultivating the young”.⁴²

5.4. *Clash of Mentality and Methods in the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow*

In his fourth year as Provincial Fr Braga complained that he had received no personnel for the missions, meaning the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow, since he had taken over as Provincial, to which Fr Berruti answered with some astonishment: “What about the personnel we sent to China these last four years, is it not for China? [...] We send personnel to the Provincial, so that he, having heard his Council, gives the part that he deems fit to the Vicariate, in accordance with the opinion expressed by the Vicar Apostolic.”⁴³ In other words, the Provincial was responsible for the formation of young confreres and had the authority to decide who would be assigned to work in the mission. Fr Braga apparently either did not know this or pretended he did not. The Vicar Apostolic did not want clerics in his Vicariate, and hence asked if it was possible to have some priests. The Superiors in Turin, answered Fr Berruti, did not send priests for the simple reason that they had none to send.⁴⁴ Hence Canazei in the Vicariate, kept waiting and complaining.

One specific objective of the Visitation was to tackle what the Congregation felt was the uncooperative and un-Salesian attitude of

⁴² ASC F156 *Braga to Rinaldi*, 22.08.1930; and undated [August-September] 1930.

⁴³ ASC F156 *Berruti to Braga*, 13.07.1934

⁴⁴ ASC F156 *Braga to Berruti*, 22.06.1934; ASC F156 *Berruti to Braga*, 13.07.1934 and 11.10.1934 (drafts). See also note no. 23 in the present article.

the Vicar Apostolic Msgr. Ignaz Canazei. Canazei handed over the management of the Province with some observations regarding the "Regulations for Missionaries" which GC XIII had approved *ad experimentum*, and on which a circular of Fr Rinaldi dated 2 June 1930 invited local superiors to express their views. Canazei's view was that the Regulations were excessively tilted towards the rights of the Society on several points and that they did not reflect the letter or even the spirit of the *Instructio* that Propaganda Fide in the meantime had issued (8 December 1929). Canazei's understanding of the document was that the Congregation was called to co-operate with the Church in the task of evangelization and establishment of local Churches, that this co-operation was shown chiefly by providing personnel and financial means, and that all the while the Church reserved for itself "the entire government of the mission" through a Vicar Apostolic, the "one real Superior", who reported directly to the Holy See.

"The Ecclesiastical Superior will wisely apply our methods of working with Salesian spirit, avoiding, however, the mistake of giving Christian communities such a specifically Salesian character that would result in their differentiation and separation from the other Vicariates, because our duty is to make Christians without further qualification, and not Salesian Christians."⁴⁵

Canazei envisaged two successive phases in mission work: the setting up of a fully local Church in response to increasingly pressing directives of the Holy See, followed by the development of Salesian works. The Salesian leadership felt that the specific way to evangelization of which the Society was the depository should be guaranteed and allowed to develop and bear fruit, and that the two objectives, i.e. the *implantatio Ecclesiae* and the development of Salesian work, should proceed hand in hand.

⁴⁵ ASC A868.0101 Ignaz Canazei, *Osservazioni intorno al regolamento missionario approvato ad experimentum nel CGXIII, fatte in base alla Instructio emanate dalla Congregatio de Propaganda Fide addi 8 Dicembre 1929.*

It took the Congregation several years to revise its Regulations, as Francesco Motto showed in his learned article⁴⁶, and this allowed Canazei to work for several years on the basis of his own observations and conclusions. The acceptance of the *Instructio* by the Salesian Congregation and what the Congregation effectively did to put it into practice, especially in terms of providing financial support and personnel to the Shiuchow mission, became an issue on which Berruti confronted Canazei. The Visitor tried to impress on the Vicar Apostolic the fact that by not allowing the Provincial to intervene in the lives of the Salesians working in the Vicariate and by refusing the Salesian method (chiefly the setting up of Salesian Communities) in the organization of his Vicariate, he was effectively contravening the *Instructio* itself, which recommended that the Ecclesiastical Superior and the Religious Superior work in a harmonious way toward the same aim.⁴⁷

Conclusions

The Salesians reached China under the thrust of a strong charismatic urge, but quite unprepared in terms of knowledge of the local culture. Efforts were certainly made to understand the socio-political and ecclesial environment in which they were working. Evidence is there to prove that during the Rectorship of Michele Rua (+1910) and that of Paolo Albera (+1921) the Salesians in China were basically given a free hand in seeking to adapt the charism to the local situation, whereas with Filippo Rinaldi (+1931) and Pietro Ricaldone (+1951) choices were made and directives were increasingly imparted from Turin that privileged the peculiar nature of the Congregation, leading to a policy that we might call of 'charism above inculturation'. The background, origin, evolution and finer points of this new policy need to be further studied in depth. What is clear is

⁴⁶ Cf. Francesco Motto, *Catholic Church and the Missions in the Twenty Years between the World Wars. Salesian Missionary Strategy* in this volume.

⁴⁷ ASC A868.0201 Berruti to Canazei, 20.10.1937.

that it set the agenda for decades to come. Even in the second phase of development of the Salesian work in China during the 1930s, the Salesians (with few exceptions) did not show enough sensitivity towards local culture and the epochal changes that the Church in China was going through, caught as they were at world and local level in the effort of establishing their own identity and method of evangelization, reassured in this by the official ecclesial recognition of Don Bosco's way to sanctity (Beatification in 1929, Canonization in 1934).

The 'charism vs. inculturation' dilemma became the root, at times, of serious confrontations between the Province and the Vicariate, both under the leadership of Msgr. Versiglia and Msgr. Canazei. As the confrontation became a stalemate, and Salesian work began to expand in various cities in China outside the Salesian Vicariate, the perception became clear that everything considered, it was better for the Congregation not to accept missions any more.

The abandoning of a way to inculturation in favour of pushing forward the plans hatched from the early '20s by Fr Rinaldi and Fr Ricaldone had its costs, chiefly regarding the quality of Salesian and missionary formation imparted to both local and expatriate Salesians and the quality of their educational work and pastoral ministry for decades to come, well beyond the 1930s, which this paper focused upon. Again, this aspect, i.e., the results of the policies of the Congregation on the immediate generations of Salesians, warrants further in-depth studies. Notwithstanding the choices made the Salesian charism, however, continued to expand both in China and, when this became off limits, in neighbouring countries as a valid and effective contribution to ecclesial work.

The vicissitudes of the China Province, which we tried to comprehend, were in great part the result of a dilemma: whether the heart should rule over the mind, or vice versa. Had the two, mind and heart, accepted each other and worked together, the outcome might have been different. The first generations of missionaries worked with what they possessed and knew best – the Salesian spirit. It may

be unrealistic of us today to expect of them to have had the mindset and qualities required to do a good work of inculturation. The same cannot be said of us: if history has anything to teach us, it is that the way forward for the Congregation may only be that of an inculturated charism.

THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN THE NEW CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF SIAM IN THE FIRST 30 YEARS

*Enrico Danieli**

Introduction

This paper aims to present the situation prevailing in the Kingdom of Siam at the time of the arrival of the first Salesians and the unexpected turn of events which posed challenges to them. This will be followed by a description of how the Salesians responded to these in a simple practical way in accordance with their experience and the directives of the Superiors that helped them implant the Salesian Charism in a different cultural environment.

I. THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SITUATION IN THE KINGDOM OF SIAM IN THE PERIOD 1925-1960

1. Brief History of the Kingdom before 1932

The Kingdom of Siam, “The Land of the Free”, has never been a colony of any foreign power. It was established in the North¹ of Thailand in the XIII century; then with the foundation of the New Capital Ayuthaya² in 1350 it extended its sovereignty over Malaysia, Eastern Burma and part of Cambodia and became powerful and

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¹ In the XIII century groups of Thai people who escaped the conquest of Kunming in Yunnan by the Emperor Kublai Khan established the Kingdom of Lanchang in Laos, the Kingdom of Lanna and the Thai Kingdom of Sukhothai in the North of Thailand and the Shan State in Burma.

² Ayuthaya is nearly 50 km North of Bangkok along the river Chao Phraya.

wealthy through trade with the great Asian Countries. The Buddhist Religion of Theravada³ struck capillary roots in the social context of the Thai society and created a culture of national identity and unity. Thailand is also called, "The Land of the many and splendid Pagodas".

For nearly six centuries the Kingdom of Siam had no fear of colonization; it had problems with Burma. The Capital Ayuthaya was captured twice by the Burmese. In 1782 Chakree transferred the Capital to Bangkok and started the present Chakree dynasty. During the reigns of the Kings Rama I-III (1782-1850) the Kingdom enjoyed another period of prosperity with the influx of many Chinese, Vietnamese and Laotians in the Country, who gave energy to agriculture and trade.

But a critical period for the Kingdom of Siam arrived when the neighbouring countries Malaysia, Burma and Indochina became British and French colonies in the XIX century. So the learned and most foresighted King Rama IV (1850-1968)⁴, fearing the same fate, made treaties and opened the country to trade with the western countries. He also favoured education, especially for the royalty and civil servants.

His first son, the wise and creative Rama V (1868-1910) with some foreign expertise, started to modernize the Country on western patterns. First he reformed the central administration, the military apparatus, the judiciary and abolished slavery. He started the railway system, the Post and Telegraph. He gave great importance to education and health care; then he reformed the national administration by introducing the new system of Provinces and Districts

His Son Rama VI was educated in England. The learned King, with hired artists and architects, endowed the capital Bangkok with parks and bronze statues; he issued laws on compulsory education all over the country and instituted the first Thai university, Chulalongkorn.

³ Theravada is the small vehicle or Hynayana of more strict observance.

⁴ King Rama IV was a Buddhist monk for nearly 26 years; he spent this time to learn Buddhist doctrine, languages and science.

In the year 1919 the Kingdom of Siam gained a place of reputation and recognition at the international level. King Rama VI led an English life-style of luxury and splendour.

2. A Volatile Period (1932-1945)

In the XX century many of the elite, both royalty and civil servants, started to go abroad to further their education, from where they acquired new democratic ideas. All this had an impact on the Thai society and aroused in many people the desire for political changes in the Kingdom of Siam for greater efficiency.

The already creeping economic situation was worsened by the world crisis in 1929 which, combined with the inability of the ruling class to take courageous decisions, opened the way for a new political course during the reign of King Rama VII (1925-1935). In June 1932 the Promoters⁵ launched a coup and obtained the Constitution, which King Rama VII signed on 10 December 1932. This was the beginning of greater political, economic and social changes.

The two most outstanding and active Promoters, the lawyer Dr. Predee Panomyong⁶ a civilian socialist and army colonel Phiboon Songkhram⁷, started many democratic and social reforms at the national and local levels, in particular the land reform. They strove to limit the influence of the royalty in the Government. They also wanted to reverse the trend of favourable conditions accorded in the previous 80 years to foreigners and Chinese in the economy and education. The military faction aimed at building a strong military apparatus and police. The Royalty had a difficult period from 1933 to 1957.

⁵ A few hundred people, both civilians and officers, who had studied abroad and had absorbed democratic ideas and wanted to promote changes in the Kingdom of Siam were called Promoters.

⁶ Predee Panomyong, also named Luang Pradit was a famous socialist lawyer, who graduated in France at the same time as many other Thai civilian and military servicemen.

⁷ Luang Phiboon was a brilliant officer of the military academy, who also graduated in France.

After five years of calm and quiet preparation, in 1938 Luang Phiboon Songkhram became Prime Minister and then Field Marshal with absolute power. With swift moves he got a strong grip on the Government apparatus and issued nationalistic laws, which he enforced with a military muscle; he proceeded to limit the power of the Royalty and the influence of foreigners in all Government institutions and in education, and gave only to Thai-born citizens the right of ownership of landed property; he favoured all Thais to dress like westerners. He changed the name of the country from Siam to Thailand.

With a shrewd propaganda he convinced the common Thais that he was the right man at the right time to do the job and restore the rights of the Thai Kingdom against the colonial powers. In 1940 he first prepared and then waged a quick two months⁸ war against France in Indochina and quickly claimed some territories⁹ back with the mediation of Japan. This gave him great credit and political power. But the false and black propaganda against the French also aroused persecution against the Catholics, seen as friends of the French.

After the quick and successful military operation of Japan in the Pacific in December 1942 Luang Phiboon Songkhram, acting alone and against many pro-westerners, went to war against the Allies along with Japan, with the aim of getting back the other territories lost to England at the West and the South¹⁰ many years before. But at the end the country lost the war without achieving anything.

In July 1944 Marshal Phiboon had to resign and left the liberal Dr. Predee Panomyong as Regent to cancel all war treaties and to deal with the Allied Forces and try to get lenient conditions for peace.

⁸ The two months war: December 1940 and January 1941.

⁹ The Kingdom of Siam lost territories East of the River Mekong in Southern Laos to France in 1993 and also in Cambodia.

¹⁰ These territories are three Northern States of Malaysia and the Shan State in North East Burma.

3. Stability and Growth (1948-)

After three years of hardships and instability, Marshal Phiboon Songkhram returned to power again in 1948 through a military coup, but with a totally different attitude. He, however, retained some of his socialist ideas, like limiting the economic power of the Royalty. On the international scene with the Allies he took a stand against communism. So with the favour and aid of the West he ruled the Country until 1957¹¹.

The Country went into a period of good international relations, which never changed and a period of continued progress. The progress was more relevant in infrastructure and communications, modern agriculture, industry and business in Bangkok. In 1958 Marshal Phiboon Songkhram was toppled by the strongman Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who became Prime Minister and also took a decisive stand against the advance of communism; so he and his military successors also got strong support from the United States of America for more than 15 years.

In 1946 the present King Rama IX ascended the throne. In 2009 he is still reigning at the age of 82. He commands great respect among the people and all the institutions for His concern for the welfare of the people, his moral uprightness and wisdom, his many useful projects and undertakings; he is also the Patron of all Religions.

This was the political, social and economic situation during the first 32 years of Salesian work in Siam: 13 years of volatile situation, 7 years of war, persecution and post-war hardships and then 12 years of stability. Many Salesian confreres were not even aware of the secret decisions at the Government level for lack of real information, but they could experience the practical consequences in everyday life.

¹¹ The Allies saw the danger of communism in Asia and they saw that Thailand could be a firm bastion against the communists. So they aided Thailand to develop infrastructures and communications.

4. The Catholic Mission in Siam

The Catholic Mission in the Kingdom of Siam had never been easy because of the Buddhist culture of national identity and also because most Thais have always considered the Buddhist religion as part of the Thai identity. The Catholic Mission was started by the Portuguese in the XVI century; the Society of the Foreign Missions of Paris arrived in 1662; they carried on the Mission with great effort, both in number of missionaries and resources, but with little result, because of the many limitations for Christians and the frequent persecutions especially during the period of Ayuthaya. At the beginning of the XIX century the Catholics were only 2000 approximately.

In the XIX and XX centuries there was a great influx of Chinese, Laotian and Vietnamese people into the Kingdom¹². These people were not subject to the ancient limitations and easily converted to the Catholic religion. Besides the presence of wise Bishops, the opening of the country since 1855 to western science and technology by Kings Rama IV-VI helped the expansion of missionary activities; they brought greater stability and good reputation to the missionaries and opened up new frontiers to the work of the Mission – health care and education.

The Vicariate of Bangkok invited religious congregations to take care of education and health care: St. Gabriel Brothers for the Assumption College, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres for St. Louis Hospital and schools for girls and in 1924 the Sisters of St. Ursula (and Angela Merici), who opened the famous Mater Dei College.

Kings Rama V and VI issued laws about property documents and the Catholic churches could retain ownership of the lands they had previously bought and developed. Since 1918 the Government issued various laws for compulsory education in all the provinces. King Rama VI started also the Thai Scouts and other activities for the young; thus an important field opened to Salesian work.

¹² The many Chinese people looked for land to till around Bangkok and in the South. At that time the Kings promoted the digging of the many canals around Bangkok too.

After the First World War the Society of the MEP had fewer missionaries. At the same time the missionary field was expanding with new challenges; many large Chinese families usually split up and some migrated to find new lands to till along the rivers and the newly opened railway to the South.

II. SALESIANS IN THE KINGDOM OF SIAM

1. The Arrival of the Salesians

In the year 1925 the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith invited the Salesians to accept a Mission in the Kingdom of Siam. The Rector Major Fr Philip Rinaldi accepted the proposal, although he had just started new Missions in Japan, Africa and South America, and invited Fr Ignatius Canazei¹³ from Macao to survey the situation of the new mission in the Kingdom of Siam.

The description and views presented to the Rector Major by the Society of the Foreign Mission¹⁴ of Paris and by Fr Ignatius Canazei appeared good and inviting: the Kings of Siam in the past century had been allowing and were sympathetic to the Catholics, the Thai people were friendly and peaceful, the environment quiet and in steady progress, the financial status of the Mission rather good.¹⁵

With this report and a proposal of contract by the Society of the MEP at hand, Fr Peter Ricaldone arrived at Bangkok in April 1927 together with Msgr. Louis Matthias from India and Fr Ignatius Canazei from China to have a personal view of the new Mission and consider the possible canonical and religious status of the Salesians in Siam.

¹³ At that time he was Provincial of the Salesians in China.

¹⁴ This is the first document about the Mission in Siam. It contains some information about the country received by the Salesians from the Society of the MEP and sent to the Rector Major through Propaganda Fide: ASC A905 *Siam, Pro Memoria 25 febbraio 1924*.

¹⁵ ASC, A905 *Report of Fr. Ignazio Canazei about the new mission, dated 15/01/1926*

The Society of the MEP were ready to give to the Salesians the 19 Provinces West of Bangkok and to the South covering an area of nearly 118,000 sq. km with nearly 6,500 Catholics. The rather well established churches and other smaller communities were all along the valley of the Mekhlong River in the provinces of Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi and Samut Songkhram¹⁶; in the other 16 Provinces (Petchaburi down to Narathivat) there was not even a chapel.

Bangnokkhuek¹⁷ was the largest community and had already some facilities, so it was fit to be the Center of the new Mission for a few years. But the Mission took the name of Ratchaburi, because this was the name of the strong Principality of the whole area (5 provinces) in the past and also because this town¹⁸ is located both on the Southern railway line and the river Mekhlong; in the future it would prove a better location for the Center of the Mission. Fr Ricaldone assured the Fathers of the Society of MEP that about 7 to 8 Salesians would arrive that same year.

The first two Salesians arrived on the 27th of August 1927 to prepare the place. Fr Peter Ricaldone himself accompanied the official group of 20 confreres who arrived on the 25th of October of the same year. The experienced and zealous Fr Cajetan Pasotti was named Rector and Delegate of the Salesians in Siam. A third group of 6 confreres arrived in December the same year. In December 1928 another 20 young confreres arrived and 28 more in two groups in 1930. So by the end of 1930 the Salesians already numbered 75, one having already passed away and others repatriated or returned to China. Some more left a few years later while some arrived in the years 1935-1936.

¹⁶ These are three provincial towns from North to South along the River Mekhlong

¹⁷ Bangnokkhuek is a village half way down the river from Ratchaburi to the mouth of the river.

¹⁸ This town is nearly 100 km west of Bangkok.

2. Goals and Challenges

The goals were to keep things going, develop the whole Mission (19 provinces) into a Prefecture Apostolic and a full fledged Vicariate, to promote education and activities for the young with a Salesian imprint. But many things were not according to what was presented in the initial proposal and the contract; the situation was also changing fast:

- The changing political and economical situation was creating many difficulties to the Mission.
- The Salesians instead of sending a few confreres to work for a period of time alongside the MEP, due to the problems in China had sent a large number of young confreres still in the process of formation, with only 9 Priests.
- The Mission didn't have any indigenous priests or sisters to help in the mission stations.
- The formation process required many resources, professors and equipment, which were scarce.
- The nationalistic movements and the war also became a great challenge for the Salesians.

3. Mission towards full Vicariate

First of all the Salesians had to tackle the question of the formation of the young confreres. For this they opened the formation house at the Nativity in 1930; they studied the language and the Thai culture. In his reports to the Superiors in Turin Fr Cajetan Pasotti often lamented the lack of professors, the need of resources and the fact of so many confreres crammed in at the Nativity: "*Siamo come le acciughe in scatola*"¹⁹ (We are packed like sardines).

The Salesians accepted the Mission on 1 January 1929, which was canonically erected on 30 June 1930 with Fr Cajetan Pasotti as

¹⁹ Cf. ASC Letters Pasotti (Siam) - Berruti 20.8.1934 and 22.8.1934 and especially 4 Jan 1935.

Administrator. The Salesians got to work in the parishes and in the schools with great zeal. But in their enthusiasm they forgot sometimes to take advantage of the long experience and difficult work of the MEP missionaries in the Mission and in some cases too quickly changed ancient traditions.

During the first 10 years all the Salesians worked for the Mission. In 12 years of work they developed the 9 existing churches, started other new small communities and furnished the schools of the Mission with new buildings; they repaired the Nativity church and built two new churches – one in Banpong²⁰ and the other in Bangtan. In 1934 the Ratchaburi Mission was erected as Prefecture Apostolic and Fr Cajetan Pasotti as Prefect Apostolic. But a few Salesian priests repatriated, either due to personal problems or on account of discouragement.

In 1930 the foresighted Fr Cajetan Pasotti started the seminary for indigenous vocations with the first 7 candidates. In 1931 they were already 14 and were settled in a small wooden house meant just for them; the brothers in practical training took turns to assist them especially for the teaching of Latin. In 1936 the candidates numbered 37 already.²¹

In 1932 Fr Cajetan Pasotti accepted too quickly some seminarians of the MEP, who asked to become Salesians or to work in the Mission. This was cause for some criticism by the MEP Fathers. Again in 1934 the long and difficult process to sign the agreement for buying the old seminary building of the MEP across the river opposite the Nativity Church when they transferred their candidates to Sriracha also caused more criticism.²² The Superior Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti felt

²⁰ Banpong is a District town nearly 80 km west of Bangkok in the province of Ratchaburi. At the arrival of the Salesians it had nearly 150 Catholics and there was a small chapel.

²¹ See Archivio Ispettoria Thailandia, Bangkok (AIT) *Chronicles of the Nativity Church in Bangnokkhuek*, 25.01.1936.

²² Cf. ASC *Letter Pasotti - Fr. Peter Berruti*, 20 August 1934.

embarrassed, because he always needed the cooperation of the MEP Fathers for many things. At the end he succeeded to convince the Superiors in Turin to buy it as a token of gratitude and good relations. In 1935 the place was used as the Salesian formation house and in 1941 became the indigenous seminary of the Vicariate.

In 1931 Fr Cajetan Pasotti invited the Salesian Sisters hoping that they would work in the parishes along with the Salesians. In 1935 he invited the Capuchin cloistered Nuns of St. Clare, who arrived in 1936 and were stationed in Banpong.

Since the Salesian Sisters, according to their Constitutions, could not work in the parishes far from their community, in 1937 Msgr. Pasotti decided to erect the indigenous Congregation of the Auxiliaries. He did all this to prepare the personnel for the stability of the Mission, which was on the way to being erected as a Vicariate Apostolic.

4. The Work in the South

On receiving the Mission in January 1929 Fr Cajetan Pasotti and Fr Joseph Pinaffo went for a quick ten-day survey of the South. Seeing the vast territories he was responsible for he felt helpless at being unable to start the work there because of the lack of priests and resources.

In 1933 six more Salesians were ordained priests and a year later the Mission of Ratchaburi was erected as Prefecture Apostolic; it was also the year when Don Bosco was declared a saint. So Msgr. Pasotti planned to start some work in the South. Fr Mario Ruzzeddu²³ was assigned first to open a chapel in the provincial town of Ratchaburi; then he started to visit the Catholic families living in Hua Hin, some 130 km down the peninsula; here the Mission soon bought a piece of land and the following year it opened a chapel and a vacation house.

²³ Fr Mario Ruzzeddu arrived in Siam in December 1927. He was young, outstanding; he had studied philosophy in England and knew English well and was fit to go to the South where there were quite a few English people working in the tin mines

In 1935 Fr Mario Ruzzeddu was only 25 years old, but he showed real missionary zeal. So in October 1935 Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti led him to the South to have a view of the Mission, and he assigned him the task of visiting the Catholic families, which were making a living in the Southern provinces. For 6 years Fr Mario Ruzzeddu made pastoral visits to the South twice a year; each time he spent between 30 to 45 days visiting all the provinces. Msgr. Pasotti and Fr Job Carnini took turns to visit the Chinese communities near the Malaysian border, in Sadao and Betong²⁴; both of them knew their Chinese language.

Fr Mario Ruzzeddu was enthusiastic about his pastoral visits to the South and had great hope for the future work there. He saw a good chance to start a stable work in the town of Hat Yai, where a wealthy Chinese offered a piece of land for a school. So in February 1941 the Provincial assigned him to go and stay in Hat Yai²⁵ and here he soon opened a house and the chapel of our Lady of Lourdes.

But the difficult years of the war doused the hopes of Fr Mario Ruzzeddu for a quick fruitful work; he was refused permission to open the school as he had wanted. But the Salesians did not give in to the many difficulties. The House in Hat Yai managed to remain open and in 1950 both the Salesians and the Salesian Sisters opened a College there and Hat Yai became the Catholic Center for the pastoral care of the South until the opening of Suratthani in 1959.

5. The Salesian Province of Siam

Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti was nominated the Administrator and then Prefect Apostolic of the Mission; he was also *Visitatore* of the Salesians in Siam since the beginning²⁶. But as the Mission developed

²⁴ Betong is the most Southern District in the hilly rubber plantations near the Malaysian border.

²⁵ Hat Yai is nearly 960 km South of Bangkok at the important railway junction for West or East Malaysia.

²⁶ Since 1927 he was Delegate and in January 1934 was nominated Superior (*Visitatore*) of the Vice-Province.

more and more the problems of the formation of personnel and plans for expansion took their toll on his physical health. So he wrote to the Superiors in Turin that he was available for a change²⁷.

In April and May 1937 the Superiors sent Fr Anton Candela for the Extraordinary Visitation to all the Salesian Missions in the Far East together with Fr Peter Berruti. As a result the Salesian Province in Siam was erected on 20 December 1937. Fr John Casetta was appointed Provincial on 30 January 1938.

It took nearly two years to assess the economic and canonical situation of the two entities: the properties, the expenses, the duties of the Salesians towards the Prefecture. But it took many more years to understand the role of the two different entities in the same place.

In February 1939 both the Province and the Prefecture approved the final assessment and they sent it to the Superiors, who approved it on 29 August 1939. Then on 5 December both the Provincial Fr John Casetta and Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti approved the "*Modus vivendi*" for the confreres working in each parish²⁸. But every now and then there were some causes of conflict²⁹.

In 1939 the Provincial made plans to open new works, because he had a number of priests and brothers packed in at St. Joseph College, Banpong. In April he opened the small house of Saladeng in Bangkok to survey the possibility of opening a vocational school for the orphans. The Superiors in Turin also approved the plan to open the house of Hua Hin and a school in the South³⁰.

The South was the first testing ground for the agreement made with the Ratchaburi Mission. In February 1941 the Provincial sent

²⁷ Cf. ASC *Letter Pasotti - Peter Berruti*, 19.12.1936.

²⁸ Cf. AIT *Contract between the province and the Apostolic Prefecture of Ratchaburi*

²⁹ See below the question of the property in Hat Yai in the chronicle of Hat Yai October 1941.

³⁰ Cf. AIT *Minutes of the provincial Council 18.7.1939*, approval by Fr Berruti 20.11.1939 and also *Minutes of 30.12.1940*.

Fr Mario Ruzzeddu to Hat Yai and in May approved the building of a Salesian house there. On 14 October 1941 Msgr. Pasotti blessed the house saying, "Well, good cooperation!" He was referring to the fact that the piece of land was first promised to the Mission.

The Salesians could not open a school in Hat Yai until 1950. The Providence of God did not allow the opening of any stable work there until the problem of the property was solved. The problem was settled when the diplomatic and good administrator Fr Peter Carretto became Provincial in 1948 and then Vicar Apostolic of Ratchaburi³¹ in 1951.

6. Ever-increasing Difficulties and Persecution

The coup that gave the Constitution to the country in June 1932 also started a process of restrictions on the Catholic missions all over the country. First there was some unrest and instability and then increase in taxes. The Government officials became ever more hesitant and somewhat hostile to the private schools and Catholic Churches due to the volatile socialist and nationalist trends. The chronicles of the parishes recorded various facts about this matter³².

The Salesians also had some problems regarding the personnel: in the first 12 years nearly 35 confreres left; of these 10 were priests. Luckily 28 young confreres were ordained priests in Siam and two diocesan priests joined the Mission.

Though the Superiors in Turin insisted on the opening of the vocational school in Bangkok and the transfer of the Salesian formation house to Hua Hin, due to the political and internal difficult situation the Salesians could not start any new stable work other than a chapel and a vacation house in Hua Hin, a house and a chapel in Hat Yai and

³¹ Cf. the problem of the property in Hat Yai in AIT "80 years of DB in Thailand" by Fr Henry Danieli (manuscripts)

³² Cf. *Chronicles of Banpong August - September 1934* in the house archives; see also AIT *Chronicles of Khok Mottanoi 1933-1934*.

Betong and a small house of procure in Bangkok; the Provincial and Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti felt that the time was not favourable.

<i>Statistics</i>				
Year	Entered	Left	Died in the Province	Still in the Province
1947	116	55	3	58
1952	145	69	4	72
1977	281	166	18	97

The false and black propaganda made by Marshal Phiboon Songkhram to prepare the war against France in Indochina in 1940 also caused a three-year persecution by fanatic groups against the Catholics, seen as friends of the French. In November 1940 all the French personnel, priests, brothers and sisters, had to leave the country. Only the indigenous priests and sisters remained, but they were also under severe restrictions for nearly 6 months. Later when the Japanese declared war on the Allies and also occupied Thailand in 1941, once again the French could not attend to pastoral work.

Divine Providence had made plans already years before by calling the Salesians to the Kingdom of Siam in 1927 (the Italians were allied with the Thais). In 1940 the Salesians had about 35 priests. Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti was consecrated Bishop of the Vicariate of Ratchaburi; he also was named Delegate of the Holy See for one year.

The Pro-Vicars of the Vicariates of Bangkok and of the North East asked the Salesians to send priests to help the persecuted communities. They made an agreement with the Provincial and Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti, who took the responsibility for this work.

Starting from February 1941 ten Salesian priests were sent to take care of a few churches in the Vicariate of Bangkok and the North East and to stand by the indigenous priests and sisters. The authorities could not do anything to the Italian priests as long as they respected the laws. During the period of the war and persecution the Salesians did a wonderful work both in Bangkok and the North East.

7. The Post-War Period (1946-1960)

After the war once again the Salesians had an internal critical period of about 6 years. 15 foreign (senior priests) and 4 Thai confreres left; but 12 foreign and 15 Thai confreres came in. Even the Nuncio expressed his concern and wanted to refer the matter to Rome³³.

In January 1948 the Superiors called the young and capable confrere Fr Peter Carretto (aged 36) to Turin, named him Provincial and gave him directions for decisive changes to renew in due time the board of rectors and the confreres in key positions in the Vicariate. In December 1949 Fr Ernest Bellido arrived for a special visitation. The formation house was transferred to Hua Hin and every year few young Thai candidates and some from Europe arrived. So the Province took a new course with a renewed Salesian spirit; it started to grow both in the number of confreres and of presences.

The Catholic Mission all over the Country made rapid progress, both in terms of conversions, vocations and the development of schools. Other religious congregations joined the Mission. In December 1950 the sacred statue of the Virgin of Fatima arrived in Bangkok also. Many non-Catholics joined the event and the authorities gave full cooperation³⁴. The persecution was soon forgotten. The blood of the Martyrs had really been the seed for many conversions to the Catholic Church in Thailand, which in a few decades increased from approximately 40,000 to about 300,000.

The Vicariate of Ratchaburi also made rapid progress: it started to have a number of indigenous priests; it opened the new Diocesan Center in Ratchaburi and developed all the existing churches and schools; it started to open new mission stations in the South – the settlement in Ban Saeng Arun, the school in Phuket and Suratthani.

³³ Cf. ASC Carretto R 16/6 *Letter Carretto to Superiors 16.5.1948*.

³⁴ The Prime Minister was the same who caused the persecution. This time he gave full cooperation to tell the Catholics that he did not hate the Christian religion.

The Salesians too performed well. They started the Don Bosco vocational school for the poor and orphans in Bangkok; a school in Hua Hin and the formation house that helped to increase the number of new candidates and confreres. A school was opened in the South and another in the North East too. They also continued to work in the Vicariate of Ratchaburi until 1969.

In 1969 the Diocese of Ratchaburi had nearly 20 priests and a flourishing Seminary; so the Holy See erected the new Diocese of Suratthani. The Diocese of Ratchaburi remained with the 4 provinces, while the Diocese of Suratthani took the 15 Southern provinces with no indigenous priests but only the Salesians and the Stigmatine Fathers. Nowadays the Diocese has already 20 churches with other 25 smaller mission stations. The schools number 25, of which 13 are of the Diocese and 12 of the religious.

III. THE SALESIAN CHARISMA IN THE MISSION

1. **Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians**

As described above, the Salesians committed themselves with great enthusiasm to the work in the Mission in the parishes and schools and also for the Church in the whole country at the time of persecution. Though young and without much pastoral experience, they were filled with the zeal of Saint Francis de Sales and of Don Bosco; they were inspired by the Virgin Mother of God, Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians.

Fr Peter Ricaldone led the Salesians to the new Mission in Siam. They arrived at Bangnokkhuek on 27 October. Two forerunners had already prepared the place for them with the generous cooperation of the Pastor Fr Durand and the Vicar Fr Nicholas Boonkert Krit Bamroong³⁵, now a Blessed Martyr. Before leaving, Fr Peter

³⁵ Fr Nicholas Boonkert was transferred to the North of Thailand in 1930. During the persecution he was falsely charged, because he gathered the people to pray in the church, and declared guilty. After three years in prison he died of tuberculosis and was declared Blessed in 2000.

Ricaldone called all the confreres together on the 29th to pray and entrust themselves to Our Lady Help of Christians, thus starting the work in the new Mission with Her as the Leader and Teacher.

In January 1930 Fr Cajetan Pasotti erected the seminary for local candidates and the Salesian formation house, both dedicated to Mary Immaculate. Even today the seminary still bears the name “Immaculate Conception Seminary” and it has given more than 70 priests to the Diocese of Ratchaburi (of nearly 14,000 Catholics).

The feast of the Immaculate Conception has always been celebrated by the young confreres with Novena, solemn Mass and stage performances. When Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti erected the new Congregation of indigenous sisters, first he gave them the name “The Auxiliaries or The Maidens of Our Lady Help of Christians”, which was later changed to “The Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary”.

On 9 February 1941, while Fr Mario Ruzzeddu was gathering his belongings to go and stay in Hat Yai, Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti gave him a small Statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception telling him, “In your work think often of Mary Immaculate and you will see miracles...” It sounded a prophecy. On arriving at Hat Yai on 11 February after a long journey by train (nearly 20 hours), he found a man waiting in front of the house he had previously rented, saying to him, “The owner of the house has decided to repeal the contract, because you have come here to teach a religion that the Government does not like. Go find another place, or better go back to Ratchaburi”.

That day Fr Mario Ruzzeddu walked around town for many hours; at last he could find a place to stay a few days in a house still under construction. The following day while celebrating Mass he prayed looking at the statue of Our Lady Mary Immaculate, “You have really to start to work miracles here”³⁶. After the war Hat Yai grew as the Catholic Center in the South. Our Lady Mary Immaculate prepared her important place in the Diocese of Suratthani.

³⁶ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of Hat Yai*.

One of the main churches that the Fathers of the Society of MEP had given to the Salesians was the church of Mary Help of Christians in Thava. While assigning Fr Felix Bosso as the first Parish Priest to this church in January 1931, Fr Cajetan Pasotti told him, "This church must be the shrine of Our Lady Help of Christians of the Mission". He soon procured a beautiful statue of Mary Help of Christians as a sign of the Salesian special attention to this church.

In January 1945, seeing the frequent bombing over Thailand Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti together with the Provincial³⁷ asked the special protection of Our Lady Help of Christians and of St. John Bosco for the Salesians, the people and the institutions of the Vicariate, vowing to spread her Devotion and that to St. John Bosco in the Vicariate and in the Salesian houses. Nobody suffered injuries and all the buildings were spared damage during the many months of bombing³⁸.

In 1947 the Mission of Ratchaburi opened another church (Vat Nai) in the name of Mary Help of Christians.

In 1939 the Salesians opened the first house in Bangkok – St. John Bosco Saladeng. In 1946 they also started the Don Bosco vocational school as part of the same house. When the Don Bosco vocational school was transferred to the present place and became a new Salesian presence, the Procure of Saladeng was restructured in 1952 and named "Auxilium". The Salesian Sisters³⁷, who bought the house of Saladeng in 1960³⁹, still have the church "Auxilium" which is the venue for an Italian Mass on Sundays in Bangkok.

In 1982 Bishop Peter Carretto built a solemn shrine in the Diocese of Suratthani to Mary Help of Christians in the new agricultural settlement of Phanom to mark the 50th anniversary of the Salesians in Thailand and 200 years of the Capital Bangkok.

³⁷ The Salesian Province of Siam was erected in December 1937 and the first Provincial was Fr John Casetta.

³⁸ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of the Nativity and the Chronicles of the Seminary 18-20 Jan 1945*.

³⁹ Cf *AIT Chronicles of Saladeng*.

The Salesians built in 2000 a new church dedicated to Our Lady Help of Christians in Bangkok at the Provincial house.

2. St. John Bosco

With the arrival of the Salesians in the Mission of Ratchaburi the Catholics there started to know about Don Bosco and the works of his sons and daughters around the world. Following the joy and celebrations in Turin, in Rome and around the world the Salesians in the Kingdom of Siam braced themselves to do something to celebrate Don Bosco Saint in 1934. All the Catholics of the Mission of Ratchaburi joined in the celebrations⁴⁰:

- The Salesians in Siam rejoiced very much at the news that the King of Siam Rama VII, at that time a special guest of the Italian Government, assisted at the celebrations in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome on the 1 April 1934.
- In all the Catholic communities in the Mission of Ratchaburi the life of Don Bosco was narrated to the people in simple ways.
- The Church also gave a special gift to the Salesians this great year by establishing the Ratchaburi Prefecture and Fr Cajetan Pasotti as the Prefect Apostolic.
- The best of all the celebrations was organized at the Church of the Nativity in Bangnokkhuek. During the first two weeks of September some confreres visited all the Catholic families for animation; this brought back to the Church many lost sheep. On the 14th a long procession of 150 boats full of people floated down from the church of the Nativity to the church of Vat Phleng, a distance of about 12 km along the canal dug by the Missionaries 54 years before. On the 15th there was the solemn Mass with the choirs of the young

⁴⁰ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of the Nativity, September*; also ASC "25 years of Salesian work in Siam" by Fr Cesare Castellino, p. 103.

confreres, the sisters and many boys and girls of the school, followed by the open doors lunch for all. Also the Governor of the province honored the Salesians with a precious visit on that day. In the evening was the joyful show on the stage. Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti presided over the celebration as the living Don Bosco among his sons in Siam at that time.

- In April 1934 the Mission opened a small chapel and youth center, named “Don Bosco”, in the town of Ratchaburi⁴¹, but the people here had to wait for further development until 1957 when Msgr. Peter Carretto built the prestigious Daruna Ratchaburi School, the Church and the new mission center, all in the name of Don Bosco.
- The best institutions of the Salesians in Thailand are the Don Bosco Homes and vocational schools for the orphans and the poor, because the alumni of these schools are those who still call Don Bosco “Father and Teacher...” with great gratitude all their life.

3. Activities for the young

Everywhere in the world the Church has always given attention to the young. But St. John Bosco had a preferential love for the young, especially the poor and disadvantaged. He cared for their material and spiritual good. He always wanted the schools and Salesian centers for the young to have sufficient space and allot time to recreation and various sports according to their culture. That is why St. John Bosco is revered in the Church as the “Father and Teacher of the Young”.

In the new Mission in Siam the people very soon noticed the difference around the churches when the Salesians took over, especially the attention and space given to the young for different sports. The Confreres themselves being rather young, actively

⁴¹ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of Ratchaburi* 26 April; also AIT “80 years of the Salesians in Thailand” by Fr Henry Danieli, part 2, chapter 9.

participated in the various activities with the young – sports, drama, music, scout movement:

- *Youth center, sports*: first the Salesians opened the youth center with various sports at the Church of the Nativity, Bangnokkhuek⁴²; then they opened others at Banpong and Ratchaburi⁴³. The young confreres themselves were active in preparing shows, which the young soon liked and later did by themselves.
- *Music: church singing and brass band*. The young were prepared to take part in the singing during solemn celebrations⁴⁴. Though quite common nowadays, it was really a new initiative in those days as most of the singing was in Latin.
- *The brass band* was also a means to get the boys of the school, whether Catholics or Buddhists, involved in external celebrations. The brass band at Bangnokkhuek was established as early as 1930. The Catholic Times on 4 September 1931 published photos and an article, saying, “The brass band of the Salesian school at Bangnokkhuek, Siam, a convincing proof that the God of these youngsters can be served in joy and gladness, was brought to the provincial town of Mekhlong for the closing celebrations of the school exposition held on the occasion of the King’s feast. Our illustration shows the band in the care of the Salesian Fathers travelling down the river for the celebrations”⁴⁵.

Later in Banpong the band was started in 1933. The brass band of St. Joseph College played an important part in all the civil celebrations of the District and activities of the school.

⁴² AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity*, 16.8.1931.

⁴³ AIT *Chronicles of Ratchaburi*, 26 April 1934.

⁴⁴ AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity*, 15 October 1934

⁴⁵ AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity* 31.10.1931

On the 7 November 1940 the band of the Nativity led the solemn march of the representative of the catholic schools of the Mission in the provincial town of Ratchaburi to offer 301.15 baht to the provincial authorities, as the Government had asked⁴⁶.

After the Second World War not only the Salesian schools, but also all the schools of some importance set up their own band.

- *The scouts*

The Salesians were ready to cooperate with other groups in all the activities for the young even if they were not Catholic initiatives. In the schools they set up groups of young friends of St. Louis Gonzaga or of Mary Immaculate. King Rama VI had established the Corps of the Scouts in Siam and some Scout camps around Bangkok. Later the Promoters ordered that all schools have a section of scouts. All the schools of the Mission gave special attention to the scouts.

On 31 December 1933 the chronicles of the Nativity record a special gathering of scouts from the various schools of the province and of the Mission. The gathering lasted a few days and the instructors showed great ability in the scout activities. The Governor of the province came for the closing day on 7 January 1934. The national newspapers reported the news, because it was the first time that clerics and priests took part in these activities⁴⁷. The gathering of scouts took place many other times either at Ratchaburi or Banpong or Bangtan where the schools of the Mission were especially active in this.

⁴⁶ Cf. AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity*, 7 November 1940

⁴⁷ Cf. AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity*, 31 Dec. 1933 - 7 January 1934; also ASC "25 years of Salesian work in Siam" by Fr Cesare Castellino.

The scout activities continued in the schools also after the War up to our days. The Salesians set an outstanding example by giving special attention to these activities from the beginning.

4. The Printing Press

The printing press was another means through which the Salesians expressed their charism in Siam.

In 1932 the fourth group of young confreres who arrived in Siam (*the group of John Ulliana and Peter Carretto*), still in the first year of their practical training, started the printing press in a simple way and without any plans for the future or buying expensive tools.

With the expertise of Gabriel Prachum for the Thai language, they typed 4 copies of a pamphlet named “*Wai Num*” (the young age) and on 7 August 1932 they presented it as a gift to Fr Cajetan Pasotti. To encourage the editors the Superior soon bought a duplicator machine “Gestetner”. With this tool, at the end of August they printed 200 copies of the manuscript with a new name “*Machimawai*” (the golden age)⁴⁸.

While the pamphlet continued its edition every month, other books were printed for the use of the Thai seminarians: the Latin text of “*Cornelius*” with some Thai notes and vocabulary.

The Mission obtained the legal license for the printing press on 10 February 1933; the cleric Gabriel Prachum Minprapha was the press in charge. In June 1933 the pamphlet reached 600 copies and was distributed to some Catholic schools in Bangkok.

The printing press made further progress in 1936 when a printing machine “*Saroglia*” arrived from Italy. With this quick tool Bro. Gabriel

⁴⁸ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of the Nativity, 8 August* and ASC “*25 years of Salesian work in Siam*” by Fr Cesare Castellino, p. 328, or AIT “*80 years of Don Bosco in Thailand*” by Fr Henry Danieli, part 3 chapter 8.

Prachum edited the Thai translation of "Pinocchio". But then he had to leave for Italy for his theology course.

In 1937 the Mission got the license to publish the fortnightly magazine "*Udomphan*" (the abundant seed). The first edition appeared on 7 August 1937, the feast of St. Cajetan. They printed 1000 copies of this first edition and they were really appreciated by the Catholic schools in Bangkok. Fr John Ulliana used all his spare time and ability to publish interesting articles in the best possible Thai language⁴⁹.

In the year 1937 the pamphlet "Golden age" also changed name to "*Jaovasan*" (Teens' Message). On the 15th of February the printing press had the gracious visit of the Apostolic Delegate Msgr. Anthony Drapier, who was visiting the Catholic communities in the Kingdom of Siam⁵⁰.

Since the printing press was working full time the Mission bought another printing machine, a "Joda" from Japan. But the chronicle reports: "The devil was so envious as to whirl its long tail and overturn the boat on which the machine was loaded on its way to Bangnokkhuek along the canals. The load of paper was lost completely but the machine was recovered the day after, repaired and set to work".

The young cleric John Ulliana while studying theology (1936-1939), in his spare time gave the best of himself to the work of printing, which reached the best possible standard at that time.

In July 1939 the young King Anantha Mahidon came back from Switzerland for a short summer visit. "*Jaowasan*" printed a special color edition and when the Christian leaders had a special audience with the young King, Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti presented a copy to him. Every year the King sent his subscription from Switzerland⁵¹.

The period 1940-1943 was a difficult time for the Catholics in Thailand. Those who wanted to remain faithful to their Christian faith

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ At that time the Papal Delegate was stationed in Hue (Vietnam)

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

had to endure many hardships. While all the other Catholic literature remained silent, *Udomphan* continued its issues regularly, and Fr John Ulliana courageously dared to print articles of the Constitution about the equality, freedom and dignity of every Thai citizen. *Udomphan* printed the article 13 of the Constitution on religious freedom with brief but appropriate comments⁵². Those who could read the magazine *Udomphan* were encouraged and acquired spiritual strength to bear all kinds of difficulties with the hope of a quick and happy ending of the persecution. The journal also helped the persecutors to understand the rights and wrongs of their doing.

Some later issues were in the form of questions and answers or dialogues, always careful not to speak of politics and with respect to people with different ideas. At the time of war it was also difficult to get printing materials; so the creative editors had always to invent new methods to continue the precious work.

In 1947 the Salesians opened the Don Bosco vocational school in Bangkok; so the printing press was moved from the Vicariate of Ratchaburi to the Salesian school⁵³. In Bangkok the simple printing press upgraded its tools and skill to respond to the ever-growing quality required by the modern companies. In the following years the printing department of the Don Bosco School had a lot of work from the various companies and shops.

But the best service the press could give to the Catholics was always printing the weekly journal *Udomphan* with much news about the Catholic church and about books on Religion⁵⁴.

In 1952 Fr John Ulliana too was transferred to Bangkok with the task of looking after the translation and printing of Salesian literature for the good of the young confreres, the young and the people in general.

⁵² Cf. *AIT Notes on the persecution* by Fr Joseph Pinaffo (manuscripts)

⁵³ Cf. *Chronicle of Don Bosco Bangkok* in the house archives.

⁵⁴ The Salesian *Udomphant* was later merged with the Bangkok journal *Sarasat* and became the actual *Udomsarn*.

5. The Schools

Even if the Catholics in Thailand are a small minority (0.4%), the Catholic schools are a quality-brand in the academic as well as in the educative and disciplinary field. The Ministry of Education as well as people of every walk of life know them very well. They know that the religious are not there for their own profit or advancement, but are in the school compound day and night for the good of their children and the safety of the school. Also the staff in the Catholic schools know this and willingly lend their cooperation to attain the proposed goals.

The present situation is the fruit of a long journey begun from the arrival of the Catholic missionaries of the Society of the Foreign Missions of Paris in the Kingdom of Siam in 1662. With their experience in France they soon started the Constantine College in the Capital Ayutthaya in 1668. This College served the purpose of the Seminary, but was opened to all people who could afford to attend. But unfortunately due to the various persecutions the College was destroyed and had to be rebuilt many times. With the new Capital of Bangkok (1769-1782) the Mission continued the important task of education.

In 1772 the first parish school of Calvary church (Rosary) was opened. In 1785 another was opened at the Assumption church. In the year 1796 the parish school of Holy Cross was opened and in 1834 the parish school of St. Xavier Samsen. But all these schools were of small size. The great Bishop Jean B. Pallegoix (1845-1862) gave much attention and encouragement to education.

There was no compulsory education for the people in the Kingdom of Siam until the year 1868; those who wanted to have some education usually went to the Pagodas and some monks would teach them how to read and write in the Thai language.

School education became compulsory in Bangkok in 1868 and in the provinces in 1922. The great King Rama V established the Ministry of Education in 1890.

In 1877 the MEP Fathers opened the famous Assumption College in Bangkok; in 1901 it was entrusted to the Brothers of St. Gabriel, under whose management the College became very prestigious. At the same time the Bishop of Bangkok invited other Religious Congregations to take care of the education of girls – the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres and of St. Ursula. These Congregations established schools of a high standard in Bangkok, which are renowned even today. The King and the Queen of Thailand also studied in these schools.

Upcountry the parish schools were started in the XX century, usually for the Catholics and for the teaching of Catechism. The Congregation of the Lovers of the Holy Cross, an older indigenous Congregation, helped the missionaries in this work.

The parish schools of the Vicariate of Bangkok were 98 in 1929 with a total of 6155 students⁵⁵, an average of 62 students per school. The Catholics at that time were approximately 30,000.

When the Salesians arrived, the Mission of Ratchaburi had already some small schools for the Catholics, mostly in the rural areas; only two of them were registered in accordance with the law⁵⁶.

5.1. *The Existing Schools*

- 1) The school of the Nativity Church: It was registered as the school of the community of Bangnokkhuek. It was the best in the whole Mission; consisted of two wooden buildings, one for the boys and one for the girls.
- 2) The school at the Sacred Heart Church, Vat Phleng. It had a small wooden building apart from the church, with two classrooms and two teachers. The school was not registered.

⁵⁵ Cf. Education commission of the Diocese of Bangkok, *336 years of the Catholic Mission in education in Siam* [Thai], Bangkok, Diocesan Education commission 2005, p. 37.

⁵⁶ Cf. ASC “25 years of Salesian work in Thailand” by Fr Castellino or AIT “80 years of Don Bosco in Thailand” by Fr Henry Danieli.

- 3) The private school Uea Darun at Bangtan was registered; had a wooden building and two teachers.
- 4) The small parish school at Don Krabueang in an old wooden building with two classrooms.
- 5) The Saint Joseph School in Banpong was using the chapel as classroom and it had only one teacher.
- 6) The parish school at Thava had a wooden building apart from the church with only a spacious room.
- 7) The parish church at Thamuang with a wooden building apart from the church, with just one classroom and one teacher.
- 8) The parish school in Khok Mottanoi was opened in 1925. It had a wooden building with classrooms and two teachers⁵⁷.

5.2. *Salesian Work in the Schools*

The Salesians gave attention to all the schools, but took special care of the school in Banpong, which initially was the least of all.

On 12 May 1929 the Minister of Education Prince Thani Nivat went to visit all the schools in Ratchaburi. At the very small St. Joseph school the Prince asked Fr Joseph Pinaffo whether he intended to provide some more decent classrooms for the students in a growing town like Banpong. He answered that it was surely the intention of the Mission to do so in due time.

In the same year the Mission approved a plan for a new building for St. Joseph school and with the special care of Fr Joseph Pinaffo in two years the new solemn building was opened in December 1932.

⁵⁷ Cf. ASC “25 years of the Salesians in Siam” by Fr Cesare Castellino, who was an eyewitness. As a cleric in practical training he taught in Bangtan and Banpong from the beginning.

We have these statistics from March 1931, beginning of the third year of the Salesian work in the schools⁵⁸:

N	School	Boys	Girls
1	Bangnokkhuek	186	202
2	Vat Phleng	62	61
3	Khok Mottanoi	56	72
4	Mekhleng	15	10
5	Don Krabueng	115	54
6	Banpong	99	29
7	Thamuang	18	42
8	Thava	50	30
9	Bangtan	82	58
	Total	683	558

5.3. *Other Achievements of the Salesians:*

- 1) They registered all the schools in accordance with the law and developed the necessary structures.
- 2) They opened the schools to the non-Christian students in order to reach out and extend Catholic education to non-Catholic families too.
- 3) They opened hostels for boarders from distant places.
- 4) They opened a Teachers Training Course to have qualified teachers in the schools.
- 5) They prepared qualified religious and lay personnel for the direction of schools.
- 6) They opened technical schools for orphans, poor and disadvantaged, when the Ministry of Education did not yet have programs in that sector.

⁵⁸ Cf. *AIT Chronicle of the Nativity Bangnokkhuek, March 1931.*

- 7) They favoured all youth activities: sports, music, art and drama, scouts, seminars and camping.
- 8) The Salesian educative system was outstanding and appreciated by students, the parents, other religious congregations and the authorities.

In the period 1929-1940 the Salesians could open only one parish school at Mekhlong in 1931.

In 1939 the nationalistic Government proclaimed the policy that elementary education was the duty of the State and the Government tried to close the private elementary schools whenever it was possible; so five schools of the Mission were closed to the regret of the parents and students. But just after the war the closed schools were reopened.

5.4. Schools Opened in the Period 1946-1960

Salesian schools:

- 1) The Don Bosco Technical School in Bangkok for the orphans and poor students (Jan. 1947).
- 2) The school in Hua Hin (May 1947).
- 3) The school in Hat Yai in the South (May 1950).
- 4) The Salesians developed St. Joseph College in Banpong "Sarasit Phitthayalai" as the main Salesian Center.
- 5) The school in Udonthani in the North East (May 1957).

Mission schools:

The Mission upgraded the standard of all the schools.

- 1) The Mission opened the parish school in the agricultural settlement of Ban Saeng Arun in the year 1953.
- 2) It opened the very important school at Ratchaburi, "The Daruna Ratchaburi school" (1957)
- 3) It opened the parish school in Suratthani, "Thep Mitr Sueksa School" (1959).

Note: On seeing the success of the school in Banpong the new schools were all oriented to Bangkok or other towns.

The schools with the boarding section have served as a means to reach out to many people, to take in as many Catholic youths as possible and to educate the young through the Salesian charism. They have been also a means to support other Salesian activities for the poor.

Conclusion

The various activities for the young that the Salesians used in education were at the beginning brand new for the country, but later got absorbed into the educational system in all the schools: scout activities, music and band, stage shows and especially sports. Later on spiritual retreats were introduced at the beginning and end of the academic year for each class to help the young reflect on their experience and give directions for their future life. The Salesians are still the leaders in the education of the young in Thailand.

SALESIAN CHARISM IN VIETNAM. 39 YEARS OF SOWING AND GROWTH IN THE STORMY HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY

*John Nguyen Van Ty**

Prologue

Up to now there is no book published on the history of the Salesian Province of St. John Bosco of Viet Nam. The events of 1975 had destroyed the entire archives of the delegation office and those of the houses. Furthermore, due to security reasons there has been no registration whatsoever of communities or the Delegation/Vice-Province up to the year 1992.

All I can do is offer my personal testimony of first hand quality, being one of the witnesses of the life and mission of the Salesians from the very first days of their arrival in Viet Nam to the present (1952-2008). Having spent practically all my life with the Salesians – an orphan in their care (1952-1958), an aspirant (1958-1960), a novice (1960-1961), a cleric sent to Hong Kong for philosophical studies (1961-1964), a practical trainee at Go Vap Professional School and Orphanage (1964-1967), a student of theological studies at the PAS (UPS) - Rome (1967-1971), back at Go Vap Professional School and Orphanage as catechist (1971-1972), prefect of studies (1972-1973), principal and vice-rector (1973-1974), rector (1974 – 1975), Superior of the Viet Nam Delegation (1975-1984), Superior of the Vice-Province (1984-1991), novice master (1991-1997), Provincial (1997-2003), missionary to Mongolia (2004-2007)... – I believe, my testimony has certain credibility.

* Salesian, Vice-Chairperson of the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Care of Vietnamese Migrants, a first-hand witness of the development of Salesian work in Vietnam from its inception.

Reflecting on the turbulent events of those years, I have been greatly helped by a sort of autobiographical memoirs written by Fr Andrej Majcen, one of the first Salesian Missionaries who came to Viet Nam (1952) and the last one to leave the country (1976).¹ Further, I still preserve some documents of the Delegation Chapters especially that of 1980, some letters exchanged with the Rectors Major in those difficult years, as well as some letters of confreres in military service and copies of the journal 'SDB' and 'Huynh De', the '*inter nos*' community and Delegation monthly communications. I do hope that my witness and memoirs would help others, in a near future, to complete a more serious and thorough study on the history of this heroic Province of VIE, which our Rector Major Fr Pascual Chavez, during his last visit in 2007 labelled '*the most fruitful in the EAO Region and may be in the whole Congregation*'.²

Introduction

How the Salesian Charism has been implanted and taken root in a country is indeed a very interesting and at the same time a very challenging theme. In the case of Viet Nam the planting and the growing processes seem to be neatly cut, surrounded by the turbulent events of the history of modern Viet Nam. The period of planting (or seeding and incubating) lasts roughly 23 years (1952-1975) with the presence of Salesian Missionaries from various countries. Together with the

¹ This *unpublished autobiography* composed by Rev. Andrew Majcen SDB, corrected by Rev Mario Rassiga SDB (preserved in the Archives of the Chinese Province, Hong Kong), and based on a much larger "polyglot" *dossier* now preserved in the Salesian Central Archives, Rome, is the most precious historical document on the history of the Salesians in Vietnam now available. The Document mostly concerns the period 1952-1975 with the author as the main and most important witness. The events that happened in Vietnam after 1976 (after the expulsion of Fr Andrej Majcen) are notes of an observer from afar. There is a Slovenian version of the *Autobiography* published from Lubljana in 1989. The *dossier* is designated in the foot notes as: Andrej Majcen, *Unpublished Notes of Memoirs* [AM].

² *Acts of the Visit of the Rector Major, Don Pascual Chavez, to Vietnam (09-14.04.2008)* [an *inter nos* document circulated among the confreres]. *Welcome Speech*.

event of the unification of entire Viet Nam (North and South) under the Communist regime (1975) the Viet Nam Salesian history turned a new page – that of silently taking root and budding forth with only Vietnamese Salesians left all to themselves. I would consider this period to last until 1991 when, due to the changing political conditions (the communist regime abandoned its Bolshevist system and adopted the one of free market), the Salesians of Viet Nam came out of their isolation and got again into direct and normal contact with the Salesians worldwide and thus began the third phase of growth and development.

In order to understand the seeding and growth of the Salesian charism in Viet Nam, which is mainly a thing of the '*spirit*' or a '*spiritual*' matter, in my opinion the outsiders should have at least a generic knowledge of the history of the country and of Salesian life in Viet Nam in those turbulent years. A short narrative of Salesian life, touching upon the more important aspects of civil history, would be truly helpful.

As for documentation on the subject, especially concerning the most difficult and obscure period after 1975, luckily we still have at hand some of the original papers which would be very helpful for further studies in the future. However, official documents and registers are by no means in existence or available.

Due to the lack of previous studies on the theme and in order to avoid the reflection being too subjective, I thought it appropriate to consult other witnesses. Luckily we do still have those who lived through all these periods, be they Salesians of Don Bosco, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Cooperators, Volunteers of Don Bosco and most important of all Past Pupils. I sent to many of them (120 in all) a questionnaire asking their personal opinion about:

1. The main traits (of the charism) of the Salesians (the Salesian Family as a whole) before 1975 (the main period of the presence of the missionaries)
2. The outstanding traits of the same Salesian charism in the period after 1975

3. The traits now in danger of fading away or being lost
4. The traits which need to be inculcated even more

Although scarcely one-third answered the questionnaire, they did greatly help form a more objective view and judgment on the topic. My thanks to all of them, also for the feeling that this study is a collective one.

1. **Brief History of Salesian Presence in Vietnam (1952-1991)**

1.1. *Arrival of the Salesians of Don Bosco*

On the feast day of St. Theresa of Lisieux in the year 1952, on the occasion of the Episcopal consecration of Bishop Paul Seitz MEP, the first two Salesian missionaries belonging to the Province of China came to Viet Nam from Hong Kong: Fr Antonio Giacomino, an Argentinian and Fr Andrej Majcen, a Yugoslavian.³ They were entrusted with the running of the 'St. Theresa's Home' or the *Cité du Christ Roi* – a boys' town of about 500 children displaced by war, founded by the newly consecrated himself. The changing of systems of education at this first phase of introduction of the Salesian charism met with a great challenge. This required also a gradual but total change of personnel. Together with the increase in the arrival of Salesian confreres (missionaries), local cooperators as well as vocations to be trained properly in the Salesian spirit was the main concern. Young seminarians coming from Bui Chu Diocese and some older youngsters from the boys' town itself presented themselves for training. For two years (1952-1954) this process went on painstakingly and resolutely.⁴ By the beginning of 1954 the Salesians were in a

³ For a detailed history of the arrival of the Salesians to Vietnam, Cf. John Ty NGUYEN VAN, *The Beginning of the Salesian Work in Vietnam. The Patriarchal Story and Exodus*, in Nestor C. IMPELIDO (ed.) *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Vol. 1. (= ACSSA - Varia, 2). Hong Kong, 2006, pp. 165-177.

⁴ Andrej Majcen, *Unpublished Notes of Memoirs* [hereafter AM], pp.152-170.

position to assume complete charge of the orphanage and run it in a truly Salesian way.

1.2. *Transplantation*

The great turmoil of the Viet Nam history began at that very moment. With the defeat of the French army by the 'Viet Minh' forces, the country was divided into North given to the communist regime and South to the nationalist. Some Salesians were called back to Hong Kong; but some remained to bring most of the children of the boy's town to the South.⁵ For six months the group was settled temporarily in the midst of the rain forest 30 km from the high land town of Buon Me Thuot where they all lived in hardship and extreme poverty for six months. It was precisely at this time that a solid and genuine Salesian family spirit was built up. These very events tied the young inmates to the Salesians in a particular way. In fact, later on quite a number of them asked to join the Salesians themselves.

Finally the children were settled definitively on a piece of land at Thu Duc, near Saigon, where they had to build their home from the scratch. One year later a group of bigger boys were transferred to their new home, an old railway station at Go Vap, nearer still to Saigon. This center was gradually developed into an orphanage with professional training facilities (later on Don Bosco Go Vap technical school), and an aspirantate for Salesian lay vocations. Thu Duc was then transformed into an aspirantate for Salesian clerical vocations. Hand in hand with the apostolate for the poor children displaced by war, the formation of autochthonous vocations was for many years the main concern of the Salesian missionaries who came from seven countries.

1.3. *Growth*

After some spasmodic professions of the first Vietnamese Salesians in the Philippines, Hong Kong, France and Italy, from 1961 the basic Salesian formation began gradually to be imparted in Viet

⁵ AM, pp.186-191.

Nam itself. The novitiate was opened in 1960 at Thu Duc and then moved to Tram Hanh on the highland, where also a so-called apostolic school (pre-aspirantate for much younger children) was opened. After years of sending post-novices to Hong Kong (1961-1970), Viet Nam opened her own house of studies at Da Lat in 1971. Even the theological formation was done in the country (at the Pontifical Athenaeum at Da Lat) from 1972.

With the rapid increase in the number of the Vietnamese Salesians – 85 in number, excluding the novices, most of them young and still in formation, while missionaries numbered 37⁶ – by the year 1974 new apostolates in the service of the young would be needed. Besides a center for street children opened at Tam Hai, plans were made for expanding Salesian social services (mostly in professional field) to Da Nang, Bao Loc and Vinh Long. There was a project to turn even the aspirantate of Thu Duc into a technical school, for the benefit of other religious congregations as well. A major step forward was taken in 1973, when after due consultations and procedures Salesian Viet Nam was detached from the Province of China and constituted into a Delegation dependent directly on the Rector Major. Fr Aloysius Massimino was appointed the Delegate. A bright and solid development was expected to be the future of this young Salesian Delegation.

The Salesians in Viet Nam by that time were augmented by the presence of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA), who first came to Vietnam in July 1961 and settled at Binh Tay, Saigon. Later their presence was shifted to Tam Ha - Thu Duc where they had developed a well-functioning aspirantate and a kindergarten. They sent sisters to help the Thanh Da parish in educating young poor children. By 1975 there were 20 Vietnamese sisters and two missionaries. They too were well on the road to a very bright future.⁷

⁶ Cf. Andrej MAJCEN – Mario RASSIGA, *Autobiography*, Lubljana 1989, p. 181

⁷ Cf. Maria HOANG NGOC YEN - Maddalena NGO THI MINH CHAU, *Nurturing of Vocations on the Journey of Implanting the Salesian Charism by the FMA in Vietnam* in this volume.

Like the rest of the Salesian world, groups of Salesian Cooperators and Volunteers of Don Bosco were also being trained; but their presence was still in the embryonic state and would bud forth into the light of day only after 1991. As for the Past Pupils Association, there had been some organization and activity before 1975, mostly with those of St. Theresa Boys' Town. A genuine association came into being only after 1992. One of the main reasons was the ban on all private associations decreed by the communist authorities.

1.4. *Communist Revolution*

God's plan for the Salesians in Viet Nam abruptly changed its course radically by April 1975 with the victory of the North Communist army over that of the Nationalist South. The country, after many years of civil war, was finally reunited under the rule of the Communist regime. All the foreign missionaries were asked to leave Viet Nam for good, the last one to leave being Fr Andrej Majcen on 23 July 1976 – a special privilege for being a citizen of Yugoslavia, a 'comrade' communist country.

By the end of 1975, just one month before the Communists entered Saigon, there was a total change of leadership in the Delegation. The Delegate and his Council, as well as all the rectors of the houses were to be Vietnamese, though young and lacking in experience as they were. The new Delegate of the Rector Major, Fr John Nguyen Van Ty was then scarcely 30 years old. To him and his council were given all the faculties that ordinarily belong to the Rector Major, with the clear order to keep the Salesian presence in Viet Nam alive as far as possible.

Even before the occupation, during two months of general offensive, there was great chaos in the Salesian houses as well as in the whole country. Under pressure from parents all the pre-aspirants and novices of Tram Hanh had to be evacuated in haste, by sea, to Saigon in the midst of the celebration of the name day of its rector, Fr Joseph Dinh Xuan Hien. On returning 50 days later the house was

found totally looted and ransacked. The same evacuation had been done with the Studentate of Philosophy and Theology of Da Lat – some by sea, others by air, with just few confreres remaining to look after the house. All other houses in Saigon had been turned into refugee centers.⁸

As soon as some sort of communication was re-established the temporary settlement process began. In no way it was possible to come back to Tram Hanh which was eventually abandoned. There was a clear understanding that the fate of other houses too was uncertain. So it was absolutely necessary to look for abandoned parishes along the route Saigon - Da Lat for eventual easy linking and communication among the confreres. Bishops of Saigon, Xuan Loc and Da Lat agreed to confide six parishes to the care of the Salesians: Lien Khuong, Thanh Binh near Da Lat; Duc Huy, Phu Son of Xuan Loc and Ben Cat, Ba Thon in the outskirts of Saigon. In fact very soon the Don Bosco Technical School at Go Vap was confiscated and only the orphanage section was left to the Salesians. Part of Don Bosco Aspirantate at Thu Duc was also “borrowed” by government associations, since it could no more receive aspirants and there were just a handful of the senior ones. The normal running of formation centers such as aspirantates, novitiate and studentates was clearly impossible. All the confreres, even those in formation, had to work in the paddy field or garden to grow their own food and earn their living. Life had indeed become very hard.

In this changing conditions of life, understandably many younger confreres hesitated and vacillated in their vocation. A great number of lay brothers at Go Vap asked to be exempted from the vows in order to keep their teaching job at the school, now run by the state.⁹ So also many clerics from Da Lat and Thu Duc returned home or prepared to leave the country. Those who remained were divided into small groups of five or six and were sent to mostly small and

⁸ Cf. AM, pp. 401-407.

⁹ AM, pp. 410.

isolated parishes. Other confreres had to remain in order to keep the houses, working hard and hoping for the best. In order to cope with the newly established communities the number of Salesian priests had to be increased especially in Da Lat Diocese. Theologians, even those just having finished second year of their studies, were ordained Deacons and Priests by Bishop Bartholomew Nguyen Son Lam of Da Lat diocese.¹⁰

At least for two years (1975 and 1976) practically most of the Salesian works of education came to a stop and the main concern was just the survival of individual confreres, of communities and of the Delegation. New security rules of the Communist military junta imposed severe restrictions on the movement of all citizens, banned all means of communication (even the use of typewriter and *ronéo* printing), purged all books and literature (therefore keeping a library was critically dangerous), and forbade all unauthorized meetings of groups of over five persons. Each Salesian community had to find its own means of survival – cultivating the land, doing all odd and end jobs and productions or joining the cooperatives which were strongly imposed by the State. For trivial reasons a number of confreres were sent to prison and to forced labour camps; some remained there for several years as was the case of Fr Joseph Hoang Van Hinh who served up to 11 years.¹¹

1.5. *Strengthening Efforts*

In order to boost the downcast spirit that was then very much diffused among the confreres, the Delegation decided to celebrate solemnly the 25th anniversary of the arrival of Don Bosco to Viet Nam (1952-1977)¹² and an emergency ‘Delegation Chapter’ was organized at Thu Duc. Spiritually these two events were of great success; the Salesians of Viet Nam found themselves girded up to face the trials and difficulties that were to come. In fact they came

¹⁰ AM, p. 417.

¹¹ AM, p. 418.

¹² AM, p.438.

quickly enough. In 1978 the whole Thu Duc compound was confiscated after an accusation of a staged anti-revolution plot. Its rector Fr Fabian Le Van Hao was sentenced to four years of prison and hard labour, all the aspirants were sent home, and Salesian confreres were dispersed into other communities.¹³ Shortly after that the orphanage and the delegation office at Go Vap were also forcefully occupied. Adding to this, some young confreres of the Saigon region, who had initiated their novitiate and made their first profession just after the revolution were called to military service. They were hastily trained and sent to the battle ground in Kampuchea (fighting the Khmer Rouge of the Polpot regime). In Da Lat region young theologians were enlisted to *Thanh Nien Xung Phong*, a communist association of youth, considered as pioneers who were sent to clear jungles or marshy land in order to establish new state-run agricultural cooperatives 'Gulags'. A year later (1979), deals were made to hand over to the government the land of Tam Hai (formerly a street children center founded and run by Fr Johan Donders and a festive oratory, transformed into novitiate from 1975). In exchange the Salesian confreres could be settled peacefully in new communities at Cau Bong, Hoc Mon, Xuan Hiep, Hien Duc, Tan Cang and *Nong Truong Cu Chi* (the Catholic run agricultural cooperative at Cu Chi).

These events once more shook the whole Delegation. More confreres took leave of Salesian life since it seemed as if there was no future. The number of professed Salesians was reduced to barely 60. For this reason it was thought that a well planned Delegation Chapter would be needed to clarify the vision and to provide badly needed basic directives and regulations to all the confreres and communities. The Delegation Chapter of 1980 was celebrated at Da Lat with all the formalities (undeclared to the authority – "Chui", which means a lot of risk) and with the representatives of almost all of the communities present. During two weeks of discussions it handled the themes of Salesian formation, which focused on the

¹³ Cf. A. MAJCEN - M. RASSIGA, *Autobiography*, p. 195

concrete figure of a Salesian (*Qualis esse debet*) living in a communist country, and of Salesian pastoral work for vocations (how to foster vocations and ensure the formation of confreres in those difficult conditions, in which the running of pre-novitiate, novitiate and post novitiate seemed impossible). The Delegation wanted not only to survive, but also eventually to grow in the future. Furthermore, the Chapter also offered to Salesians some practical guidelines for pastoral services in the parishes, and brief pieces of advice for those who were called to military or civil service.¹⁴

Another unexpected event that boosted up the spirit of the whole Delegation was a sudden and secret visit of Fr Bernard Tohill, the General Councilor for the Missions, who could somehow obtain an entry visa to visit Viet Nam 'incognito', as a tourist-professor. He stayed at the *Hotel Caravelle* and contacted indirectly some Salesians to come to the sacristy of the Saigon Cathedral to meet him. An arrangement was made that he could meet the Delegate, who would come to the Hotel in disguise as an official tour guide. They had their talk while strolling in the open streets of Saigon. On the next day, at greatest risk, he was picked up for a quick visit to some communities in the Saigon region where he came very briefly into contact with the reality of life and work of the Salesians in Viet Nam. To his surprise and delight he discovered what he nicknamed later the '*Aspirantate-Oratory*' in disguise. Just three short days of his presence in Viet Nam had tied the Delegation very strongly to the worldwide Congregation. The Salesians of Viet Nam felt very vividly that they had not been totally cut off from the Salesian body, and that Don Bosco was very close to them.

1.6. *Taking Root in Silence*

Hardships and trials were still the reality that the Salesians of Viet Nam had to face in their daily life; but from then on they had a clearer vision of their presence and mission in the country.

¹⁴ *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980, Appendix* (the original in Vietnamese in the VIE Provincial archives and typewritten copies circulated among the confreres)

Externally they made some logistical expansion that the scarcely permissible conditions occasionally allowed (the officially declared policy of the regime was to tolerate lawful religious activities but any form of expansion and development would not be permitted). Small new outposts sprung up, which eventually developed into communities such as Bac Hoi, Cam Duong, Suoi Quit, Phuoc Loc. Most of the apostolic services of the communities, except in few cases, centered on parish activities, carried out in a Salesian way. Proper Salesian works would have been either oratory or vocational training and guidance. Some attempts were made at small scale professional training, tutoring and boarding. The Salesians gave support to youth activities promoted and guided by the local civil authority, and thus they gradually gained the sympathy of the public.

But what was more important was the internal consolidation of Salesian life and spirit. Community life and relationships were emphasized. Since in many cases a community had to be split up into smaller groups (or presences) for the sake of pastoral services in many separated localities, Community Day was felt by all to be a must. The Salesians felt also the need of relationship and communication between communities and within the Delegation. To this end a paper '*Huynh De*' meaning 'brotherhood' was started. The monthly or bimonthly issues were typed, carbon copies made and distributed among themselves. When the state's control tightened and communication became even more difficult, the Delegation created three sub-regions – Da Lat, Dong Nai and Ho Chi Minh City – corresponding to the provincial administration of the country. Every sub-region had a representative of the Delegate with his council in order to be able to take appropriate decisions quickly. Efforts at translating Salesian literature into Vietnamese and sending copies to other communities were made very spontaneously.

Community prayer was also one of the main concerns. In fact the theme of prayer life was one of the main topics of the Provincial Chapter of 1983, and a Salesian manual of community prayer was then promulgated. The community spiritual reading and monthly

recollection were strongly insisted on. Even though the gathering of confreres in number could provoke grave security threat, annual spiritual retreats were bravely organized.

The formation of young confreres was also one of the big issues. The study of many confreres was abruptly suspended in the years following the 1975 event. The Delegation had to make all sacrifices necessary in order to resume it and reorganize it. No center of studies was allowed to be opened; so the young Salesians had to re-group themselves quietly in some determined place where they could have their lessons. The Delegation provided teachers who were mostly Salesians themselves and very busy with their personal duties in the communities. Some available non-Salesian professors were also invited. The teaching was done in secret, unknown to outsiders. We could assert that both the study and the teaching were great heroic acts in themselves, although the quality was understandably poor. At times they had to cover great distances by bicycles or motor bikes, putting aside their various works to earn their living in order to have lessons in very miserable conditions. Just imagine, for example, they had to make copies of text books for themselves by no other means than typing day and night (photocopying was prohibited).

Following the directives of the Delegation Chapter of 1980, many communities (such as Ba Thon, Duc Huy, Cau Bong, Da Lat) resumed or began their pastoral work for vocations. High school graduated students were admitted into vocational guidance and follow up groups which functioned mostly on Sundays.¹⁵ Theoretical courses were given in the morning and in the afternoon activities such as group discussions (*sodalities*), sports and theatrical exercises were offered. They were considered 'aspirants' and their number grew steadily. Some communities even started groups for 'pre-aspirants' whose members were younger boys of high school level, sent in mostly by parish priests who wanted the Salesians to train them to be youth leaders in their parishes.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

Even though the political condition was very much unfavorable, various attempts were made to reopen the novitiate in a flexible manner: private novitiate with a spiritual director . . . , then small groups of novices with flexible timings and place (living in any Salesian community for at least two months a year and for a period not exceeding three consecutive years).¹⁶ These unusual modes of novitiate lasted until 1991. Understandably, the ceremony of religious profession had to be done in utmost secrecy, with the presence of only one or two family members each.

Public ordinations to the priesthood in those years were few. Any candidate, secular or religious, had to be introduced by the diocesan bishop to the high public authority for approval and permission, which was in reality very rarely given. There had been no public ordinations among the Salesians for many years after 1976. So the Delegation decided to open up the road for secret ordinations (the so called “*chuu chuc chui*” in Vietnamese) for those candidates who had applied for it. As it would have entailed grave consequences not only to the individual but also to the Delegation and to the Church at large, only after due consideration case by case some confreres were given permission to take this step. One must think, for example, also of the limitations of pastoral and sacramental ministry these priests would have had to endure. . .

1.7. *Celebrations amidst Hardships*

All of a sudden like a bolt from the blue, without prior consultation or warning, the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò announced by telephone from Rome the decision to elevate the Salesian Delegation of Vietnam to a Vice-Province with its Superior Fr John Nguyen Van Ty. The document signed on 8 December 1982 arrived more than three months later. There had been no public celebration of this great event but just an *inter nos* announcement and silent prayer. The new Vice-Province of St. John Bosco of Viet Nam (VIE)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.

quietly continued its course of history as if nothing had changed. It began preparations for celebrating its first Chapter as a Vice-Province in 1986 to study the definitive Constitutions and Regulations, approved and promulgated by GC XXII in 1984, of which one copy had been left behind, as if casually, by Fr Luc Van Looy, the successor of Don Bernard Tohill as Councillor for the Missions, on a bench inside the Cathedral of Da Lat during his quick travel across the country in 1985 (unable though to come into direct contact with any Salesian).

Besides the strengthening work of the Provincial Chapters (1983, 1986, 1989) which aimed at various aspects of the life of the Vice Province such as Provincial regulations, manual of prayer, pastoral and educative work in the parishes, youth ministry with its singular spirituality, formation of young confreres . . . , the Salesians of Viet Nam still had to carry on bearing the heavy burdens and facing the dangers of their daily existence. The major part of their time and energy was spent in earning their daily subsistence – food and clothing. In the Communist economic system everything was regulated by the State; there was no free market but only state-run shops in which everything was rationed and inflation sky rocketed. All the communities had to find and change continuously their means of income: cultivation of rice and other crops, growing coffee and hot pepper, raising pigs, cows and goats, making artifacts, producing beansprouts, breeding exotic fish, manufacturing homemade goods such as soap, ice and ice-cream, battery, fish sauce, even beer, to name but some of the odds and ends jobs that occasion and chance suggested.

During this period, the Vice-Province also grieved the loss of some very young and promising clerics – Bro. Joseph Pham Viet Van, Bro. Joseph Le Van Thanh, and Bro. John Le Quang Anh. In most cases the cause of death would have been simply lack of appropriate sanitary and medical care. Even their burial site and ceremony would cause much complication from the side of the authority. However, new entries made the number of Salesians increase slowly but steadily.

Once a year, on the occasion of the feast of St. John Bosco (January 31) which is happily always close to the *Tet* (Vietnamese lunar New Year), the Salesians would gather in one of the communities in order to celebrate Provincial Family Day (which is very much in tune with the Vietnamese tradition). In their midst were present not only all the superiors but invariably also the Bishop of the Diocese. This was the event that all the confreres looked forward to during the whole year. They had much fun together with programmes such as singing competition or gala of newly composed songs or hymns on Don Bosco or on Salesian themes and sports, all aimed at lifting up the spirit of the confreres.

That was why, when they had learned about the solemnity with which the Salesian World had celebrated the Centenary of Don Bosco's death (1988), the Salesians of Vietnam were very much enthusiastic. They knew this was a good chance to consolidate internally among themselves their Salesian identity and to assert and make known Don Bosco and the Salesian mission to outsiders, both Church and civil authorities.

The Ba Thon parish, where the Superior of the Vice-Province resided, had been planning from 1983 to build on this occasion a new Church dedicated to Don Bosco. This enterprise of Church building was the first ever in the country because of the official policy of restrictions on all religious constructions. Notwithstanding all the odds, the building was completed and the church was blessed by the Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City, Paul Nguyen Van Binh, in October 1987 and was named "St. John Bosco Church".

As for public manifestations, with great encouragement from the Archbishop himself, a solemn Mass was organized in honor of Don Bosco at the great Gothic Cathedral of Saigon. The Vicar and Dean of the Cathedral themselves applied for the necessary permissions from the government. The permission included also the printing of 5000 holy pictures of Don Bosco. Booklets on the life of St. John Bosco and the Preventive System of education were also distributed. What happened on the morning of 31 January 1988 was

very memorable. From very early in the morning onwards more than 2500 young people from Salesian and non Salesian parishes teamed up in the Cathedral from all directions in order to honor their beloved Father. The youthful music and singing was great and overwhelming. “*A scene never seen for more than a decade in Saigon*”, stated later the Archbishop himself. After the Mass, young people went by groups to the different public parks of the city for their lunch and picnic, while religious and civil representatives were invited to a banquet at the Archbishop’s House.

The celebration might throw some new light on the relationship of the Salesians with the civil authority. Every where, little by little, they gained the sympathy of the people and that of Communist officials too, through their simple works of service to the young such as sports, music, recreation and popular skill training courses. The confreres were more confident about their vocation and mission. Their number continued to grow and touched the line of 100 confreres by the year 1990, with large groups of university-student-aspirants who were readying themselves to enter the novitiate.

Meanwhile by 1989 the Communists of Viet Nam had started to adopt the ‘*Mo cua*’ (*perestroika* or openness) policy, that seemed to release a fresh breeze in the country. In every field the restrictions were being loosened a bit, especially in economic matters. Contact with other countries (by phone, telegram and letter) were re-established. Some Salesian Superior even began to think of visiting Viet Nam. By 1990 there was such a favourable condition that the Rector Major thought of giving to the Vice-Province a new leadership. By April 1991, Fr Peter Nguyen Van De was nominated Superior of the Vice-Province, and Salesian Viet Nam began to enter a period of normalization. A promising phase of robust growth and healthy fruit-bearing began.

Looking at the prevailing conditions of life and making an overall observation on it, the Delegation Chapter of 1980 wrote as follows:

“The social changes of our conditions of living are influencing profoundly every aspect of our religious life as Salesians. In

the field of formation, these social influences would have particularly important impact on every one of us as individual Salesians, since it obliges us to change even our way of thinking, as well as the mode of carrying out our mission.

“In these past years, as a whole, our Delegation has been present in the midst of this country with a considerable vitality and has continually sought new ways to adjust itself to the changes of the ‘environment’. Notwithstanding all that, we have to sincerely admit that we are still infants in many aspects, particularly that of the formation of young confreres.”¹⁷

So was the design of the all-merciful Lord.

2. How the Salesian Charism was Implanted and Developed

Any charism, the Salesian being no exception, should be a living reality. Therefore it cannot be contained by books or documents.¹⁸ It is particularly true in the case of Viet Nam where Salesian charism was shaped and nourished and even subjected to trials of all sorts in the vicissitudes of a very stormy history. When the first Salesian missionaries came to the country, their very persons and their Salesian way of life and work touched and inspired the people in general and the youth in particular, especially those who were being attracted to such a kind of vocation. Twenty-three years (1952-1975) of their active presence is to be considered as a time of seeding, of incubating the Salesian charism in the Vietnamese soil. But unlike other countries where in general the continuity of seeding and growth was maintained, in Viet Nam, for better or for worse, similar to paddy cultivation, the seeding and growth were two distinct processes, in two distinct

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁸ Sebastian KAROTEMPREL, *Don Bosco's Charism and Asian Culture. Studies towards an interpretation of Don Bosco's Charism for Asia*, Dimapur, Salesian College Publications 1988, pp. 18-19.

climates and conditions. The abrupt departure of all the missionaries in 1975-1976 and entrusting the heritage of Salesian charism into the hands of young autochthonous Salesians of the first generation had been indeed, humanly speaking, a very dangerous and risky act of Divine Providence. But “nothing is impossible with God”! (Lk 1,37). Even the most unfavorable and severe conditions could not suffocate the Salesian seeds that had been sown. They might hinder the process of growing a little by prolonging the time of incubation (as in the case of sowing just before a severe winter); but may be precisely because of that the eventual growth would be more robust and the harvest more abundant.

2.1. *Predilection for the Young*

As anywhere in the Salesian world, the most outstanding feature of the Salesian charism was giving to the young, especially the poorest and most abandoned ones, priority in the life and activities of the Salesians.¹⁹

The first apostolate of the Salesian pioneers when they came to Viet Nam in 1952 was an orphanage – a boys’ town of over 500 children displaced by war. The institution itself had been previously established by their predecessors, the MEP Fathers, who ran it in their own style. It was the exodus of 1954 that made it hundred percent Salesian.²⁰ In the most difficult circumstances of shifting all these children to the South into the midst of the jungle, the Salesians did their best in order to continue to care for them. By then (and up to 1975) the Salesians in Viet Nam were known as “orphan boys’ fathers”. Don Bosco Go Vap was famous as an institution of first quality in caring for poor and abandoned children. Groups of delinquent boys were sent in by the Ministry of Social Affairs and other associations such as Lions Club. Later on, though in a smaller measure, the center for street children at Tam Hai and the planned professional school at Da Nang strengthened this conviction.

¹⁹ *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, 4

²⁰ Cf. A. MAJZEN – M. RASSIGA, *Autobiography*, pp. 71-72.

In addition to these services the oratories, very much promoted in all the houses of formation, had not only a great influence on local kids and the people but also strengthened the Salesian charism in young confreres. In fact this particular service would at times be the only one possible in the difficult years later.

When as a result of the events of 1975 the Salesians lost all their institutions that until then had served so wonderfully the poor and abandoned children, they realized that, the predilection for the young should start first of all from their heart and mind . . . and then and only then, it might be expressed through any kind of service that the situation may propose. Initially they tried to cling at all costs to the most genuinely Salesian work, the Orphanage at Go Vap, which they named "Don Bosco Home". They succeeded in running this institution up to 1978 before forcefully being obliged to hand it over to the government.

Considering the most precarious economic condition of all the communities and particularly the political and anti-religious situation that they were in, we can imagine how great was their effort in order to keep in touch with and be able to offer some kind of service to the young. Fortunately they could still do something through the activities in the parishes (any youth activity was strictly monopolized by the Party). Just think, for example, of the simple catechism class. Details of teachers, pupils and curriculum had all to be submitted to the local authorities before any permission could be obtained. During the most difficult period, being with the young was limited to working together in the field or playing soccer late in the evening.

When and where the conditions of life were a little more favourable, the Salesians would do their best to consecrate more time and means to serve the young. They opened small scale boardings for children in difficulty, both financially and morally (Xuan Hiep, Tan Cang, Phu Son, Lien Khuong, Doc Mo), evening tuition classes and alphabetization (Ben Cat, Da Lat, Thanh Binh, Hien Duc, and Cau Bong), short courses of professional training (Ba Thon, Hoc Mon, and Da Lat). The case of Duc Huy was rather singular. The community

had neither workshops nor personnel to begin training courses. But the needs were there, real and pressing. Some young people needed training so that they could find jobs. Recalling the example of Don Bosco in the early days of Valdocco, the community invited catholic families of the neighborhood to join in the project. So a number of these young people were sent to the various family workshops, where they could learn an appropriate trade. The Salesians themselves would follow these young men through regular visits to the families. In this way young people did get the training and jobs, while many catholic families would be involved in the Salesian mission.

Another moving example was the case of Ben Cat community. The Salesians discovered in the neighborhood a large number of children earning their living (and often that of their entire family) by doing odd jobs on the streets. Among the many initiatives to assist them, the community decided to open evening classes of alphabetization since most of these children scarcely knew how to read and write. The catechism classrooms of the poor parish were used for the purpose. The police then came and closed down the classes and sent the children away under the pretext that the location had been registered with the authorities for teaching catechism only. The Salesians then came out with an original solution; they continued the classes in public parks with the collaboration of student-aspirants. After 8.30 p.m. they would gather the children, have some games with them and then begin the alphabetization and tuition classes in the open air. The sessions would usually conclude with some singing and the 'goodnight talk'.

Sunday and even daily oratories were common in all communities. In some cases the community had to keep on moving their oratory every week to different localities, just as in the first days of Don Bosco's oratory before being settled at the Pinarci's (Ba Thon, Hoc Mon, Da Lat, and Xuan Hiep). The most common form of oratory was gathering together the youth for games (football) with intervals of catechism, sodality meeting and confession, all being done in the open air.

In short, their life of meager conditions could not hinder them from being with the young, catholic and non-catholic alike, and serving them. The Salesians in Viet Nam have kept alive the fire of love for the young which the missionaries had brought and kindled in this land. The fire might not have been blazing bright enough under those circumstances, but it has been tended and kept alive, waiting for a chance to erupt into a great bonfire. They all wanted to translate into action the following recommendations of the Delegation Chapter of 1980:

“Our formation aims at forming Salesians of great apostolic zeal. Our presence in this country, Viet Nam, should be imbued with the value of service only.”²¹

“While serving the young in the environments of Parishes or Cooperatives we should not only aim at sharing with them something that we possess, but at the prospect of elevating their life as a whole, culturally and professionally, so that they can be prepared to enter into the practical life of the society. In concrete every community nowadays has to fight for its own survival; therefore, besides whatever we can offer to the young in material support, we can and must give them precisely our zeal, our total devotion to their salvation, ‘*Da mihi animas*’, and our spirit of total detachment: ‘*coetera tolle*’.”²²

2.2. *Care of Vocations*

In this predilection for poor and abandoned youth, the Salesians of Viet Nam always gave a privileged place to those who showed good signs of a religious and priestly vocation.

Right from the beginning (1953) one of the priorities of the pioneers was to prepare personnel in the Salesian spirit and way of education. They began by recruiting young seminarians from major and minor seminaries of Ha Noi, Bui Chu and Phat Diêm dioceses. Even boys from among the orphans of the boy’s town were selected

²¹ *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980*, p.10.

²² *Ibid.*, p.23.

and followed up. Joseph Than Van Hoan was one among them. Being a helper to a Salesian Lay Brother Andrea Bragion in the workshop, he had first been conferred the diploma of Salesian Cooperator and then invited to join the Salesians. He was sent to Hong Kong for the novitiate and became the 'Senior Brother' ("*Anh Ca*"), as the Vietnamese confreres affectionately nicknamed him. During the turmoil of 1954, a group of these selected youngsters and seminarians were sent to Hong Kong, France and the Philippines for formation. In 1956, as soon as the transplanted boys' town was settled at Go Vap, an aspirantate was set up at Thu Duc, of which the core group consisted precisely of boys of the orphanage. Later on even at Go Vap, where the service for the poor and delinquent children developed prodigiously into a professional school, a section was dedicated to train vocations to lay brotherhood.²³

At the expulsion of the Salesian missionaries in 1975 four of the five then existing and functioning Don Bosco institutions were also dedicated to the different phases of formation (Thu Duc – aspirantate for priestly vocations, Go Vap – aspirantate for lay brother vocations, Tram Hanh – Novitiate and Apostolic boarding (pre-aspirantate), Da Lat – studentate of philosophy and theology).

During the years after 1975 the social conditions were most unfavorable to work for vocations and to run houses of formation. In fact all diocesan major seminaries were closed down or confiscated, so also all formation centers of religious congregations. Though the Salesians at first managed to keep their aspirantate and novitiate until 1978, they too then had to follow in line like the others. But the toughness of spirit of the pioneers still prevailed; for the Salesians in Viet Nam *working for vocations was just a must!* Very soon activity in favour of vocations spontaneously sprung up in some newly started small communities (Ba Thon, Duc Huy, and Ben Cat). The initiative always started with the gathering and care of altar boys and choir members of the parish. Eventually it was extended also to other

²³ A. MAJZEN – M. RASSIGA, *Autobiography*, p. 140.

parishes in the neighborhood. In those most difficult years (1975-1985) this was probably the only organized effort for vocations in the country, as stated by Aloysius Pham Van Nam, Auxiliary Bishop of Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese, during one of his visits.

At the Delegation Chapter in 1980 the Salesians made the following reflection on this problem:

“Our Delegation is paying much attention and effort to religious and Salesian formation. Nevertheless we should never forget to care for vocations because this is one of the main activities and works of ours, and because vocation is always so very important to the life of the Church and of the Congregation. Soon after entering the new course of history, notwithstanding all the limitations and difficulties, the Delegation Chapter 77 has asserted: “The Salesians should give due attention to the needs of caring for vocations which is considered a fertile potential of the Church... This should be the main concern for the sake of the Congregation and of the Church in Viet Nam.

“In the past, under the guidance of Delegation Chapter 77 (n. 9, 62), a number of communities have made great effort to help and guide local vocations. Everywhere we can find young people who show themselves to be generous in their intention to become Salesian apostles in order to serve the Youth in Viet Nam”.²⁴

From Delegation Chapter 1980 onwards, this kind of aspirantates had been reorganized and unified with regard to curriculum of study and ways of following up, as well as criteria of admission to be applied to the whole Delegation. Relationship between various groups has also been insisted on. It has been continuing to the present day making the apostolate of vocations to be evermore flourishing in the Province. That is the precise reason why Viet Nam is now leading in the number of vocations offered to the Congregation and to the Church. In fact it has prepared large number of vocations,

²⁴ *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980*, p. 42.

not only for Salesians, but also for diocesan seminaries and other religious orders as well. We may consider it one of the characteristics of the Salesian charism in Viet Nam.

2.3. *Work and Temperance*

The first Salesians came to Viet Nam, a war torn country; in the midst of poverty and hardship they had to work hard and certainly live a very frugal life. Against the background of most local priests and religious, who could live a rather comfortable life since they were very much venerated by the faithful, the Salesian figure came out just as striking. After the foundation of both Thu Duc and Go Vap in extreme poverty as a result of the Exodus (1954-1955), for several years (up to 1960) the conditions of life at times were just unbearable. Thu Duc was then an empty desert land, far away from any habitations, 3 km from the small town of Thu Duc. The missionaries set up three military tents and a metal framed house, dismantled and brought down South from the workshop of Thai Ha (North Vietnam), with nothing but an earthen floor and no walls. According to the testimony of Rev. Andrej Majcen the heat of the metal roof and dusty wind had been unbearable to the missionaries. In fact he himself had to have his *siesta* lying on the wet floor of a bathroom.²⁵

A complex of simple houses then slowly sprung up, fruit of the sweat and labour of the children themselves and of the Salesians along with them. Go Vap (the orphanage and trade school) was the first to be built and equipped systematically (1960) out of the barracks and store houses of an abandoned railway station. Thu Duc was built up a little later (1962) – first the chapel, then classrooms and offices, while most of the activities continued to be carried out under the old metal roof sheds up to the year 1975. The Da Lat Studentate was built in 1973-1974, most of the heavy works of construction being done by the young students themselves. Salesian life in general was frugal and simple. We can say that from 1971 Salesian Viet Nam

²⁵ Cf. AM, p.213.

was on the road to development. New projects had been contemplated for Da Nang (in central Viet Nam), Bao Loc (on the highland) and Vinh Long (in the delta of Me Kong River – south). That notwithstanding there was no sign yet of bourgeois or consumerist tendency among the confreres.

The events of 1975 had stripped the Salesians in Vietnam, just within three years, of all their subsistence and reduced them to extreme material and financial poverty. It seemed that the abrupt change of the conditions of life, though painful it was, was accepted by most of the confreres in a spirit of calmness, mingled with a sense of adventure and humour. Cut off from all financial help from abroad, and having no income whatsoever, the communities had to earn their own living by directly cultivating the land and producing whatever they could through farming and handicraft, cooking their own food and doing all the household chores. There were times when the communities were literally reduced to a miserable state, near to starvation. In those circumstances the spirit of poverty, work and temperance became so concrete and so natural that it might have penetrated deep into the Salesians' life as the air they breathed. Surely these ideals ceased to be abstract spiritual values, and though imposed by force of circumstances, they became a concrete aspect of their life.

What is more important is that this condition of life might have been the very source of their zeal in apostolate, of family spirit and of solidarity among themselves. It was touching to see how they shared the products of their works and toils with other communities, even if only small quantities of food at times. On the Delegation Day (Provincial Community Day) communities often brought in their best contributions of home-made food and drink. The sharing of manual labour with the externs – the youth and the people (parishioners) – was two-way: giving and receiving. The confreres not only received the direct labour help from the people but also offered their own to the people who were in need (*'doi cong'*, the Vietnamese term for exchanging labour force). The little time they consecrated to the apostolate properly speaking (games, teaching and catechism) with

the young and common people (both Catholics and non-Catholics) late in the evening or on weekends became very meaningful as it was based on the relationship already established in their daily work together.

In fact the Delegation Chapter of 1980 stated:

“In these times every one of us does understand fully the meaning of the saying ‘living out of one’s own sweat and tears’. The pains and toils of manual labour have taught us many rich lessons. On the other hand, we have given little time to intellectual work; this is especially true in the case of the newly founded communities where the economic conditions are still unstable. There have been efforts made both at community and Delegation level that aim at balancing these two kinds of labour, because we are fully convinced of the value of both of them in the formation and maturation of each confrere.... More than ever our Delegation has to deepen ever more the Salesian spirituality of work, and at the same time find ways and means to develop the competence of its members so that our works and services may be more fruitful...”

“Our present circumstances have placed many confreres who have good qualifications in a situation alien to their talents. Moreover the spirit of service, of initiative and of flexibility will push us on to offer every kind of good service (*fac totum*). We would never abandon the purpose ‘*Da mihi animas*’, and always consider all the rest to be only relative, ‘*coetera tolle*’. This is the genuine Salesian spirit and attitude ‘to become all things to all men’.”²⁶

2.4. *Joyfulness and Optimism*

It is impossible to work for and with the young, in whatever condition they find themselves, without a genuine sense of joy and optimism. This is very much true of the Salesians who worked in Viet Nam, a war torn country with endless destruction and sufferings. But

²⁶ *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980*, p. 14-15.

it is precisely in this environment that this Salesian charism found its expression in the most striking form.

When the Salesians first came to Viet Nam in October 1952, the Indochina war of partisans was escalating into a full scale war between the French army and the *Viet Minh* coalition forces and the political and social situation was deteriorating considerably. The transfer of the boys' town from the MEP (French Fathers) to the Salesians did infuse a new breath to the work and to the children. Formerly in 1945 Fr Francisque Dupont, a French Salesian chaplain to the French army, looking after a group of Franco-Vietnamese Métis children, had been killed by the partisans. His death continued to haunt for a long time *St. Theresa's Home*. As usual, the Salesians had recourse to music, singing and sport. In particular, with Fr Generoso Bogo, a Brazilian Salesian with his trumpet, this cheerfulness contaminated all the children and personnel. Even during the darkest time after the Exodus, living in a far off jungle with no future prospects, the boys' spirit had been lifted up by this Salesian optimism. As testified by some boys of those times, in the midst of political and social turmoil such as *coups d'état*, sabotages, etc. the Don Bosco institutions at Thu Duc and Go Vap appeared to be safe oases of joy and fun. Some children of Don Bosco Go Vap still recall the summer camp of 1965, when they could enjoy their vacation at Tram Hanh with so much fun, despite the fact that all routes that could bring them back to Saigon had been bombed and ambushed.

As Salesians everywhere also in Viet Nam they were known for their joy and fun, music, sport and drama, not only in peaceful times but also in the most chaotic situations. During the great events of war such as the '*Mau Than offensive*' (1968), '*Red-hot Summer*' (*Mua he do lua* 1972), and the '*General Insurgency*' (1975), when many of our schools were transformed into refugee camps, joy and cheerfulness still prevailed. Even during the '*great evacuation*' of March 1975 from Dalat-Tram Hanh to Saigon, laughter could still be heard among the old and young Salesians alike. It was in this atmosphere of calm and hope the transfer of responsibility between the two generations of Salesians took place.

Being heir to such a wonderful heritage, notwithstanding all the difficulties of adjusting themselves to the changing social conditions, the Vietnamese Salesians cherished it and made all efforts to preserve it. Certainly they were fully aware of their critical conditions of life, as Delegation Chapter 1980 stated clearly:

“Living in this special situation as we are: a fast changing and secularized society, completely new conditions of life and activities, small community, pressure of means for survival, no possibility of movement... certainly we would experience moments of loneliness or be prone to mere human decisions. These are simply signs of our weakness and lack of faith.”²⁷

This furthermore proves that the Salesian optimism should have a supernatural rooting. Precisely in the newly founded communities where everything was lacking, the confreres could easily exchange jokes and laughter, while eating pieces of boiled paprika and relaxing around an improvised aquarium made from a brass coffin abandoned by the American army (concrete case of *Phu Son*).²⁸ They all cherished occasions and moments when they could be together.

The celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the arrival of the Salesians to Viet Nam (1977), which they simply called ‘Don Bosco’s arrival’, offered a precious occasion to strengthen their hope and optimism. The great celebration at Thu Duc was typically Salesian in manner and spirit which surprised many of the invited guests (given the financial condition of the country when the national currency had been changed twice and all citizens could possess but very limited amount of money). On this occasion a young cleric (*Pham Trung Chinh*) composed a very touching song of thanksgiving which later was diffused in all the churches of Viet Nam.

Every year all confreres would eagerly come together for the feast day of Don Bosco (baptized “*Day of Salesian Traditions*” for

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁸ *Huynh De* (inter-community journal, *ms.*), November 1977 (copies available in VIE Provincial Archives).

getting permission from the public authorities to hold the gathering). Usually with the presence of either or both of the two Bishops of Saigon, the confreres would spend happy moments of Eucharistic celebration, meal, exchange of gifts between communities, lottery of items offered by the Delegation Economer Fr Marc Nguyen Duc Huynh, gala of singing and music (Salesian songs newly composed by the confreres themselves) and finally football matches.

The people, especially the young ones were very much impressed by the joyfulness and optimism of the Salesians in a gloomy and bleak society of collectivism. A veteran communist who was invited to a meal in a Salesian community (Ba Thon) had tears flowing down his cheeks when observing its joyful atmosphere of jokes and laughter. He confessed that in the more than 45 years of serving the communist cause, never had he witnessed such a genuine spirit of the family anywhere. Many young vocations were attracted to the Salesians probably just because of this typical Salesian characteristic.

2.5. *Creativity and Flexibility*

When one is really driven by apostolic zeal creativity and flexibility would show forth naturally. This Salesian characteristic takes its source from the "*Da mihi animas, coetera tolle*".²⁹ So was the case of the first Salesians of Viet Nam. Here we limit ourselves to mention just two important historical events.

After one year of studying the Vietnamese language, the two Salesian pioneers took over the responsibility of running the boys' town entrusted to them by the MEP Fathers. What they had to figure out was how to blend the Salesian preventive system of education with the existing one applied by the French missionaries. The transition from one to the other was very successful, though not without tensions and trials.

²⁹ Cf. *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco. A Guide to the Salesian Constitutions*, Madras, Salesian Institute of Graphic Arts 1987, p. 224.

After the victory of the Viet Minh forces over the French army at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the superiors of China Salesian Province (intimidated by their own experience of communist occupation of China in 1949) decided to call back all their confreres. Those who were directly sent by the Rector Major to Viet Nam, however, decided not to abandon the boys and to stay on. They ran the risk of being left completely to themselves. The courage and dedication they showed eventually by moving the children to the South, feeding them with whatever they could find, sharing their meager means of survival, and finally settling them definitively was convincing enough to persuade Hong Kong later officially to resume the Salesian work in Viet Nam.

But the greatest show of creativity and flexibility of the Salesians in Viet Nam would be manifested in the actual communist occupation of the whole country after 1975. As it has been narrated above, the confidence and trust that the Superiors in Rome and the Salesian missionaries themselves bestowed on the Vietnamese Salesians of a much younger generation were something that surpassed all imagination. Not only was the Superior of the Delegation appointed by the Rector Major just 30 years of age and without any experience or preparation for the task, but also all his councillors. Out of nine newly nominated rectors, seven had no experience whatsoever and two just one year. Into their inexperienced hands the Rector Major, Rev Luigi Ricceri, entrusted the whole future of the Salesian mission in Viet Nam along with all faculties and powers (including those normally reserved to the Rector Major himself).

The quick and bold practical decisions of this team have surprised many confreres and outsiders. In some cases exceptions even to the requirements of the 'Constitutions and Regulations' themselves had to be made. For example, the famous case of nominating clerics and lay brothers as rectors of some budding communities (Hoc Mon, Cau Bong, Hien Duc, Nong Truong) in the absence of priests due to the impossibility of priestly ordinations and change of residence. The situation could be corrected (*sanatio*) only when priestly ordinations could somehow be organized. In extreme cases this was even done

in secret (“underground” – *chui* i.e., without due authorization from civil authority).

Without entering into details, we may conclude our reflection on the Salesian Charism by quoting the words with which the Delegation Chapter 1980 addressed the confreres of Viet Nam:

“Being sons of Don Bosco, we will follow the example of Abraham who had walked the road of faith, even in the darkest night. We fully put our hope and trust in the hands of Divine Providence and of Mary our Mother, the Help of Christians”.³⁰

2.6. *Family Spirit*

To the Vietnamese, ‘family spirit’ is one of the most cherished values, but according to the Confucian spirit, ‘familiarity’ is generally not very well accepted, especially in the education of the young.

The Salesian missionaries coming to Viet Nam were of different nationalities: Brazilian, Yugoslavian, French, Italian, Chinese, Scottish, Belgian, Dutch. This international group would certainly have difficulties in expressing their feelings. Happily they had found an ambience of family that welcomed them. In fact their predecessor, Msgr. Paul Seitz MEP and his collaborators, had established, not an orphanage but “*Famille de Ste. Therese*”, not a social center but “*Cite du Christ Roi*”. The children were grouped into 12 families according to their age, each with two senior boys acting as elder brothers. Except the time they spent at Church, school and workshop, they shared their daily life as in a real family. It was into this favourable condition that the pioneer Salesians were first introduced. Their task was now to make this prevailing family spirit to be genuinely Salesian. Through music and sport, but most of all, through their continual brotherly presence among the boys (Salesian assistance), they succeeded in making the Salesian familiarity felt.

The miserable life in the jungle at Buon Me Thuot (1954-1955) and the difficult time at Thu Duc and Go Vap (1955-1957) had offered

³⁰ *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980*, p. 16.

them concrete occasions to make the boys feel at home. Salesian familiarity became a characteristic trait and made a good impression on the Vietnamese. The President of the Republic of South Viet Nam, His Excellency John B. Ngo Dinh Diem, on the occasion of his visit to Don Bosco Thu Duc (1956), was so impressed by the familiarity and joyfulness of the children that later on several occasions he just dropped in spontaneously, without any pre-announcement.³¹

Up to 1975 this Salesian familiarity had been continually cherished and developed especially in the formation houses. This was precisely the first and lasting impression that many young confreres had when they came into contact with Salesian houses, whether Go Vap, Thu Duc, Tram Hanh or Da Lat. It was even more impressed on the minds of the Vietnamese who in the families are taught to use the utmost respect and veneration towards superiors. The simple sight of superiors playing soccer with the students would be considered by many as revolutionary.

This attitude of familiarity and easy approachableness prevailed among the Salesians even after the socialist revolution. In the parish ambience it had distinguished the Salesians from the others even more strikingly and became perhaps their most noticeable characteristic. Even the communist officials at times had to acknowledge this. They often showed greater sympathy to the Salesians because of their familiarity and friendliness, and that would to certain extent explain how they could have developed so much in such difficult conditions of the country.

2.7. *Community life*

Ordinarily community life is taken for granted by all Salesians (and the missionaries were no exception). They would live in common just because they are religious. They would spend most of their life and time together with and among the children or in their offices. They were noted to be together only occasionally for some practices

³¹ AM, p.16.

of piety, meals and meetings. It seemed that personal relationships within a structure of community were more important than the community spirit itself.

But with the events of 1975, at the departure of the foreigners, there began a new awareness of the meaning and of the need for community life among the Salesians of Viet Nam. Under the pressure of the new social, financial and political order imposed by the communist regime, preserving and continuing a life in common was practically impossible. In fact many religious institutions had decided to send their members back to their own families ('home-religious' or '*Tu tai gia*' in Vietnamese). Exclaustration became a common practice. It was a very singular fact that the Salesians at the Delegation Chapter 1977 took the official stand to live in common at all cost. Knowing that big institutions would soon be closed and confiscated (as in the case of other communist countries), they moved quickly to split the confreres into smaller communities by sending them to small isolated parishes. Suddenly they had to live in reduced communities of just five or six confreres (sometimes even less). They would share manual work together in order to earn their own living, cook their own food, do all odd jobs by themselves, pray, share their meals, often also have some recreation together. In short a community life that was mostly restricted to themselves.

Some felt suffocated but others would instead discover a new and deeper meaning for their Salesian consecrated life.

"We long for a community life that is genuinely sincere and fraternal, because as the Constitutions no. 49 has asserted "to live and to work together is for us Salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation". We would live for each other when we are united in God, and we would share with each other joys and sorrows, pleasures and sufferings, all our fatigue and success."³²

³² *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980*, p.19.

The community soon discovered the need of sharing everything among them. They would share whatever they had among themselves and even with other communities. Exchanging gifts and communicating news between communities became a must. Since there was neither telephone nor printing, nor any other means of communication, every community wrote down (by typing) news of their daily life, work and apostolate, and ‘smuggled’ them to other communities. These sheets of communication bore the title “*SDB*” at the community and regional level and “*Fraternity*” at the Delegation level. Besides they likewise also shared with others something much more precious and spiritual: fruits of their long periods of reading and meditation – Salesian books translated into Vietnamese. In this way the Delegation/Province was enriched with Salesian literature in autochthonous language. That provided the communities, after hours of sweat and fatigue, with rich sources of spiritual reading. The Delegation Chapter 80 in fact laid down the following guideline:

“Nowadays, our apostolate in the communities is becoming fragmented: each community decides to do whatever it can, according to the possibility and capacity ‘sur-place’. Just because of this, the apostolic outcome might be poor and limited. In order to enhance and improve the service of Salesian mission, it is required that we exchange, study and share experiences with others, as well as provide proper coordination at the Delegation level.”³³

Around the years 1978-1980 a number of young confreres had been called to military and civil services. They had to suspend temporarily their vows and community life. These events demanded that the Delegation as a whole revise the motivations for their community life. Delegation Chapter 1980 made the following reflection when it talked about accepting new vocations:

“The figure of the Vietnamese Salesian in the future faces the gravest challenge: fraternal communion. Perhaps he has to

³³ *Ibid.*, p.24

live frequently away from his community – in family, factory or agricultural cooperative... We should understand that this situation (if it happens) is ‘extra-ordinary’, demanded by particular circumstances. It is always alien to the mind of St. John Bosco and the Salesian tradition. Physical communion is always one very important element; therefore we cannot accept a Salesian vocation living outside the community whenever physical communion is still possible. Even though communion in spirit and action has to be stressed in the first place, the Salesian of the future should be deeply convinced of the necessity of fraternal communion, dialogue and sharing with his respective community and superiors about the zeal and commitment with which he carries out in his ambience of life and work the Salesian apostolic mission.”³⁴

Some short extracts from letters written by confreres in civil service (at Tahine, Lam Dong province) would be enough to convince us:

“Here in the midst of the forest we meet each other almost daily. In my platoon C1 there are three Salesians and two diocesan priests. Whenever occasion presents itself we celebrate *Fractio Panis* together. Our altar is a rain-poncho spread on the ground and the liturgical vestment is our working uniform. We sense that Christ is being brought to Tahine... We are finding a way to carry out our SDB mission at Tahine in a practical manner. It is indeed very difficult. Our Salesian prayer life is still based on “*Comunità Salesiana in Preghiera*” and the rosary. We try to make it daily but it’s almost impossible. Whenever there is a chance, generally by night, the Salesians in pairs come into dialogue with each other through the rosary... We are very grateful for the care that our community at Da Lat and others in the region continually bestow on us. ... we feel very much consoled by this family concern.”³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.43.

³⁵ VIE Provincial Archives, *Collection of letters written by confreres in the service. Letter from Tahine, 27 April 1978.*

2.8. Sense of the Church

The first two Salesians to Viet Nam were sent in obedience to the Church. In fact Bishop-elect Paul Seitz MEP had made known to the Holy See that his condition *sine qua non* for accepting the nomination to the Episcopal See of Kontum was that the Salesians should come to take over his boys' town. From then on, in almost every move, the Salesians would always stay in close contact with the Ordinaries. The 'Exodus story' was a clear proof of it. On account of the imminent occupation of the country by the communists, the superiors in Hong Kong had decided to close down the Salesian work in Viet Nam. Msgr. Joseph Trinh Nhu Khue, Bishop of Ha Noi, and the Apostolic Nuncio to Indochina, Msgr. John Dooley, had to intervene in the name of the Pope, asking the Salesians not to abandon the children without trying to find a good solution.³⁶ Could we affirm that the Salesian work in Viet Nam has always been a joint venture with the Church?

All the developments that followed were strictly 'pontifical', in the sense that as everywhere, the Salesians would make their plans and decisions independently of the Ordinaries, while reserving due respect and maintaining good relations with the ecclesiastical authorities. The Bishops were very much honoured and welcomed in all Salesian houses. The *Sense of the Church* could be identified with the veneration of hierarchical dignitaries.

The communist policy towards the Church brought in radical changes in this regard. The regime recognized none of the legal religious entities. The only one that still had some tacit recognition was the Diocesan Bishop. Schools, hospitals and other charitable institutions belonging to religious entities were all confiscated. If the religious institutes wanted to deal with the civil authorities on any matter, they had to make it through the local bishop and only through him, while he himself had to submit himself to the Patriotic Group, a pro-government Catholic (in name only) association. In this situation

³⁶ J.T. NGUYEN VAN, *The Beginning of the Salesian Work in Vietnam*, p. 174.

the Salesians had to be closely associated with the local Church in everything. They took part in all the activities of the 'Inter-religious Group' created by the local Bishop. Under the Bishop's guidance they came into ordinary contact with other religious congregations for meetings, studies, prayers, even social and political services. In this way their sense of the Church became both practical and spiritual, and deepened day by day. Their activities and courses of action were then taken through the lens of the local Church's interest and mission.

At first the Salesians as well as many other religious congregations felt certain uneasiness because of the dependence and restriction of action. But they had no other choice especially when weightier matters such as property and priestly ordinations had to be taken up with the authorities. In this general situation of the Church in Viet Nam the Salesians too learned in a very practical way the real content of the '*Sensus Ecclesiae*' – always with the Church for the Church's interest and mission. When the Salesian Delegation decided to join along with a number of other religious institutions in the establishment and running of the 'Catholic Agricultural Cooperative' at *Lo 6 Cu Chi*, an undertaking promoted by the Archbishop himself, the reason was precisely to be together with the local Church even in politically disputable matter.

All this was done in a genuine Salesian style. The Bishops came often to Salesian houses (or parishes); there they would be welcomed with familiarity and cheerfulness. At any Salesian gathering (Don Bosco's feast, spiritual retreats, Delegation/Provincial Chapter etc.) the local Bishop would always be present and address his fatherly words. It was clear that the Bishops themselves enjoyed this close relationship. In fact their photos with the Salesians were often enlarged and hung on the walls of the Bishop's house (e.g. photo of Msgr. Paul Nguyen Van Binh, Archbishop of Hochiminh City, and his Auxiliary, both in Don Bosco's soccer team colours with the football in hand).

The Delegation Chapter 80 gave the following directive:

"The community should favour and help the confreres, particularly the clerics, to engage themselves in all pastoral

initiatives of the local Church, as well as to be flexible and creative in social action. This engagement must first of all come from the personal conviction of the confreres themselves.”³⁷

2.9. *The Preventive System*

The first and painstaking effort of the two Salesian pioneers as testified by one of them, Fr Andrej Majcen, was precisely to introduce and to inculcate the Preventive System of education of Don Bosco into the work they had initiated in Viet Nam.³⁸ Is there a place for the educative method of Don Bosco in Viet Nam, a Confucian country? The MEP’s method (of French inspiration) was currently in use at the boys’ town. Slowly and very delicately the Salesians introduced the new method by preparing personnel of substitution. During the exodus and settlement years they succeeded in implanting firmly and practically the Salesian Preventive System in all their institutions. The figure of the Salesian assistant was introduced with the coming of young clerics and brothers from Italy, Belgium and France (from 1958 onwards). Books on Salesian assistance were translated into Vietnamese, and the first Vietnamese Salesians (1960) could learn how to be educators in the Don Bosco’s way.

However, with the closing down and loss of all traditional institutions – boardings and schools – in the crisis of 1975, in order to be able to continue the Salesian mission, the Salesians in Vietnam felt the need of deepening ever more their knowledge of the Preventive System of Don Bosco. But what was more important for them was knowing how to adapt this educative system to all the informal Salesian settings. The task has been very challenging, but the Salesians were very conscious of it. In fact in their reflection on the occasion of Delegation Chapter 1980 they expressed the problem as follows:

³⁷ *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980*, p.26.

³⁸ J.T. NGUYEN VAN, *The Beginning of the Salesian Work in Vietnam*, p. 172.

“In the new environments in which we find ourselves today, the Preventive System of education could be taken lightly, or even be forgotten completely, while it is the very key of success that Don Bosco has left to us all. In fact, along the history of the Congregation, this System has been diffused and applied amply and has offered optimum results. Therefore we should preserve and apply this traditional Salesian method as far as possible.

“During the process of basic Salesian formation, the formators should take great care so that the Preventive System may be known, understood, and esteemed. They should also guide the young confreres to make practical application of it in their daily life.”³⁹

Whether they had succeeded in this great effort or not, we do not know; but a firm conviction was certainly there.

2.10. *Prayer Life – Union with God*

The Vietnamese Catholics are generally used to long prayers and many practices of piety. The Salesians really surprised them with shorter and simpler forms of prayer. The manual “*Giovane Provveduto*” in Vietnamese version was introduced very early (1958) and was in use in all Salesian houses up to 1980. Sunday services and “*sodalities*” were also introduced. But what really impressed many was the efficacy of the devotion to Mary Help of Christians. It was fostered by all the Salesians, especially Fr Mario Acquistapace.⁴⁰ One can assert that the prayer life of the Salesians by then had been pretty good; but as everywhere else it did not create an impression on the people.

After 1975 things changed drastically. Prayer as a part of everyday routine was no longer possible. All felt the need of strengthening prayer life.

³⁹ *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980*, p. 23-24.

⁴⁰ AM, p. 392.

“Pressed by apostolic as well as livelihood-earning works our common practices of piety have been gravely disturbed. Therefore every one of us should arm himself with an interior life deeply rooted in the Word of God, individual reflection, solid liturgical and sacramental life, and especially by being faithful to the practices of piety of the community following the traditional Salesian devotions.

“In order to protect the confreres from external disturbances, the community should endeavor to create favorable atmosphere and promote times of silence. It should make all effort to hold regular monthly recollections and to provide other soul-nourishing means.

“The individual as well as the community share the responsibility to promote this spiritual maturity. The goal is to be able to reach a deep spirit of prayer that may be little visible externally like that of Don Bosco our Father, but would transform our life into a continual prayer.”⁴¹

Among the practical resolutions taken at Delegation Chapter 1980 was:

“The Community keeps weekly sharing on the Word of God of the Sunday Mass. At any event of certain importance, the community seeks all together the will of God in the light of the Gospel... In this unfavourable situation, the Delegation is responsible for the spiritual retreat of the confreres renewing their vows. Annual retreats for other confreres should be organized by regions (since changing residence from one locality to another is almost impossible), under the supervision of the Delegation.”⁴²

A manual of prayers for Salesians of Viet Nam entitled *Cong the Saledieng cau nguyen* (Salesian Community that Prays) was published after the Vice-Province Chapter of 1985 and it (revised editions) is still in use.

⁴¹ *Acts of the Vietnam Delegation Chapter 1980*, p. 19.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Conclusion

Looking back at past history, gloomy and painful though it was, the Salesians of Vietnam – now a full fledged Province (VIE) – have to express their deep and heartfelt thanks to God and his Blessed Mother. We have gone through a lively experience of the deep meaning of Psalm 126,5-6: “They go out, they go out full of tears carrying seed for the sowing; they come back, they come back full of song, carrying their sheaves”.

Thanks to the toil and sweat of the Salesian pioneer missionaries, thanks also to the steadfast fidelity of those heroic Vietnamese confreres who had cherished their Salesian vocation above all else, and last but not least, thanks to the countless prayers of Salesians all over the world, the Salesian charism has been properly sown and firmly rooted in this soil of trials in an impossible period of the history of modern Viet Nam. It has sprouted and grown into a robust and flourishing “tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches” (Mt. 13, 31-32).

The Salesian charism is a living reality and therefore it should be tended with care and prayer. In fact in these last 18 years of growth the Salesian Province of Viet Nam has shown all the vitality it possesses: in the daily life of the confreres, in the increase of vocations (Salesian and non-Salesian alike) and in the apostolic and missionary spirit. The Salesian charism is yielding abundant fruits. On the occasion of the golden jubilee of Don Bosco’s presence in Viet Nam (October 2002) and during the most recent visit of the Rector Major Fr Pascual Chavez (April 2007), the Vietnamese Province has been highly praised. Nevertheless the Salesians of Viet Nam should always call to mind the admonition that the Rector Major has given them:

“Talking about Salesian formation, I am so glad that the percentage of perseverance among the confreres of Viet Nam is actually very high – may be the highest in the whole congregation... But in order to assure such thing to be continued in the future, you should also ensure the condition and environment of formation in the community as well as

promote the process of personalisation of formation among all the confreres... It is not enough to create a good and fertile community climate, but it is necessary too to inculcate personal conviction".⁴³

To cultivate and develop the Salesian charism in the Province is indeed a very important task of superiors and confreres alike; but it is even more important to make Salesian saints out of the confreres, whose lives should be imbued with the living Salesian charism of Don Bosco. Building up the Salesian charism was a difficult task, but keeping it alive in the young confreres of generations to come is a much more challenging one.

⁴³ *Acts of the Visit of the Rector Major Don Pascual Chavez to Vietnam (09-14.04.2008). Concluding Talk to SDB Confreres of the Province*, p.137.

THE IMPLANTATION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN INDIA: IDEALS, CHALLENGES, ANSWERS, RESULTS

*Mathew Kapplikunnel**

Introduction

The phase of implantation, expansion and initial consolidation of Salesian presence in India may be considered to be the period from 1906 to 1951/52, i.e. from the arrival of Salesians until the establishment of the two provinces of the North and the South. This paper proposes to study the ideals that led the Salesians during this period, the challenges they faced, their response to these challenges and the results they attained.

This paper has drawn greatly from the monumental work of Joseph Thekkedath¹ on Indian Salesian history, which is the fruit of much painstaking and meticulous research especially on the unpublished materials in the Salesian Central Archives, the Salesian Provincial Archives of India and in the principal Diocesan/ Archdiocesan archives of India. In preparing this paper, besides this work, other precious little material available in print and the same sources in the Salesian Central Archives utilized by Thekkedath have been consulted.

It is not the intention of this paper to trace the development of Salesian works in India during this period, but in keeping with the theme of the seminar only to capture some of the salient features that reflect the ideals that led them, the challenges they confronted, the answers they devised to surmount the same and the results attained.

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¹ Joseph THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India. From the Beginning up to 1951-52*. 2 vols. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2005 [Hereafter THEKKEDATH].

After a bird's eye-view of the expansion of the Salesian presence in India during the nearly first half century, the ideals that lead the early Salesians are exposed. Thereafter the major challenges they faced, along with the answers and outcomes corresponding to each, will be delineated.

1. Don Bosco Comes to India

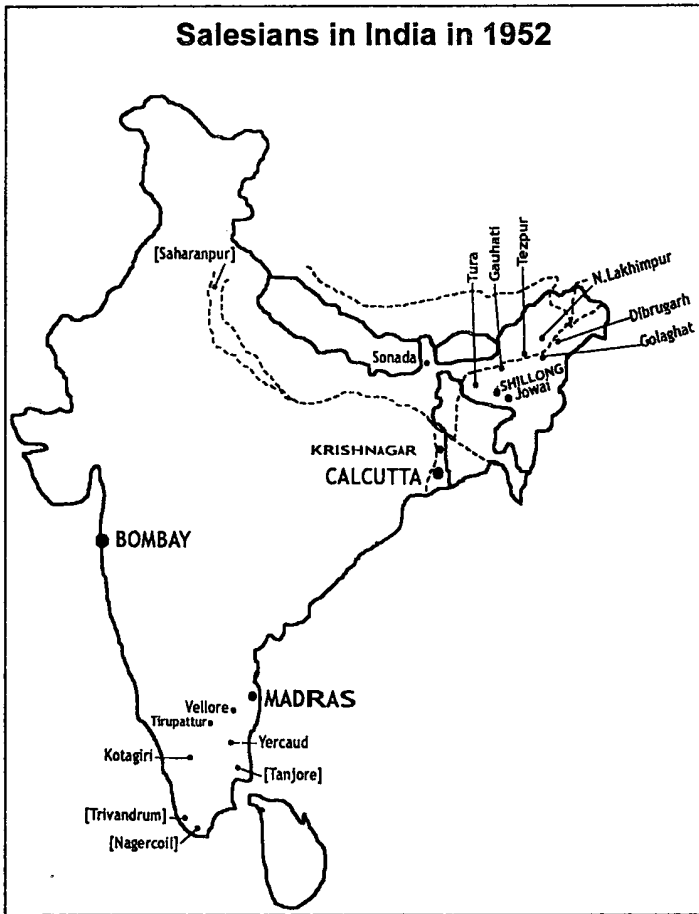
Don Bosco always had before him the dream of sending out missionaries to conquer the various parts of the world for Christ. He was often heard to say, "What a wonderful day that will be when our missionaries will go to evangelize the various regions of America, Australia, India, Egypt and many other lands! I see them already penetrating Africa and Asia and entering China; we shall have a House right in Peking!"²

Though the prospect of an expedition to India in 1877 to take up the Vicariate Apostolic of Mengador (Mangalore) seemed imminent,³ only under Don Rua as Rector Major plans to send Salesians to India materialized. It was at the request of Rt Rev. Antonio de Souza Barroso, the Bishop of the Padroado Diocese of Mylapore and his successor, Msgr. Teotonio Emanuele Ribeiro Vieira de Castro, who could claim a personal rapport with Don Bosco. Salesians landed in Bombay on 5 January 1906 and on the 14th arrived at Tanjore, the field of their apostolate, under the leadership of Fr Giorgio Tomatis.

They took up an orphanage with merely 6 orphans, whose number would however soon rise, and a middle school for boys. In January 1909 San Thome orphanage in Mylapore, Madras, meant for boys of Eurasian descent, was also entrusted to the Salesians. The apostolate at Tanjore expanded with an industrial school with carpentry, weaving and later also a press. A night school was started to

² MB XI 409-410 (Eng edition XI 384).

³ Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth. History and Relevance of the Early Salesian Presence in India (Tanjore and Mylapore, 1906-1928)*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 1989, p. 11-12.



supplement the literary formation of the artisans. The middle school grew to a high school. With the assumption of the Sacred Heart Parish in October 1915, Tanjore became a veritable mission field.⁴

⁴ Cf. Joseph THEKKEDATHU, *St. Francis Xavier's Orphanage and Industrial School at Tanjore, South India (1906-1928)* in Francesco MOTTO (Ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale. Vol. II. Esperienze particolari in Europa, Africa, Asia.* (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Studi, 17). Roma, LAS 2001, pp. 390-402.

In the meantime, after the expulsion from North East India of the Salvatorians, who were all Germans, on account of the outbreak of World War I, the handful of Jesuit missionaries were unable to keep the mission going. Hence, succumbing to the insistence of the Holy See the Salesian Superiors accepted the mission of Assam. The Salesians reached Shillong on 13 January 1922 under the dynamic leadership of Fr Louis Mathias and gave to the mission a tremendous growth. Before the end of the year Fr Mathias was made the Prefect Apostolic of Assam, and in 1923 appointed the Superior (“Delegate”) of all the Salesians in India.

On 28 May 1926 “The Province of India of St Thomas the Apostle” was canonically erected, and the decision conveyed to the confreres in March 1927, along with the nomination of Msgr. Mathias as the new Provincial.⁵

Msgr. Mathias was always desirous of starting a Salesian house in Calcutta in order to realize as early as possible Don Bosco’s missionary dream of 9 April 1886, in which he had seen his sons working in Calcutta. It would also be of great advantage to the mission and the missionaries of Assam. In 1925 he was able to purchase the Catholic Orphan Press from the Archdiocese through the extreme goodwill of Archbishop Perier of Calcutta.⁶

The year 1928 witnessed several important events in different parts of India.

The orphanage and the mission of Tanjore, the cradle of Salesian work in India, with its institutions and the orphanage of San Thome, Madras, were handed over to the diocese in 1928, as working there had become practically impossible in the absence of the Bishop and under the hostile attitude of the Vicar General and the clergy of Mylapore.⁷ The painful decision to withdraw from there was taken

⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1360.

⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 214-216.

⁷ Cf. J. THEKKEDATHU, *St. Francis Xavier’s Orphanage...*, pp.405-408.

by the Extraordinary Visitor, Fr Peter Ricaldone, on 1 May 1928.⁸ The Salesians received as compensation the shrine of Our Lady of Bandel in Calcutta.⁹

It was agreed with Archbishop Elie Joseph Morel that once the Salesians left the diocese of Mylapore they would gradually take over the mission of North Arcot, which then belonged to the Archdiocese of Pondicherry.¹⁰ The Salesians of Tanjore reached Vellore, the headquarters of their new mission of North Arcot, on 31 May 1928 led by Fr Mederlet. Within five weeks, however, with the re-organization of the dioceses at the termination of double jurisdiction in the missions by the Bull *Ad maius religionis incrementum* of 3 July 1928, North Arcot passed to the Archdiocese of Madras,¹¹ which was entrusted to the Salesians and as Archbishop was appointed Fr Mederlet, who thus became the first Salesian Bishop in India.¹²

In 1928 the Holy See practically forced the Salesians to take up the Diocese of Krishnagar, even though they pleaded that they had neither personnel nor means to develop it.¹³ The same year the Salesians entered Bombay (Mumbai) with the assumption of an existing Catholic school at Tardeo.¹⁴

⁸ ASC 398 Tanjore: *Relazione della Casa Missione di Tanjore (Sud India) Novembre 1925 - Maggio 1928* of A. Frasson, dated December 1974.

⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 79-80.

¹⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 83.

¹¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 424-425.

¹² M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth...*, p. 71.

¹³ THEKKEDATH, p. 311-313. At certain point in the negotiations there was even the danger that this mission would have to be accepted at the cost of renouncing that of North Arcot: cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 422-423.

¹⁴ Joseph THEKKEDATHU, *The Starting of the First Salesian Work in Bombay and its Consolidation (1928-1950)* in Francesco MOTTO, *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo Don Bosco. Saggi di storiografia*, Roma, LAS 1996, pp.249-251.

South India was made a Vice-Province in March 1933 with Fr Cinato as the Superior¹⁵, and on 8 February 1934 raised to a Province with Fr Cinato himself as Provincial.¹⁶

Salesian presence in the North East made substantial progress. New missions were started at Dibrugarh, Tezpur and Tura and in 1934 the Holy See raised Shillong to the status of a Diocese with Msgr. Mathias as the first Bishop. At the same time Fr Stephen Ferrando was appointed Bishop of Krishnagar. After the sudden death of Msgr. Mederlet at the end of 1934, Msgr. Mathias was translated to the Archdiocese of Madras as the new Archbishop. With his arrival also the mission of the South acquired remarkable progress. During his thirty years in Madras he proved himself to be one of the most energetic of the Bishops of India – an acknowledged leader, always ready at the forefront to defend the interests of the Church anywhere in India.

2. The Ideals

The ideals which orient our lives or we strive to uphold are often not explicitly articulated. Nevertheless they reveal themselves in our actions, attitudes and approaches. At some instances in our life they are more evident than others. We shall consider a few of these instances to have a glimpse of the ideals cherished by the Salesians in India. The documents – personal correspondence, chronicles, official reports etc. – do highlight some of these elements, always not explicitly expressed, while others can be culled from the overall style of their lives and from particular circumstances.

Among the ideals that guided the Salesians in India we are able to identify the following: (i) Trust in God, (ii) Love for the Heart of Jesus, (iii) Love and devotion to Mary Help of Christians, (iv) Love and loyalty to Don Bosco and the Congregation, (v) Missionary

¹⁵ Even after this, Msgr. Mathias continued to be, at least in theory, the Provincial of the whole of India, and Fr Cinato was to some extent under him.

¹⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1361-1362.

zeal coupled with a spirit of sacrifice and work, (vi) Love for the poor. These elements did not exist in isolated or mutually exclusive forms, but as parts of a whole, as can be easily understood from the following recommendations which, when visiting the mortal remains of Don Bosco at Valsalice, Fr Mathias gave to the group that was to set out with him for Assam, prior to their missionary journey: 1. always bring honour to their mother the congregation; 2. spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians; 3. persevere in the fulfilment of their vows.¹⁷

2.1. *Trust in God*

Don Bosco was famous for his trust in Divine Providence. He was even accused of bending Divine Providence to his needs. There is a wonderful testimony to the Salesians' trust in God's providence rendered by Archbishop Roberts of Bombay in the religious journal *The Examiner* of 7 Feb 1942, after the completion of the school at Matunga in record time and under adverse conditions:

"I would like to repeat here what I said to several audiences at Matunga, that if the Salesians never did anything else in Bombay, they would still have taught us the lesson most needed by us human beings for whom the trust of children in their Father is the condition of being saved... The new building is a lesson in stone about the miracles possible to those who, like St John Bosco, became like little children... It would be difficult to imagine any condition more unfavourable to Father Maschio than the present ones. The war, difficulties of staffing, trouble with materials, their ever rising cost – all these were treated as just so many challenges to trust in God in proportion to the difficulty. God's answer has been quite astounding."¹⁸

One of the spontaneous expressions of their trust in God was prayer, which the Salesians did not overlook as a solution to the

¹⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 98.

¹⁸ Quoted in J. THEKKEDATHU, *The Starting of the First Salesian Work in Bombay...*, p. 269.

problems. In the example just cited, the great efficiency of the contractor and the large number of workers employed was seconded by the prayers of the boy who conducted a campaign of prayers and visits to the Blessed Sacrament in the months from June to September 1941.¹⁹

Success in the work of evangelization too was recommended to the power of prayers. About 300 baptisms realized in a particular village in 1932 under peculiar circumstances were attributed by Msgr. Mederlet to the efficacy of the prayers of Benedictine nuns in a convent in Belgium.²⁰

2.2. *Love for the Heart of Jesus*

The essence and centre of the Salesian spirit is pastoral charity, of which the model and source is the very Heart of Christ.²¹ The Salesians in India had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to keep alive in them the same pastoral charity that blazed in Don Bosco. Fr Carreño made his novices to fall in love with the Heart of Jesus when he was the novice master and helped them to give themselves completely to Him.²² When he took up the direction of the Province of South India in 1943, in the very first meeting of the Provincial Council it was decided to consecrate the Province to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so that He might protect and guide it. The consecration was officially done at Tirupattur in 1943 on the feast of the Sacred Heart in a solemn ceremony along with other important functions like the blessing of the new church and consecration of the altar, priestly ordinations and inauguration of the aspirantate. Even years later, it was the general conviction that the extraordinary growth

¹⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 291-292.

²⁰ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 446.

²¹ Cf. SDB Const. 10,11.

²² THEKKEDATH, p. 1375.

thereafter of the Southern Province was the result of this consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.²³

2.3. *Devotion to Mary Help of Christians*

The early Salesians in India were very zealous in trying to make Mary Help of Christians known and loved. Within a short time of their arrival in Tanjore the devotion to the Help of Christians began to gain ground and several graces were reported to have been obtained through her motherly intercession.²⁴

As already mentioned, one of the recommendations given by Fr Louis Mathias to the first group of missionaries to Assam was to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Their joy at seeing the statue of Mary Help of Christians in the church when they reached Shillong, the solemn celebration of her feast on 24 May 1922, the entrustment of themselves and the mission to her that evening, their enthusiastic decision in January 1923 to celebrate the 24th of every month in her honour, all go to show their filial devotion to her and their commitment to spreading it.

In the South, a special effort was made by Fr Carreño to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians, in particular, after the strenna of the Rector Major for 1948, which was to “increase in ourselves and to spread everywhere the devotion to Mary Help of Christians”. Thanks to his efforts, no less than 43 bishops of South India sent their petition to the Holy See for the extension of the feast of Mary Help of Christians to the universal church. Very successful Marian congresses and exhibitions were held in six different places in the Province. More than 100,000 pictures were printed for circulation.²⁵

²³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1376.

²⁴ M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth...*, p. 87-88.

²⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1378.

2.4. *Love and Attachment to Don Bosco and the Congregation*

To love Don Bosco, make him known, follow his educational system, strive for his educative goals were their priorities, and bringing honour to his name was what was uppermost in the thoughts and plans of the Salesians in India. In November 1930 a monthly, "Don Bosco in India", was started for the purpose of making Don Bosco and the Salesian work known to a wider public.²⁶ "Don Bosco's Madonna" from Bombay and another magazine in Hindi were published with the aim of spreading devotion to Mary Help of Christians and making Don Bosco known.²⁷

When Msgr. Mathias was transferred from Assam to Madras as its Archbishop, though it meant a great sacrifice for him to leave the field of apostolate to which he had dedicated himself so long, he accepted the transfer in obedience. The memorable words he uttered on this occasion were expression of his love and attachment to Don Bosco: "My ambition is to make Don Bosco known and loved. I would like to flood India with Don Bosco. This filial and ardent desire which almost devours me, makes me daring, strong and courageous, [...]"²⁸

Don Bosco was aware of the importance of making himself and especially his work for boys known, in order to garner help from various quarters. The Salesians in India too did not hesitate to follow suit. When they reached Bombay and took up an already existing school, they soon changed the school's name to "Don Bosco High School".²⁹ At great financial sacrifice a brass band was started, which soon became famous and was invited to different places to play on important occasions. Right from the beginning the band was thought of as a good means of publicity.³⁰

²⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 158.

²⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 186, 286.

²⁸ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 455.

²⁹ J. THEKKEDATHU, *The Starting of the First Salesian Work in Bombay...*, pp. 252-253.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

During the novena for the feast of Don Bosco in 1940, some special effort was made by the Salesians in Bombay to make Don Bosco better known and loved by the boys. The reading in the church after Holy Mass and in the refectory, the good night talks and sermons during the novena service were all on Don Bosco.³¹

To commemorate the centenary of the priestly ordination of Don Bosco in 1941 a big programme was organized at Vellore with a view to instilling into the hearts of the people the dignity of the priesthood and encouraging priestly vocations, making Don Bosco and his catechetical work in the Oratories known, and promoting the efficient teaching of catechism. A solemn triduum with sermons on the priesthood, a catechetical competition and an exhibition were the highlights.³²

Love for Don Bosco found expression also on the operative level through their commitment to the application of his educational system. The Salesian staff of Poonamallee³³ seminary applied the educational system of Don Bosco successfully in the formation of the seminarians.³⁴

Also the confreres working with youth showed the same zeal in educating in Don Bosco's spirit. At Nagercoil the 'good night' talks were used to transmit to the boys the Salesian ideals. In the very first 'good night' Fr Gatti, the rector, exhorted the boys to put up with inconveniences, be dutiful and avoid sin. The second was on the family spirit, in particular familiarity with the superiors, and the third on devotion to Mary Help of Christians.³⁵

When the school of Tardeo, Bombay, was taken up, besides financial insecurity the Salesians had to face also indiscipline and

³¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 288.

³² THEKKEDATH, p. 515

³³ Poonamallee seminary was started by Msgr. Mathias in Madras for the formation of the diocesan clergy and was entrusted to the Salesians for running it.

³⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 992.

³⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1054-1055.

laziness to which the boys had become accustomed. Nevertheless, in compliance with the system of Don Bosco, they did away with the stick in the school.³⁶

Faithful to Don Bosco's educational ideals, the Salesians strove to form good Christians and honest citizens. Great importance was given to religious education and the training of the boys. At Don Bosco, Liluah, Calcutta, the final results and promotions were based on the marks obtained during the entire year and no prizes were awarded if good marks were not scored in catechism. As a result of the good religious formation, several boys from the school opted to join the aspirantate.³⁷ No less attention was paid to forming the boys to become good and respectful citizens. Under the caption "Good citizenship in Don Bosco's High School", Bombay, a well known journal, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, of 13 September 1942 wrote: "Courtesy, a regard for others as a guiding principle in life, and idealism have their appeal to youth, and these qualities are being fostered and admirably exploited by the priests who run this grand institution".³⁸

Though far from other confreres in a distant part of the globe, attachment to the Congregation and union with the Superiors in Turin was a mark of the Salesian missionaries in India. Fr Tomatis, who led the first group to Tanjore, wrote to Fr Albera: "The word of the Superior General is always a great comfort to those who are far away, lost among the Indian pagodas."³⁹ The love and grief manifested at the death of the then Rector Major Fr Albera by the first batch about to leave to Shillong through their participation in the vigil near the body and in the funeral, and later on the expressions of filial love and loyalty to the newly elected Rector Major, Fr Rinaldi, are ample proofs. At the first baptisms in Shillong on 24 December 1922 the

³⁶ J. THEKKEDATHU, *The Starting of the First Salesian Work in Bombay...*, p. 253.

³⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 252-254.

³⁸ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 295.

³⁹ ASC 389 Tanjore: *Letter Tomatis to Albera*, Mylapore 15 November 1916.

boys were given names of the members of the General Council and a girl that of the Mother General of the FMAs.⁴⁰

Love and attachment to the Superiors and to the Centre of the congregation were evident in the letters that Fr Carreño sent to Turin immediately after the war, when it became possible once again to get in touch with the Superiors. The same filial attachment and a sense of gratitude to them on the part of the Province were shown in the desire he expressed immediately after the end of the war in Europe to help the Superiors even financially.⁴¹

This same love and unity was also seen in the case of the local superior. All the confreres of the North felt like a closely knit family, united with Fr Mathias, their leader. This continued to be the case for many years.⁴²

2.5. *Missionary Zeal*

It was their missionary zeal that inspired and motivated the Salesian missionaries to leave their homeland, near and dear ones and set out for a totally unknown land, people and customs, desirous “to work much in India for the propagation of the faith”, as Fr Carpené wrote to Fr Albera.⁴³ For this reason the early Salesians at Tanjore eagerly looked forward to taking up the parish in order to do direct evangelization.

In the act of entrustment the first group of Salesians made of themselves and the mission of Assam to Mary Help of Christians at Shillong on 24 May 1922 the missionary intent of the early Salesians in India is quite evident: “to work with all our strength and with all our soul for the conversion of the peoples of these lands and for the propagation of your cult and to make you known, praised and loved together with the fruit of your virginal womb, Jesus...”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 100.

⁴¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1377.

⁴² THEKKEDATH, p. 100.

⁴³ M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth...*, p. 83.

⁴⁴ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 99.

One of the most important reasons of the quick progress in the mission was the zealous and sacrificing work of the missionaries. They did not spare themselves, but toured the territory frequently.⁴⁵ We are told in the chronicles of the Mission of Assam that the missionaries went there “with their hearts full of enthusiasm and with a strong desire to work”⁴⁶.

In the mission of North Arcot the missionaries worked with great zeal and good will. They worked in conditions that were really hard and their zealous and charitable work filled Fr Pianazzi, the Provincial, with admiration. In North Arcot there did not exist the consolations of Assam, but the spirit of the missionaries was not inferior.⁴⁷

2.6. *Predilection for the Poor*

The history of the implantation of Salesian works in India is a saga of interventions on behalf of the poor. The several orphanages that were accepted or started in different parts of India were an expression of love for the poor boys – poor economically and socially in the first place. The first institution in India (Tanjore) was an orphanage; so also the second one at Mylapore. In Assam too they opened the St. Antony’s orphanage. Practically everywhere they went the Salesians had an orphanage to look after the poor boys. Just a few months after reaching Goa the Salesians began to accept poor orphans and thus began the orphanage which created great enthusiasm among the people who realized that the Salesians meant what they said.⁴⁸ The many technical schools started at different places were primarily to give the poor boys a chance to come up in life by learning a trade.

⁴⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 101.

⁴⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 879.

⁴⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 724.

Love for the poor people also urged them to initiate various interventions for the social and economic wellbeing of the people. In every mission center there were several social works to help the Christians. The Assam Mission had five crèches with 225 children, three orphanages which cared for 308 boys and 468 girls, two houses for old people and nine dispensaries under the supervision of the sisters. Various cooperative banks were started in order to save the simple people from the hands of unscrupulous money-lenders, by lending money, rice, etc. The Christians were also helped before tribunals.⁴⁹

In the Tura mission, the Salesians went to the aid of the people especially during the terrible famine of 1943, by distributing rice, medicines etc.⁵⁰ When Fr Anthony Alessi worked in the mission of Tezpur, it was the help given them against the oppression of the *Zamindars* and the *Marwaris* that attracted the poor immigrants from Chotanagpur.⁵¹

With funds gathered from his native country, Bishop Morrow of Krishnagar had a plan to provide elementary education and religious instruction to all the boys and girls of the mission. More than 1000 boys and girls were maintained by the diocese in the boardings of the Salesians and the Sisters of Charity. Bishop Morrow made energetic efforts to alleviate the misery of the people of Krishnagar during the disastrous Bengal famine of 1943-44 and also later.⁵²

3. Challenges, Answers, Results

The XVIII century ended disastrously for the Catholic missions in India. The numerous wars and political upheavals of that century led to the destruction of its structures and properties and the dispersion of its members in some parts of the country. The expulsion of the

⁴⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1098.

⁵⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1350.

⁵¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1300, 1383.

⁵² THEKKEDATH, p. 337-338, 1389-1390.

Jesuits from Portugal and its colonies in 1759 and the suppression of their Society by the Pope in 1773 deprived India of the majority of its most active missionaries. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars prevented the arrival of other missionaries to take their place. The position was made worse by the inability of Portugal, which still stubbornly stuck to its patronal (*padroado*) rights over the whole of India, to fill even the four existing Sees, much less establish new ones.⁵³

Within this larger context we shall see some of the challenges faced by the Salesians in India, of which the lack of personnel and insufficient finance were the two major ones. This is the appraisal also of Thekkedath in the concluding chapter of his monumental work.⁵⁴

3.1. *Lack of Personnel*

The only visitation of India by a Salesian Provincial between 1905 and 1924 was carried out by Fr Cogliolo, the Provincial of Portugal⁵⁵ in the period between the end of 1909 and the beginning of 1910. After visiting the houses of Tanjore and Mylapore he felt that if the Salesians were to remain honorably in India the communities needed to be consistent with regard to the number of members. He promised to do the needful, but could not on account of the Portuguese revolution of 1910. The situation of the Salesians in India at that time was quite difficult on account of their small number. There were altogether only four Salesians – two at Tanjore and two at Mylapore. The Bishop was ready to give the parish, which they needed in order to give the Salesian community some missionary activity and not merely the management of a small orphanage and technical school. But the

⁵³ THEKKEDATH, p. 6.

⁵⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1368; Cf. also p. 110-111.

⁵⁵ At that time the two houses were attached to the Portuguese Province, on account of the *padroado* connection. By November 1911 the Indian Salesian houses were made part of the Roman Province.

personnel was not arriving. One of the confreres, Fr Balestra, got so discouraged on account of this that he decided to leave for Italy.⁵⁶

The situation of the personnel in India in 1929 – year of Don Bosco's beatification – was so precarious that Msgr. Mathias was undecided whether he should go to Italy at all for the General Chapter leaving the confreres in such dire straits.⁵⁷ Though Vicar Apostolic and Provincial, often he had also to assume the rectorship of houses, as for instance of St Antony's Industrial School and Orphanage in 1928 when it was separated from the school.⁵⁸

When Msgr. Mederlet took over as the Archbishop of Madras, the most serious problem which he confronted was the lack of sufficient priests for the needs of the Archdiocese. Many priests who worked there earlier were going to work in other dioceses.⁵⁹ Even Mgr Mathias who was in the North decried the shortage of personnel in Madras and wrote to the Rector Major in 1930, urging him to send priests to the Archdiocese:

“We are cutting a very poor figure in Madras, where, after accepting one of the most important Archdioceses of India, we are not putting in personnel and all the neighbouring Bishops are withdrawing their subjects. There are parishes without parish priests. As soon as the schools close, please choose at once and send personnel. Otherwise we are going to have regrets.”⁶⁰

The scarcity of priests was so real that Msgr. Mederlet himself acted as parish priest of Polur in North Arcot for some months from July 1930.⁶¹

⁵⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 44-46.

⁵⁷ Archimede PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam. La storia di una missione*, Leumann (Torino), LDC 1983, p.128.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.122,128.

⁵⁹ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 430.

⁶⁰ ASC B7290108 *Letter Mathias-Rinaldi*, Shillong, 19.3.30.

⁶¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 435-436.

The shortage of personnel was an enduring problem. Fr Pianazzi, after taking over as the Provincial of the South, presenting his report to the Superiors in August 1952 highlighted that the most serious difficulty in the mission was the shortage of personnel.⁶²

One of the repeated complaints of Bishop Ferrando to the Superiors in Turin was that there were too few missionaries in Assam to cope with the immense amount of work. He wrote to Fr Ricaldone, the Rector Major, at the end of June 1936 that at Dibrugarh which had 20,000 Catholics, there were only three priests, of whom one could not tour. At Tezpur there were only two priests for 12,000 Catholics.⁶³

3.1.1 Answers

The Salesians in India devised various ways to find the needed personnel.

Appeal to the Superiors: Obviously, the first solution was to turn to the Superiors in Turin. The responses to the appeals for fresh hands were varied. Msgr. Mathias with his inimitable ways was more successful than some others. Msgr. Mathias wrote and got others to write to the Superiors in Turin.

Starting a novitiate: Msgr. Mathias envisaged a plan which would eventually solve the problem of personnel to a large extent. He proposed to bring in trained aspirants from Europe, who would begin their novitiate in India along with aspirants recruited from India itself. The mixing and living together of Indian and European candidates right from the novitiate would be of help to both groups. They would learn to understand, appreciate and love each other, and put up with each other's limitations. Young Europeans would be able to adapt themselves more easily to the climatic, social and cultural conditions

⁶² THEKKEDATH, p. 885.

⁶³ ASC A8910214 *Letter Ferrando-Ricaldone*, Shillong, 30.6.36.

of the mission field and learn the local languages, history, customs and manners with greater facility.⁶⁴

A minor seminary in Madras: After the existing seminary of the Archdiocese passed on to the newly created diocese of Nellore, the minor seminary of Madras, named after the then reigning Pontiff Pius XI, was started on 17 June 1929. The seminarians consisted of those doing high school or studying Latin for two years after their high school prior to going to the major seminary. Later, in 1931, Don Bosco Apostolic School of Vellore was started for those seminarians who were doing their middle school.⁶⁵

A novitiate in the South: In his report sent to the “Superior Chapter” (General Council) in May 1932 Msgr. Mathias, the Provincial of India, strongly recommended starting a novitiate also in the South because the North was too far, the climate very different, and the languages even more so.⁶⁶

Formation of the local clergy: The first and primary undertaking of Archbishop Mathias was the establishment of a major seminary for the training of the clergy. In his first pastoral letter on 19 September 1935 he floated the idea and started a campaign of propaganda.⁶⁷

Promoting indigenous vocations to Salesian life: the crisis in personnel following World War II and the internment of Italian and German Salesians made the Southern Province think of taking the bold step of cultivating indigenous vocations, although until then it had been very cautious. After getting to know the Syrian Catholics of Kerala the Province increased enormously the number of aspirants. They had been Catholics for more than 15 centuries and the families

⁶⁴ A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam*, p.77; [Luigi MATHIAS], *Quarant'anni di missione in India. Memorie di Sua Eccellenza Monsignor Luigi Mathias*. Vol. I. *In Assam 1921-1935*, Torino-Leumann, LDC 1965, pp. 103-105.

⁶⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 434.

⁶⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 445.

⁶⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 458.

were well known for their solid piety and austere morality. Ecclesiastical vocations abounded among them.⁶⁸

Besides the senior aspirants (post SSLC) who were at Tirupattur from 1943, Fr Carreño decided to recruit young high school boys. The first group of these boys from Travancore arrived in 1945.⁶⁹ In a couple of years the number of aspirants went up to about 200.⁷⁰

School of the Salesian Coadjutor. Fr Carreño had very much at heart the quality formation of the future coadjutors. In his first circular of 1948 he wrote about the starting of a professional school exclusively intended for future coadjutors at Tirupattur. He told the province:

“We must cultivate the vocation of our would-be coadjutors with as much zeal and care as we are devoting to the training of our young aspirants to the priesthood ... [to] be able to send to all the corners of South India the type of Salesians needed for the moment – men full of zeal and imbued with the Salesian spirit, trained in the different crafts, possessing a firm, moral and intellectual background, capable of teaching catechism and manning oratories.”⁷¹

Although he was told by the Rector Major not to open any new house for three years, he was allowed to have the school for coadjutors temporarily at Tirupattur.⁷² It was started in 1948 with five trades – weaving and tailoring, carpentry, mechanics, art section and printing.⁷³

Involvement of catechists: The shortage of Salesians was to a great degree made up by the catechists, who played a vital role in

⁶⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 810.

⁶⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 912.

⁷⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 922.

⁷¹ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 817.

⁷² THEKKEDATH, p. 817.

⁷³ THEKKEDATH, p. 919-921.

the work of evangelization.⁷⁴ Their importance can be gathered from what Fr Pianazzi wrote to Fr Zigiotti:

“Without catechists the missionaries cannot instruct the Christians who are baptized when they are still very ignorant. The priests visit the villages only 3 or 4 times a year. Generally they reach the evening and leave the following morning. So it is the catechists who have to instruct [the cristians].”⁷⁵

Even if some of the catechists were illiterate or nearly so, they were often men of such faith and piety that the example of their lives made up for their lack of instruction.⁷⁶

In order to have a sufficient number of trained catechists, a temporary school for catechists was opened by Fr Alessi at Tezpur.⁷⁷ Fr Alessi also appointed catechist-inspectors who would supervise the work of catechists in ten or twelve villages or tea gardens and report to the missionaries.⁷⁸ The Tezpur mission, adjudged to be one of the best in 1937 by Fr Candela, the Extraordinary Visitor, could boast of a small army of 104 catechists and 11 catechist-inspectors.⁷⁹

In-service refresher courses were offered to the catechists. A school of catechists started at Jessore (Krishnagar diocese) in 1937 went on till 1941. The programme consisted of a two-year course in catechism, the gospels, apologetics, languages (Bengali & English), comparative religion and mathematics.⁸⁰

Some innovative projects: To tide over the scarcity of specialized personnel, Fr Carreño came out with some novel ideas, which were clearly ahead of their times, and hence frowned upon by the Superiors.

⁷⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 190.

⁷⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1125.

⁷⁶ A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam*, pp.102-103.

⁷⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 192-193.

⁷⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 195, 1383.

⁷⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1300.

⁸⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 330.

- a) Introduction of lay volunteers: He envisaged bringing to India professionally qualified persons as “volunteers”, who would dedicate some years of their life to mission work. In fact Fr Carreño had asked Fr Anderson, an English Salesian who returned to England after being in India, to advertise in the Catholic papers for Catholic engineers, printers etc. to serve three years in the missions on a “bread and paradise” basis.⁸¹
- b) Technical training for clerical candidates: Another proposal of Fr Carreño was to offer some regular technical training to clerical aspirants in South India before sending them to the novitiate. His reasons were: (i) difficulty of getting coadjutors, (ii) the type of priest produced by the seminaries tended to be inactive and concentrated on himself, (iii) there were so many requests for Salesian technical schools that even if the Province had all the coadjutors from Cumiana and Rebaudengo, they would not suffice, (iv) a technical ability would increase the prestige of the Salesian priest and help him to find ways of helping his poor Christians and would help to preserve chastity by keeping him busy, (v) if the communists gained power in India, they would not want the priest, but would welcome the technician.⁸²

Getting entry permits: When it became difficult to obtain entry permits for Salesians to come from Europe to India, and since there weren't as many confreres to send to Goa⁸³ as was needed, it was resolved in 1949 that the confreres from Europe should first go to Goa, where missionaries could easily enter. They could help there for some time and in the meantime try to get entry permits to India.⁸⁴

⁸¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 844.

⁸² THEKKEDATH, p. 844-845.

⁸³ Even after the Independence of India from the British, Goa continued to be a Portuguese colony.

⁸⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 733.

3.1.2 Results

The idea of Mgr Mathias to start a novitiate in Shillong with trained aspirants from Europe and those recruited from India itself, met with the approval of Fr Rinaldi. From the first group of 8 novices from Europe who reached Shillong on 22 December 1923, there blossomed several very important figures in the history of Salesian India, among them Orestes Marengo (the first Bishop of Dibrugarh and later of Tezpur) and Eligius Cinato (the first Provincial of South India). The group from Europe was joined by four novices from South India.⁸⁵

The proposal to start a novitiate for the South too was accepted by the Superiors. In fact, Fr Ricaldone in his letter of 25 Aug 1931 to Msgr. Mederlet had proposed the formation of personnel *in loco* also for the South. He offered to send a group of novices from Italy every three years.⁸⁶ The novitiate was started at Tirupattur in December 1933 with ten novices and Fr Carreño as novice master. Six of the novices came from Europe.⁸⁷

For starting the major seminary in Madras, a large building at Poonamallee with 25 acres of land was purchased from the Administrator of Mylapore Diocese. The seminary was solemnly inaugurated on 8 September 1936 with 21 students.⁸⁸

The urge for having more aspirants at times ended in choosing those of poor quality.⁸⁹ This notwithstanding, the bold venture of Fr Carreño of bringing young aspirants from Kerala turned out to be a great success.⁹⁰ Fr M. Alves who spent some months in India wrote to Fr Ricaldone,

⁸⁵ A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam*, pp.77-78; [L. MATHIAS], *Quarant'Anni...*, pp.121-123.

⁸⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 441.

⁸⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 520-521.

⁸⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 458.

⁸⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1008-1009.

⁹⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1368-1369

“I think that we will be able to draw from them [the aspirants of Tirupattur] a strong and splendid generation of new Salesians who will change the face of India from the vocational point of view. It is a holy revolution, a great triumph brought about by our dear Fr Carreño, wonderful soul, totally Don Bosco’s man ...”⁹¹

The success of this venture forced some, especially in the North, who were initially critical and even derisive of this undertaking, not only to change their stance but even adopt the same method.⁹²

At the end of the three year ban on opening of new houses Fr Carreño wanted to shift the School of the Salesian Coadjutor from Tirupattur where it had been started temporarily to some place in Madras. Though Archbishop Mathias offered land at Madhavaram on the outskirts of the city, he preferred “Lu Ville”, about a mile from Basin Bridge, as it presented several advantages over the former. However, due to the opposition of Msgr. Mathias, the Superiors declined to approve the plan. The controversy over Madavaram or “Lu Ville” turned out to be a serious blow to the project itself, and the aspirants were finally shifted to Basin Bridge along with other students.⁹³

The project of introducing lay volunteers to help in the missions did not find favour with the Superiors, as they considered it unwise since it would introduce externs to the communities and the volunteers generally don’t render the service that is expected of them.⁹⁴

As for the technical training of clerical candidates, the superiors turned down the project for two reasons: (i) Tradition did not allow the introduction of an important innovation in a systematic and universal form. (ii) The reaction of the coadjutors. When superiors introduced

⁹¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 821-822.

⁹² THEKKEDATH, p. 918-919, 1184-1185.

⁹³ THEKKEDATH, p. 846-854, 1378.

⁹⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 844.

Fr Zola from Goa at Colle Don Bosco as a voluntary printer, there was almost a rebellion among the coadjutors there.⁹⁵

We know that these ideas floated by Fr Carreño and disapproved by the Superiors are now universally accepted and very much in vogue.

3.2. *Insufficient Finance*

Lack of funds to carry out the mission work was a serious challenge the Salesians were faced with. Speaking of the progress made by the Assam mission during the first ten years, the Catholic weekly of Calcutta, *The Herald* of 1 May 1932, highlighted this problem:

“But for economic difficulties over which they [Salesians] had no control, their progress would have been even greater. A number of schemes have had to be laid by until the arrival of better times and enterprises which have been begun have not received that attention they would have received in a more prosperous decade.”⁹⁶

When the effects of the “*great depression*” that started in the USA in 1929 began to be felt in Assam in 1931, in spite of the programme of expansion he had set in motion by opening new mission stations, Msgr. Mathias warned his confreres not to make expenses which were not essential. They were not to begin any new construction or appoint new teachers or catechists without formal permission.⁹⁷

Almost all the mission stations and institutions were faced with financial difficulties. The finances of the St Antony’s School, Shillong, were in a bad shape. One of the lay teachers was asked to look for a job elsewhere as the school was unable to pay him.⁹⁸ The two

⁹⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 844-845.

⁹⁶ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 161.

⁹⁷ A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell’Assam*, p.134.

⁹⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 170.

missionaries of Tezpur mission lived in extreme poverty. They were too poor even to buy a bicycle and hence they had to walk distances of 15 to 20 miles under the scorching tropical sun.⁹⁹

In the Diocese of Krishnagar the catechists and teachers, not receiving their pay and not having other resources, were forced to leave, with serious consequences to the apostolate.¹⁰⁰ The subsidy of the Propaganda was sufficient just for three months of the year, and no money was coming from Italy because of the sanctions imposed on it by the League of Nations after Italy had attacked Ethiopia.¹⁰¹

In the mission of North Arcot too there was very great difficulty for money.¹⁰² The Province did not have any house which brought in an income, except that of Bombay. The houses were all formation houses or of charity.¹⁰³ Towards the end of 1935 or the beginning of 1936 Fr Cinato who was still in Italy addressed a memorandum to Fr Ricaldone, describing the nearly desperate condition of the finances of the Province. He begged Fr Ricaldone to do everything possible to help him out.¹⁰⁴

The financial situation of the novitiate house of Tirupattur was very bad at times. There was grinding poverty, not to say misery, though much good spirit and holy cheerfulness existed in compensation. On various occasions there was not a pie and the house owed money even to the grocer, dhoby and milkman.¹⁰⁵

The financial condition of the studentate of Sonada was very bad in the first years. Fr Pianazzi, the rector, wrote to the Rector Major in February 1939 that the clerics were united and happy and

⁹⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 192.

¹⁰⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 317.

¹⁰¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 327-328.

¹⁰² THEKKEDATH, p. 431, 889.

¹⁰³ THEKKEDATH, p. 889.

¹⁰⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 487-488.

¹⁰⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 531, 540.

practiced poverty with love. The only difficulty was that this poverty was a bit too much. At times the house lacked even bread, and the shopkeepers were on the verge of refusing to give provisions.¹⁰⁶

Naturally, propaganda was the chief source of finance. But caution had to be applied to the Indian propaganda, following complaints from several Ordinaries (Bombay, Pune, Calcutta) and the Apostolic Delegate regarding the manner of propaganda in India. The Provincial prohibited propaganda through printed or duplicated matter. Efforts had to be made to dispel the impression that the Salesians wanted to take away from others (e.g. parish priests) the offerings due to them. All appeals had to be made through *Don Bosco in India* or approved Catholic papers like *The Herald*, *The Catholic Leader* etc. Propaganda through strictly personal letters could continue, but with prudence, restraint and absolute honesty.¹⁰⁷

3.2.1 Answers

Appeal to benefactors: To solve to some extent the problem of the insufficiency of financial resources, Msgr. Mathias decentralized the “propaganda” for monetary help and encouraged all his missionaries to make known the pressing needs of their mission station or institution by writing to magazines and private persons. Naturally, he himself gave the example by setting up his own office in Shillong.¹⁰⁸

Following the proposal of the Extraordinary Visitors Fr Candela and Fr Berruti in 1937 it was decided to start a centre for propaganda in which the houses were free but encouraged to participate, especially those houses which were completely dependent on the Province. At the cost of great sacrifice the Province set aside three confreres for the purpose.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 122, 51226.

¹⁰⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 1137.

¹⁰⁸ [L. MATHIAS], *Quarant'Anni...*, pp.102.

¹⁰⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1145.

Concerns such as the increasing number of aspirants, the need of putting up a house of formation, the expectation of the city of Madras for a first class technical school from the sons of Don Bosco, prompted Fr Carreño to think of a journey to Spain to look for funds and personnel.¹¹⁰

Fund raising programmes: Several unusual ways of raising money were devised. For the project of a school and technical school at Matunga, Bombay, *charity dances* were organized, one of which was held at the Taj Mahal Hotel, under the patronage of Lady Lumley, wife of the Governor. More than the money collected (Rs 4000 & 2500), it made many people aware of Don Bosco and his works in Bombay. Another means used was the “*Don Bosco Donation Scheme*”, under which coupons were distributed in return for a small donation of one Rupee. Prizes, including a deluxe motor-car, were offered to the winners of the lucky numbers.¹¹¹

Loans: Taking a loan was deemed a way out of the financial crisis. With a loan to the tune of \$12000 it was planned to furnish the Tirupattur college laboratory and library, put the Sagayathottam (Uriurkuppam) agricultural colony on production lines by making canals and digging more wells, get the technical school of Basin Bridge moving and transfer the press from Tirupattur to Madras. The Sagayathottam agricultural colony and the press would serve to make the Province more self-sufficient. The workshops at Basin Bridge and at St Gabriel’s when set right, would enable the Province to pay back the loan and slowly free itself from the dangerous dependence on mass stipends.¹¹²

3.2.2 Results

Appeals which appeared in the *Bolletino Salesiano* as part of the propaganda plan mooted by Msgr. Mathias were helpful and the

¹¹⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 804.

¹¹¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 289.

¹¹² THEKKEDATH, p. 855-856, 874.

Salesian Cooperators responded generously. Divine providence also raised up locally a number of generous benefactors.¹¹³

The plan for a central propaganda office proposed by Fr Candela and Fr Berruti had to be abandoned at the outbreak of the war and nothing more was heard of it afterwards.¹¹⁴

The trip of Fr Carreño to Spain proved quite fruitful. He received a lathe and formal promises for five others. He was also able to find a number of benefactors willing to adopt aspirants and meet their expenses.¹¹⁵

In spite of the persuasive eloquence of Fr Carreño, the Superiors refused permission to take the loan to invest in the agricultural colony at Sagayathottam and in the workshops at Basin Bridge. Even Fr Pianazzi, who succeeded Fr Carreño, was of the opinion that with a loan of about Rs 50,000/- the expensive machines, which were lying idle at Basin Bridge could have been made productive.¹¹⁶

3.3. *Hardships of Missionary Life*

One of the major challenges to the missionaries, especially those from Europe, came from the geographic and meteorological conditions of India. The tropical climate, the difficult terrain and the great distances in India not only caused discomfort but posed real hardships to them.

In North East India visiting the Christians meant walking hundreds of miles, as they were dispersed in several villages, which were at times in a radius of 50, 100 or 150 miles. As in many places there were absolutely no roads or any kind of transport the journeys had to be done trudging on foot, passing through virgin forests, inhabited by wild animals.¹¹⁷ Occasionally they had to ford streams and rivers

¹¹³ [L. MATHIAS], *Quarant'Anni...*, pp.102-103.

¹¹⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1145.

¹¹⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 805, 807.

¹¹⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 856, 874.

¹¹⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 177, 1352.

or cross them on a bamboo raft.¹¹⁸ The big rivers were infested by sharks, crocodiles and pirates.¹¹⁹

The missionaries had plenty of work. Most of the time they would be busy touring the villages or subdistricts, even upto 25 to 28 consecutive days, stopping in some villages for the night in order to avoid the dangers of the forest (tigers, bears and elephants), working among the Christians in the morning and then moving on again after lunch, in order to reach the next village before nightfall.¹²⁰

The mission stations of North Arcot too were very tough, on account of both the climate and the character of the people who were poor financially and morally. The chief work of the missionaries was to bring back the very large number of apostates and descendants of apostates. Their number was as high as twenty to thirty thousand.¹²¹ Uriurkuppam in the South was a very difficult place because of the primitive conditions of life and the lack of communication. The food was poor in quality and the house was uncomfortable. The enormous heat caused skin eruptions that were very annoying and lasting.¹²²

The inclemencies of nature at times were the cause of sicknesses and in certain cases even death. Fr Biebuyck who was at Tanjore was operated on for a carbuncle and had to return to Europe. The death of the first Salesian on Indian soil took place less than two years after their arrival, the first victim being Fr Vigneron who died in November 1907.¹²³ The second, Fr Leonidas Gatti, passed away in August 1914.¹²⁴ In the Assam missions the first deaths were in 1928, of two clerics in practical training – Paul Prando and John Zaetta.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 1343.

¹¹⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 379.

¹²⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1343, 1295.

¹²¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 884-885.

¹²² THEKKEDATH, p. 887.

¹²³ THEKKEDATH, p. 22.

¹²⁴ M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, p. 21.

¹²⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 152.

The very few fathers who were in the Diocese of Krishnagar were constantly getting sick and had to be hospitalized often because of the terrible climate of Central Bengal. Some of them like Fr Igino Ricaldone, Fr Pisano, Fr Piesiur had even to go away definitely from the mission.¹²⁶ Fr John Castro, a young Spanish Salesian contracted typhoid while on a missionary tour of the Sunderbans and died in the first week of March 1936.¹²⁷

3.3.1 Answers

To cope with the hardships of missionary life, besides the involvement of more collaborators, the Salesians adopted suitable methods. We have already seen the important role played by catechists. In places far from the resident mission stations, a catechist would in general be in charge of teaching the prayers and the fundamental truths of the faith.¹²⁸

The missionary method used by Fr Vendrame, one of the most zealous and effective missionaries of the North East, was simple. His preaching of the faith was preceded by love, affection, friendship and sympathy for the simple people and identification with them.¹²⁹

The yearly *Mahasabha* or annual assembly, Eucharistic procession and other large gatherings of the faithful were utilized by the Salesians as effective means of evangelization, especially in the North. These gave the Catholics a sense of their strength and also attracted non-Christians.¹³⁰ The annual celebrations were not merely festivities; much solid instruction accompanied the celebrations. About 2000 persons attended the functions in 1938, most of them being

¹²⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 317.

¹²⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 327.

¹²⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 447-448.

¹²⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 119. A similar approach was adopted also in the South: cf. M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, p. 85-86.

¹³⁰ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 193.

members of the Catholic Action. The feast was followed by a three-day retreat for nearly 100 catechists.¹³¹

Catholic Action was vigorously promoted in the parishes of the mission. Its members were real apostles among their brothers and sisters and helped the missionary in spreading the catholic faith, preparing for feasts, processions etc. Their example encouraged the Christians to live better lives and drew non-Christians to the church. In Shillong alone Catholic Action had 700 members and it was organized separately for men and women, boys and girls. The young women of Catholic Action organized the festive oratories for girls. Young volunteers carried out a work of charity among the shelterless poor.¹³²

The Catholic press which was especially cared for in the Northern Province helped greatly the work of evangelization. The report of Fr Candela after his Extraordinary Visit mentioned the following journals and leaflets: *Ka ling Kristan* (Khasi) - 700 copies, *U Symbai* (Khasi) - 2000 copies, *Salesian Kabaren* (Hindi) - 1500 copies, *Don Bosco in India* (English) - 1200 copies, *Sengbaa* (the Dawn, Garo) - 400 copies. Besides these regular publications, catechisms, prayer books, Bible histories and even some scholastic books had been published in several languages.¹³³

3.3.2 Results

In North Arcot the hard work of the missionaries bore fruit especially in some districts because of their sacrifice, zeal and charity. There were some conversions also among caste people, who were somewhat better of financially.¹³⁴

The mission of the North East had a remarkable growth. Fr Peter Ricaldone considered Assam mission to be the most responsive

¹³¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1301, 1307.

¹³² THEKKEDATH, p. 1316-1317.

¹³³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1097.

¹³⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 885.

of all the Salesian missions at that time.¹³⁵ What the Salesians took up as the Prefecture of Assam had already grown into two dioceses at the conclusion of the period under purview. In addition, the Salesians developed also the Diocese of Krishnagar. The following table would give an idea of the rapid growth of the mission of Assam from the time it was taken up in 1922 upto 1933.¹³⁶

From a report of Bishop Ferrando to the Propaganda Fide we know that in 1951 the Assam mission had 86,511 catholics, 56 priests, 128 sisters of which 57 Indians, 439 catechists and 2877 catechumens. All the priests were Salesians.¹³⁷

	1922	1933
Catholics	5,844	24,459
Priests	6	28
Clerics	0	58
Salesian Brothers	5	13
Irish Christian Brothers	8	9
Sisters	17	37
Catechists	48	273
Christian centres	93	329
Churches for more than 400	6	24
Chapels	20	204
Orphanages	2	7
Orphans	100	484
Technical & Agricultural schools	1	3
Primary Schools	31	280
Pupils	638	5,128
Teachers	47	145
Colleges & High Schools	2	4
Dispensaries	1	8

¹³⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 162.

¹³⁶ ASC A8900316 *Letter (copy) Ricaldone - Fumasoni Biondi*, Torino, 15.12.1933.

¹³⁷ Cf. A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam*, p.205

3.4. *Internal Differences*

It cannot be forgotten that the early Salesians in India came from different backgrounds and nationalities. As such, problems of adaptation and accommodation in interpersonal relationships and in living and working together were inevitable. In the *Breve relazione* of Fr Tomatis we read:

“The small number of the confreres, the differences of character, nationality and formation, the insufficiency of work [in the earlier period at Tanjore], the isolation, the privation of relationships, the distance from other confreres and Superiors in an extremely hot climate make the individuals always ill-tempered and prone to quarrels.”¹³⁸

Msgr. Mathias on being informed about his transfer to the Archdiocese of Madras, writing to Fr Ricaldone voiced among other things that the milieu in the South was narrow and divided.¹³⁹

Despite the intense growth of Salesian works and the great esteem the Salesians enjoyed in Goa, there were internal divisions and problems of interpersonal relationships in the community. From December 1949 until the middle of 1951 there was much tension, dissatisfaction and grumbling among the confreres of Don Bosco, Panjim. Their grievance was that Fr Scuderi and Fr Moja decided everything and that the others were hardly taken into confidence.¹⁴⁰

At Tirupattur too with a large community having many activities and persons with different tastes and belonging to different nationalities, it was difficult to satisfy everyone.¹⁴¹

In a letter to the Rector Major, after mentioning many positive things about the house of Kotagiri, Fr Maschio added that there was jealousy and a lack of understanding between Fr Meliga (the rector)

¹³⁸ ASC 389 Tanjore: *Breve relazione* of G. Tomatis, 17 settembre 1908.

¹³⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 454.

¹⁴⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 739, cf. also p. 745.

¹⁴¹ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 923.

and Fr Mantovani (the novice master); but for this Kotagiri would have been a model house.¹⁴²

In the Northern Province there were some difficulties in the late 30's with regard to the English and Irish confreres. They were thought to possess a "completely different mentality", lacking a religious spirit, sense of sacrifice and poverty.¹⁴³ At Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, the Extraordinary Visitor Fr A. Fedrigotti found that the union of hearts left something to be desired. There was some disquiet between nationalities; the Indians and the English felt that they were not properly understood.¹⁴⁴

In the Diocese of Krishnagar there was much tension between Bishop Morrow and the missionaries during the war and till about the middle of 1948, on account of the way they were treated. The missionaries felt that the Bishop treated them more like his servants or clerks than as priests.¹⁴⁵

Even Shillong, which in the words of Fr Piasecki, was "such a peaceful and promising Diocese before, especially as regards grumbling",¹⁴⁶ had its share of woes. In the Assam Mission there was widespread dissatisfaction, mostly due to Msgr. Ferrando's ways of settling matters, and also to the Provincial who was not liked by many. The Bishop lacked leadership and organization.¹⁴⁷

3.4.1 Answers

Msgr. Mathias made great efforts to keep his confreres united and fervent. One of his great achievements in Assam was the creation and maintenance of the "family spirit", especially in the formation house. The solemn celebration of feasts like the Provincial's Day and

¹⁴² THEKKEDATH, p. 955-956.

¹⁴³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1147-1149.

¹⁴⁴ See THEKKEDATH, p. 1221.

¹⁴⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 340-343.

¹⁴⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1113.

¹⁴⁷ Cf THEKKEDATH, p. 1114, 1124-1125.

the Rector's Day was not only allowed but even encouraged, because he knew that they were a wonderful means to keep the Salesians united and enthusiastic.¹⁴⁸

Fr Alvin Fedrigotti, the Extraordinary Visitor to Salesian India in 1949-50 visited Goa in February 1950. He invited all to cooperate in wiping out the evil of discontent and criticism by means of good example. He recommended regular meetings of the chapter of the house, where everything was to be freely and openly discussed with the greatest freedom, calmness and with an eye on the facts of the case.¹⁴⁹

To the complaints regarding the Anglo-Irish confreres, Fr Berruti asked Fr Scuderi to recommend to the confreres charity without limits, making an effort, above all, to avoid anything which could cause displeasure to others. "You know better than I do that majorities always tend to dominate", he wrote.¹⁵⁰

A bulletin called *Inter Nos* was started in May 1943 in the Southern province to give news about the activities of the houses and missions to those who were far away in the internment camps at Dehra Dun and elsewhere. It helped much to maintain union and charity among the confreres.¹⁵¹

3.4.2 Results

The internal divisions among the Salesians was at times hard to overcome. In Goa the situation did not seem to improve even after the intervention of the Extraordinary Visitor. According to a letter of Fr McGlinchey to Fr Carreño, "[...] the visit of Fr Fedrigotti made no impression. Nothing of his recommendations has been carried out here at all, except maybe in some petty points".¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 163, 1369.

¹⁴⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 740.

¹⁵⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1148.

¹⁵¹ ASC B7290149 *Letter Mathias - Berruti*, Yercaud, 17.10.44.

¹⁵² THEKKEDATH, p. 745.

Fr Di Fiore, the prefect of studies of the theologate of the South at Yercaud, wrote to the Provincial Fr Pianazzi after his visitation that the visit had done much good, but added that the division of nationalities, that is, the ill-feeling between the Indian and the European clerics, still continued.¹⁵³

The overall picture was not, however, that bleak. After the creation of a separate Province in the South, there was a general feeling of satisfaction among the confreres at the improvement in Salesian spirit and fraternal charity in the Province. Fr Cinato testified that even those who had earlier been cold, if not hostile, were slowly becoming better.¹⁵⁴

Fr Cinato found the novitiate at Tirupattur to be going on well in 1934. There was plenty of poverty, but also cordiality and joy.¹⁵⁵ He reaffirmed the same in 1935. Even though from several countries, the newly arrived got integrated quickly, showed good spirit and good will.¹⁵⁶ Fr Berruti too found the house in 1937 very poor, but there was an abundance of gaiety, good spirit and attachment to the superiors. The soul of the house was the rector, Fr Carreño, young, happy, intelligent and extremely active. He noticed in the boys an attachment to the superiors and “a joy which one hardly finds in the boardings of Europe”. He saw there genuine family spirit, and had the feeling of being in the first days of the Oratory.¹⁵⁷

The extraordinary visitor Fr Candela visited the house and parish of Vellore in December 1936. He judged the spirit of the house to be excellent. Piety, religious observance and fraternal union reigned there. Fr Berruti who visited the house in the company of Fr Candela in November 1937 had only words of praise for the excellent spirit in

¹⁵³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1019.

¹⁵⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 484-485.

¹⁵⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 522.

¹⁵⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 527.

¹⁵⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 493-494.

the house. "The spirit of Don Bosco marvellously flourishes there," he wrote.¹⁵⁸

The prevalence of genuine Salesian spirit and union of hearts in the Southern Province was attested to by several highly qualified witnesses like Archbishop Mathias, Fr Maschio, Fr Scuderi, Fr Tuena etc. in their letters to the Superiors. They had no hesitation in attributing the credit for this enviable state of things to Fr Carreño.¹⁵⁹ The bulletin *Inter Nos* had gone a long way in maintaining unity and charity among the confreres, especially among those who were not in the camp.¹⁶⁰ Even Fr Pianazzi, who succeeded Fr Carreño as Provincial, despite his reservations regarding the latter's financial administration, found the spirit in the province to be very good.¹⁶¹

Fr A. Fedrigotti, Extraordinary Visitor to the two Provinces of India in 1949, affirmed at the end of his visit to the North that the disorientation of spirit that existed during the war when many of the confreres had been interned seemed to be a thing of the past, and the Salesian spirit and Salesian work flourished everywhere.¹⁶²

Fr Pianazzi who visited all the houses and missions of the Northern Province in the period September 1950 - February 1951 felt that good spirit reigned everywhere.¹⁶³ The majority of the confreres were Italians; but there were also small groups of Englishmen, Belgians, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Czechoslovaks, Germans and two or three others. All were well integrated.¹⁶⁴

3.5. *Difficulties Posed by World War II*

Two days after the German armies invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany. France

¹⁵⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 510-511.

¹⁵⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 857, 1377-1378.

¹⁶⁰ ASC B7290149 *Letter Mathias-Berruti*, Yercaud, 17.10.44.

¹⁶¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 875.

¹⁶² THEKKEDATH, p. 1179.

¹⁶³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1185-1186.

¹⁶⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1186.

joined in six hours later and the Second World War started. In the evening of the same day, a total of nine German Salesian missionaries working in Assam, Bengal and South India were taken to internment camps. They were later released in December. The German missionaries of Assam were not disturbed any more until the general internment of the Italians; but the two German Salesians who were in the South were again interned in July 1940.¹⁶⁵

Italy declared war on Great Britain and France on 10 June 1940. Thus the Italians became enemy "aliens" and hence there started the internment of the Italian Salesians working in different parts of India.¹⁶⁶

With the entry of Japan into the war in December 1941 and her rapid advance towards Singapore, tighter restrictions were imposed on enemy nationals in India. The Government of India decided to intern all the missionaries from enemy countries who had not spent at least 16 uninterrupted years in India.¹⁶⁷

The War, as is to be imagined, adversely affected the work of the missionaries due to reduction in personnel and in finance. Until the entry of Italy on the side of Germany the war did not affect very much missionary work, but the income of the missions was seriously impaired.¹⁶⁸ Help from Europe stopped and the prices of things shot up. The financial situation of all the houses was bad in general. Fr Iginio Ricaldone from Don Bosco, Shillong, wrote to the Rector Major, who was his own uncle, that he found Don Bosco Orphanage financially in a hopeless condition. There were continual threats from the creditors to take the Salesians to court.¹⁶⁹

In Assam (1943) many catechists left since their salaries were not increased in proportion to the rise in the cost of living, due to the

¹⁶⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 655-657.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 657-661.

¹⁶⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 667.

¹⁶⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 1102.

¹⁶⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1254-1255.

shortage of funds. Due to the lack of finance, many schools, especially in the plains, had to be closed down. The restrictions on the missionaries' travels became even more stringent than before. A number of Christian communities could scarcely be visited even once in 12 months, though some priests were on tour almost all the time.¹⁷⁰

3.5.1 Answers

As soon as the Second World War broke out and again when Italy was about to enter the war, Fr Scuderi asked all the confreres to be very prudent in speaking, among themselves as well as with outsiders. They were not to interest themselves in politics. He forbade everyone except the rectors to read the newspapers or listen to the radio.¹⁷¹ When it was almost clear that Italy was going to war on the side of Germany, Fr Cinato, the Provincial of the South, warmly recommended that all should strictly observe article 14 of the Constitutions, which urged the avoidance of politics and contests of nationality, whether among the members themselves or with outsiders.¹⁷²

When Italy entered the war as an ally of Germany on 10 June 1940, on the following day a squad of soldiers surrounded the compound of Don Bosco, Shillong, not allowing anyone to go out for a month. The council of the house then took some very important decisions to cope with the situation of financial crunch as well as the political climate: (i) dismiss all the workers, (ii) continue with all the boys of the orphanage for some months; if it were to become impossible to carry on like that send home half the number of boys.¹⁷³

Austerity measures were taken to counteract the financial crisis. Fr Uguet insisted on the houses not spending a farthing more than

¹⁷⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1108.

¹⁷¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1146-1147.

¹⁷² THEKKEDATH, p. 500-501.

¹⁷³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1256.

was required, and when every other means failed to reduce the number of boys.¹⁷⁴

Fr Carreño exhorted the novitiate community of Tirupattur to practice poverty, going to such minute details as having two bananas less per day, jaggery instead of sugar for tea, cutting on post, etc.¹⁷⁵

At Sonada all the servants who could be dispensed with, including the cook, were dismissed. The clerics did the cooking, washing of plates and cutlery and the laying of tables. Every day there was work for all, even in the place of the customary Thursday walk. To save on light, the time table was anticipated, going to bed earlier and rising earlier. All the confreres cooperated by accepting these decisions cheerfully.¹⁷⁶

Measures were taken to ensure “regular life”, especially with regard to those in formation. The two Provincials Fr Cinato and Fr Uguet met in Madras in 1941 and took certain decisions like the unification of the formation houses to lessen some of the difficulties caused by the war. They agreed to send all the novices to Tirupattur and all the theologians to Mawlai (Shillong).

When the interned Salesians from Calcutta and its neighbourhood were shifted from Ahmadnagar to Deolali on 25 February 1941, it was decided that the clerics should have theology classes in the camp itself. There were five students and four professors.¹⁷⁷ Since the theologate of Mawlai was converted into a parole camp for the interned Salesians of Assam from the beginning of February 1942, it became necessary to open also a theologate in the south, which was started on 14 February 1942.¹⁷⁸

Fr Cinato who visited the internment camp at Deoli in Jan 1943, using his extraordinary war-time faculties and as the delegate of

¹⁷⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1153.

¹⁷⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 540.

¹⁷⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1229.

¹⁷⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 664-665.

¹⁷⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 546.

Fr Uguet, the Provincial of the North, constituted the Salesians at Deoli into one Province and two houses with regular house chapters, so that ordinations, professions etc. could be conducted more regularly.¹⁷⁹ The classes for the students of philosophy and theology started on 3 February. For the priests a kind of pastoral course was organized, with a lecture per day on moral and dogmatic questions, Hinduism, Islam, sociology, youth movement of the Catholic Action.¹⁸⁰

To remedy the scarcity of clerics in the houses, the Provincial Council of the South decided in May 1943 to keep the first year theologians of the following year at Vellore, where they would learn theology and also help in the house. The students of philosophy would be asked to hurry up and finish their course in two years instead of three.¹⁸¹

The Salesian internees did not remain idle in the camp, instead engaged themselves in various apostolates to the extent they could. They provided religious assistance to the civilian internees and in the nearby Camp of the Prisoners of War. During Holy Week and Easter they were particularly busy, and had the joy of seeing more than half of the civilian internees performing their Easter duties.¹⁸² Fr Scuderi was full of initiatives and tried to keep everyone usefully occupied. He tried to prepare a book for the Italian public with all kinds of information on India. He also began in April 1942 a weekly called "*Fides Nostra*", a much-appreciated pamphlet of about ten pages, for circulation among the internees.¹⁸³

When it became impossible to find Salesians for certain posts in the houses, lay collaborators were asked to take their places. When at the approach of the Japanese forces towards India, the government ordered the Salesians to leave St Gabriel's and go to the parole camp

¹⁷⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 677-678.

¹⁸⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 679.

¹⁸¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 785.

¹⁸² THEKKEDATH, p. 662, 665.

¹⁸³ THEKKEDATH, p. 670.

at Tirupattur, Mr S Natarajan, the assistant master, was entrusted with the headmastership of the school.¹⁸⁴

3.5.2 Results

Several measures adopted to counter the wartime crisis met with positive outcome. The efforts to obtain freedom for as many Salesians as possible produced significant results. When Archbishop Mathias met the Governor of Madras after Italy entered the war, he was assured that the latter was doing his best to save the missionaries from internment, though he could not guarantee that fresh orders would not come from the centre.¹⁸⁵ When the Government of India was planning to remove all the Italian missionaries of South India to an internment camp in the North, Archbishop Mathias appealed to the Viceroy on 10 Nov 1942 and got Fr Mora and Fr Dabove exempted for service at the seminary.¹⁸⁶

Archbishop Mathias met the Chief Secretary of Madras on 22 Sept 1942 and on the following day the Chief Adviser (the final authority) and was able to obtain the postponement of the internment of those at Tirupattur by a few months, so that the school year could be ended normally and the Archdiocesan Synod held. The order for internment could not be waived as it was issued from Delhi and not Madras.¹⁸⁷

A request to release on parole the Salesians of Assam who were ordered by the government to assemble at Shillong in June 1940 was favourably received. A statement was then drawn up and signed by Fr Uguet pointing out that the Salesian Society was not an Italian congregation. By the end of the month most of the fathers were

¹⁸⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 564-565. When Fr Mariota was made the parish priest of Perambur and consequently was less and less available in the school, Mr S Natarajan was again made headmaster in 1947.

¹⁸⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 660.

¹⁸⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 559.

¹⁸⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 676.

allowed to return to their mission stations and the rest by the third week of July.¹⁸⁸

When in December 1941 after the entry of Japan into the war the government decided to intern all the missionaries from enemy countries, Bishop Ferrando and Fr Uguet requested the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam for some special concessions in order to have at least a skeleton staff in all the mission stations. In addition to those who had completed 16 uninterrupted years in India, six others were allowed to stay on.¹⁸⁹

Normally the Italian missionaries of Krishnagar Diocese should have been interned like the others. But Bishop Louis Morrow, a citizen of the USA, was influential enough to get exemption from internment for 21 missionaries so that they could remain on in their own places with the existing restrictions.¹⁹⁰

Help arrived also to surmount the financial crunch. At the beginning of 1940 Fr Ricaldone informed Fr Scuderi, the Provincial, that he had directed Fr Tozzi, the Provincial of England, to help the house of Sonada in his name.¹⁹¹ The Rector Major sent help also at other times, for instance in 1945 from Ireland.¹⁹²

The Rector Major was mindful also of his sons at Tirupattur. Again he arranged with Fr Tozzi in January 1940 to send a fairly good help in his name to Fr Carreño. He also allowed Fr Carreño for the duration of the war to keep the alms received from the Masses of the work of the Sacred Heart.¹⁹³

The war proved detrimental to the missions by halting missionary work or by slowing it down. Though the number of baptisms in general

¹⁸⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 661.

¹⁸⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 667-668.

¹⁹⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 677.

¹⁹¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1226.

¹⁹² THEKKEDATH, p. 1234-1235.

¹⁹³ THEKKEDATH, p. 541.

was consoling, there were many defections.¹⁹⁴ The strength of St Antony's College, Shillong, diminished very much because the students were afraid that it might not have been allowed to continue as the college authorities were Italian. The Catholic associations were badly affected. Participation in public religious manifestations like the Eucharistic procession diminished drastically. Buildings of many catholic institutions were taken over by the government.¹⁹⁵

The Salesians released from the internment camps were allowed to return to Assam in October. Even after their return everything was not all right with the mission. The concentration camp had brought much uneasiness and lack of balance in the Salesians. In the Assam Mission the confusion was such that an intervention of the Superiors was deemed necessary.¹⁹⁶ Even Bishop Ferrando had to suffer on account of those who came out of the camp. For those of the North, according to Msgr. Mathias, the camp was certainly not a school for perfecting themselves and they had become difficult to satisfy.¹⁹⁷

Amidst all the hassles caused by the war, there was a streak of silver lining. The war brought with it also some benefits. One of the positive outcomes of the war was that it brought the missions into contact with many American and British soldiers, who, seeing the sacrificing lives of the missionaries and sisters, were generous with money and provisions. This contact was useful for the mission later on as well.¹⁹⁸

During the war the Salesians encountered also the goodwill of the government. We have seen how both in the South and in the North the officials helped the Salesians to stay on in their field of work. Seeing the financial straits in which the mission found itself,

¹⁹⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1319.

¹⁹⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1104-1105.

¹⁹⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1112.

¹⁹⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 1112-1113.

¹⁹⁸ ASC A8130705 *Relazione missionaria del Vescovo di Shillong sulla Missione dell'Assam*, Shillong, 17.10.1945; THEKKEDATH, p. 1303.

the Government of Assam offered a grant of Rs 7000 to St Antony's College, despite opposition from certain officials.¹⁹⁹

The presence of the Salesians in the camp really helped bring about a new atmosphere, as in the camp at Deoli. The solemn celebration of the feast of Don Bosco along with the academy on the occasion and the theatrical performance on the subsequent day contributed to this change. Prior to that many, including Msgr. Poli, had been depressed. Msgr. Poli himself attributed the change to the presence of the Salesians.²⁰⁰

The confreres showed a great spirit of sacrifice and abnegation during the difficult years of the war. If the report of Don Bosco Industrial School and Orphanage is anything to go by, the greatest cordiality and charity prevailed among the confreres during the war years and they were like in a family, though belonging to 12 different nations at war among themselves.²⁰¹

Conclusion

“The Salesians of Don Bosco who were hardly known in India at the beginning of the 20th century, became well known and esteemed by the middle of that century,” affirms Joseph Thekkedath.²⁰² When the Salesians, their technical schools and their services in favour of poor boys became more widely known and appreciated there was also an increasing number of requests for new foundations.²⁰³ Among the other achievements of the Salesians during this period, worth mentioning are the establishment of three University Colleges – St Antony's College, Shillong; Salesian College, Sonada and Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur; and the foundation of two religious

¹⁹⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1161.

²⁰⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 678.

²⁰¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1262.

²⁰² THEKKEDATH, p. 1367.

²⁰³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1367.

congregations of sisters – the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) and the Sisters of Mary Immaculate (SMI).

The founding of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians by Bishop Ferrando in 1942 was a step that helped the Assam Missions in a big way in the course of time. Those sisters filled a real need. They were ready to remain in remote villages for several days at a time in order to evangelize, prepare catechumens for baptism and the sacraments and engage in basic health care. Bishop Morrow founded the Sisters of Mary Immaculate in 1948, with the scope of giving professional assistance to women and children in all possible ways.²⁰⁴

When the Salesians came to Tanjore in 1906 the group numbered six, and at the end of our period in 1952 they numbered 208 in South India.²⁰⁵ A group of 11 Salesians reached Shillong in 1922, and in 1951 the Northern Province had a total of 200 Salesians.²⁰⁶

	<i>Southern Province</i>		<i>Northern Province</i>	
	1906	1952	1922	1951
Priests	3	92	6	120
Clerics	1	90		39
Brothers	1	26	5	41
Novices	-	14	-	3

The growth of the Salesians in India in terms of members and activities was, as exposed above, accompanied by the infusion and diffusion of genuine Salesian spirit. The nearly first 50 years of Salesian presence saw the progressive implantation of the Salesian charism on Indian soil on firm foundations with prospects of a bright and promising future.

²⁰⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1388-1389.

²⁰⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 884.

²⁰⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1187.

WITNESS OF FIDELITY, RICH IN HOPE. IDEALS, CHALLENGES, ANSWERS, RESULTS OF THE FIRST 30 YEARS OF FMA IN THAILAND

*Anna Grassi - Teresa Pharksuwan**

Introduction

This paper, which investigates the first thirty years of the history of the Thai FMA Province of “St Mary Mazzarello” through the lived experience of its members from the first batch of missionaries who came to Siam in 1931 to the 14th group in 1961, takes on added significance in the context of the celebration of the 75 years of FMA presence in Thailand two years ago and our present project of completing the chronicles of the Province.

This article is the fruit of the research carried out on the chronicles of the communities and of the Province, and on certain documents preserved in the Central Archives of the SDB and of the FMA in Rome as well as in the Provincial archives of the FMA in Thailand. In addition to these, the written testimonies of some of our sisters, the writings of the Superiors, both FMA and SDB, and the important book of Fr Antonio M. Alessi¹ have served as sources. We have also thought it appropriate to involve the participation of the sisters who shared the history of the first 30 years and are still alive, in order draw upon their experience of community and apostolic life in all the aspects characteristic of our Salesian and Mornesian tradition.

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¹ Antonio M. ALESSI, *Con Maria nel paese del buddismo: l'ispettoria delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in Thailandia*, Torino, LDC 1984 [Hereafter denoted as CMPB].

They know the history of the Province and are today witnesses of the fruits of the activities started and consolidated by them.

In exposing the present theme, we would like to take off from the “Conclusion” arrived at by Sr Anna Rosa Sivori² in the corresponding contribution at the previous Seminar of Hong Kong 2004, and hence consider this paper a continuation of the reflection on FMA consecrated life on Thai soil from its beginnings.

“In these past 75 years, the mission of the FMA in Thailand changed notoriously according to the times. In 1931, when the five pioneers arrived, the mission field was just a small village; now we have 11 houses all over the country.

“Today we are 91 FMAs in Thailand, and 74 are native sisters. All of us, except a few aged sisters, are involved in the assistance and the formation of children and young people in big schools, vocational centers, hostels and in small poor village centers.

“Our first missionaries lived in great poverty and endured with joy and generosity the labour and the privations of the hard beginnings. With their lives, they wrote beautiful pages of courage, sacrifices and authentic heroism. It seems almost unbelievable how our pioneers could give life to such a great enterprise”³.

Re-reading this conclusion, we can say that the sisters, especially those of the first four missionary expeditions, have expressed eminently well the charismatic vocation of the FMA through their personal, community, ecclesial and apostolic way of life.

We were persuaded to add “Witness of Fidelity, Rich in Hope” to the title of this article on account of the continual reference to the

² Cf. Ana Rosa SIVORI, *The Beginning of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Thailand. The First Twenty Years (1931-1952)*, in Nestor C. IMPELIDO (Ed.), *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia. Vol.II, The Salesian Family* (= Associazione Cultori Storia Salesiana- Varia 3), Hong Kong 2006, pp.67-73.

³ A.R. SIVORI, *The Beginning of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, p.73

concept of hope by the Superiors of the SDB and of the FMA, by lay people and religious, by the FMA themselves, as well as in the chronicles and annual reports with respect to the attainment of the educative goal, the response of those cared for, the growth of the proposed activities and the intervention of the Lord and Mary Help of Christians. Of these we would like to cite a few:

Fr Antonio M. Alessi SDB, author of the book commemorating the 50 years of the FMA in Thailand affirms: "I had the fortune of being close to and knowing personally the courageous few who spread the Christian faith in this faraway land, which is *today heading towards a more radiant future*"⁴.

Fr Gaetano Pasotti SDB, requesting the presence of the FMA in Thailand wrote: "*I am certain a wonderful field of work and of apostolate is about to open in this country, also for our sisters*"⁵.

Not less encouraging is the affirmation and testimony of Mother Cogliolo as recalled by Sr Teresa Merlo: "Our heroic sisters of Thailand [...] I am sure that the Madonna will help them to grow, to do much good, and one day also to have good vocations"⁶.

Fr Cesare Castellino, writing to the Rector Major regarding the growth of the Salesian foundation at Banpong stated the following in a letter which was later published in the Salesian Bulletin:

"[...] among our houses of Siam, that of Banpong seems to be destined by God to gather abundant fruits in the cultural and spiritual spheres of this nation. A little beacon of light in this zone which is a stronghold of Siamese Buddhism, being home to the most splendid and famous pagan temple, it now occupies a place in the vanguard, achieved through ten years of hard work and sacrifice"⁷.

⁴ CMPB, p. 8

⁵ Quoted in CMPB, p. 9

⁶ Quoted in CMPB, p. 55

⁷ Cesare CASTELLINO, *Incremento dell'opera salesiana a Banpong*, in BS LXIII (luglio 1939) 214.

In one of the outlines of the educative and apostolic work of the sisters drawn up on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the FMA presence in Thailand we read:

“This year, therefore, marks a jubilee year for the Institute in this country. But for the sisters concerned – the real protagonists of this anniversary – more than a destination arrived at, it is a goal to be attained. Having reached a milestone, they look forward with confidence to the future, ready for higher flights and greater conquests of charity and apostolate”⁸.

One last example: the FMA missionaries themselves had made their own the invocation “*In te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum!*”⁹.

1. An Overview of FMA History in Thailand

The thirty-year span from 1931 to 1961 covering the apostolic work and fecundity of the FMA in Thailand, characterized by its historical, political, social, cultural, economic, artistic, religious and spiritual legacy, may be divided into three periods corresponding to the terms of animation and government of the three Mothers General.

Initially the situation of Thailand was not well known to the Superiors General who, though desirous to respond to the first requests for FMA personnel for the education of youth, found themselves in socio-political situations not conducive to communication and to providing suitable and sufficient personnel to the different Provinces in the East. Despite the limits on direct and frequent communication, especially in the first decade of their missionary presence, there was never a lack of mutual interest and confidence on the part of the Superiors and the missionary sisters.

⁸ FMA Provincial Archives, Bangkok, [Anonymous notes on the occasion of the Institute's Silver Jubilee]

⁹ Quoted in CMPB, p.102.

1.1. *Term of Mother Luisa Vaschetti (1924-1943)*

The FMA presence in Thailand was one of those started during the term of office of Mother Luisa Vaschetti. During this period, in fact,

“Central houses for the formation of the missionaries were opened in Italy [...] Mother Luisa Vaschetti was described as ‘deeply and tenaciously Salesian’; she faced up decisively to the problem she considered of vital importance, namely, the formation of the sisters and the increase in vocations. Furthermore she maintained that the missionary aspect was fundamental and so the missionary expeditions continued unabated despite the difficult socio-political situation”¹⁰.

Subsequently our mission profited greatly from this policy, in terms of both quality of personnel and activities.

1.2. *Term of Mother Linda Lucotti (1943-1957)*

This period is marked by a World War (1939-45), which put to severe test the cohesion of the Institute and its ability for gradual reconstruction. Several sisters and youth fell victims to the war. Several communities and educational activities disappeared, especially in Eastern Europe and People’s China. Institutions were destroyed, communities were dispersed, sisters were deported to concentration camps or to prisons. Our two communities of Bang Nok Khuek and Banpong too were not spared the last mentioned fate.

Nevertheless, in the immediate post-war period, the internal development of the Provinces continued and in 1954 the Institute opened its first house in Australia, as well as in other countries of East Asia (Philippines, Korea) and Africa (Mozambique).

Mother Linda’s programme involved visiting those communities that had not received the visit of a Superior for several years.¹¹ She

¹⁰ “Mother Luisa Vaschetti” in <http://www.cgfma.org>, 02.06.09.

¹¹ “Mother Ermelinda Lucotti” in <http://www.cgfma.org>, 03.06.09.

sent one of the Councillors as her delegate to the provinces she was not able to visit personally. Mother Carolina Novasconi visited the mission of Thailand as her delegate on 5 March 1958. It was a very brief visit, lasting just a day, but sufficient to strengthen the bonds of fidelity and fraternal communion.

It was Mother Linda who, after careful discernment, decided to authorize negotiations regarding the acceptance of a school for the blind at Bangkok, in part also yielding to the pressures of the Salesian Bishop Gaetano Pasotti as well as other local civil authorities. They were particularly interested in entrusting the management of this institution to the FMA, having great confidence in the efficacy of their educative and administrative presence.¹²

The FMA in Thailand consider Mother Linda

“The noblest figure of a superior, who continued the tradition of those strong and loving mothers gifted to her Daughters by the Help of Christians to lead them in the work begun by their Co-foundress St Mary Mazzarello. [...] At her death, great was the mourning of all the sisters who had known her personally and felt as though they had lost a mother. The Provincial, Sr Antonietta Morellato said, ‘She was a real mother to us – loving, understanding and generous. We shall express our gratitude to her through our prayers in suffrage for her noble soul’.”¹³

1.3. *Term of Mother Angela Vespa (1958-1969)*

Mother Vespa was elected during General Chapter XIII held from 14-24 September 1958. We here refer only to the first three years of her term of office which have influenced the growth in quality and number of the FMA and their institutions also in our mission, which was in need of a more qualified communication, dialogue with the Superiors General and pastoral/professional preparation according

¹² CMPB, p.72.

¹³ CMPB, p.115.

to the principles of her government. She wanted to involve the FMA as much as possible in the preparation for Vatican Council II.

Through her formative communication, the Conciliar spirit and experience calling for a renewed vision of consecrated life, of presence in the society, of educational and pastoral mission and improvement in the biblical, liturgical and pastoral preparation of the religious re-echoed also here among the FMA in Thailand.

During these years, there was awareness of the dawn of a new era across the social, cultural, political and religious landscape, but it was impossible to foresee with any certainty the consequences of the altered situation at all levels.¹⁴

In these years Mother Angela guided the Institute from the Centre with the wisdom of her directives and through various gatherings and international congresses, notably the international catechetical congress of 1963, with the participation also of some FMA from Thailand.¹⁵

At the conclusion of General Chapter XIII she suggested to transfer the Provincial House to the capital Bangkok in spite of the difficulty of finding a suitable place. With maternal insistence she exhorted the sisters, "Pray much to Mary Help of Christians and you will see that what seemed impossible till today will be realized with her assistance! Only have faith and courage"¹⁶.

On this occasion, conceding the request of Sr Antonietta Morellato to be relieved of the role of Provincial for reasons of declining health, Mother Angela called her along with Sr Teresa Merlo who was to succeed her and told them, "Do everything possible to increase the number of vocations and the houses. I shall pray in a special way for this country and for the difficult work the sisters are carrying out"¹⁷.

¹⁴ "Mother Angela Vespa" in <http://www.cgfma.org>, 03.06.09.

¹⁵ CMPB, p. 119.

¹⁶ Quoted in CMPB, p. 119, from a Report of Sr Merlo, 23.06.1983.

¹⁷ Quoted in CMPB, p.116, from a letter of Sr Merlo from Bangalore, 26.06.1983.

Unable to visit the Province personally Mother Angela sent Mother Nilde Maule as Visitor from 18 May to 20 June 1958. Knowing that the Province never had a meeting with any of the Superiors from the Centre for a sustained period of time, she was lavish with her kindness, unmindful of fatigue and sacrifices. Though not enjoying good health, she wanted to visit all the houses thoroughly, speak to all the sisters, novices and aspirants, and offered ample opportunities also to the teachers, students and past pupils to meet her.¹⁸

This reference to the role of the Mothers General and indirectly to their Councils, and the response of the FMA of these thirty years of the mission, serve to highlight the witness, on the part of both sides, to the vitality of the Salesian and Mornesian charism.

2. Implantation of the Charism: Ideals and Challenges

This reflection on the implantation of the charism in Thailand is done in the light of the knowledge and practice of the Constitutions professed by the FMA missionaries first and then the native FMA who followed them. We would like to underline our conviction and theirs that

“The Constitutions are a mirror of the charism; they configure our charismatic identity and are therefore a constant point of reference, a perennial source of inspiration and verification for our daily life. Fidelity to the Rules is a guarantee of the future of the Institute as Don Bosco himself wrote in his Testament: ‘Divine Providence has prepared a happy future for our Congregation and its glory will endure as long as the Rules are faithfully observed’. For our first missionary sisters and for those of the subsequent groups, fidelity to the Constitutions was a must and it became for them a spontaneous expression of their witness. Further, in organizing the activities which they undertook based on providential signs, they carried out a process of discernment in accordance

¹⁸ CMPB, p.118.

with the spirit of the Constitutions, bearer of a charismatic project”¹⁹.

The fidelity of the sisters was the fruit of their knowledge and in-depth personal living of the renewed Constitutions approved by the Church on 4 April 1922. The scope of the Institute outlined therein described the ideal which became theirs with the assumption of the responsibilities accruing from their religious profession as FMA. It is fitting that we evoke this scope the better to appreciate their witness of fidelity to the FMA consecration and to the educational praxis in the preventive style.

Scope of the Institute

- i. The primary scope of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is the sanctification of the sisters who are its members, through the observance of the three simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and of their Constitutions.
- ii. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, therefore, shall strive before all else to practice the Christian virtues, especially charity, piety, kindness, spirit of work and sacrifice, after which they will dedicate themselves to the good of their neighbour.
- iii. A secondary and special scope of the Institute is to promote the salvation of the neighbour, through the Christian education of the daughters of the populace.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians shall, therefore, open festive oratories, schools, nursery schools, orphanages, hostels for young working women and students, and trade schools for poor girls, also in the foreign missions.

¹⁹ Piera CAVAGLIA, *Le costituzioni segno dell'amore di don Bosco e a don Bosco*, Roma, Casa Gen. FMA 2005.

They may also likewise open educational institutions for girls, with a preference for those from humble backgrounds, and they shall not teach their pupils anything other than those sciences and arts, which are in conformity with and required by their social situation. It will be their task to educate them to piety, make them good Christians and capable eventually of earning their livelihood honestly; and in their work of Christian education and instruction of youth, they shall remain faithful to the teachings of their holy founder, Don Bosco.²⁰

In the light of these objectives we can offer some observations regarding the fidelity to the consecration and to the educative, pastoral, evangelizing mission of the 14 batches of FMA missionaries to Thailand, expressed through their lives and educational activities.

2.1. *As Women Consecrated to God: the Ideals*

2.1.1 Life of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience

The Virtue of Chastity was manifested in fraternal and joyous relationships among the members themselves of the community, in selfless and loving dedication to the children and girls to whom they extended maternal care and constant presence, in respect and reserve towards grownups who approached them and with whom they worked, aspiring only to belong to the Lord and to spread his Kingdom.

A typical example of this is the testimony we find in the chronicles and in the already cited book of A.M. Alessi regarding the service Sr Luigina di Giorgio used to render in the dispensary of the mission: “Even the Buddhist monks used to come in large numbers to the dispensary to be treated by her, even if the rules forbade them to be touched by a woman. But in the case of “ser Moo” (Sister Doctor) the superior was willing to make an exception”²¹.

The persons who approached the sisters and observed their way of life realized that they were women given to God and recognized

²⁰ FMA Const. (1922), 1-3.

²¹ CMPB, p. 38.

their identity as virgins, although many people, having no knowledge of religious life, when meeting them in different places, would ask them directly where they lived, whether the girls who accompanied them were their daughters etc.

The Virtue of Poverty was expressed by their normal, spontaneous, joyous adjustment to privations and discomforts of every sort. In fact, our sisters did not even consider them such, aware from the time of their departure for the missions that they would have even less than what they were used to; furthermore, comparing themselves to those who lived in the same surroundings they felt more the need to share with them the little or very little they had to satisfy their basic everyday requirements. "Life at Banpong began in the greatest poverty; plenty of work, lot of sacrifices and no conveniences. They were put up in a wooden shed, where they came together every evening to take rest"²².

It was the same subsequently in the other communities too. The experience of poverty and the continuous adjustment to the situations was, however, always lived with a great sense of trust in and abandonment to Divine Providence. Among other examples, that of the community of Udon (1960-61) stands out. The evening of their arrival an old Vietnamese woman came to the Directress and said, "Mother, your daughter has little to offer, but am happy to share with you all I have". So saying, she presented her a packet containing five eggs and five bananas, just sufficient for that first evening's dinner.

The school required various kinds of equipment. The amount available was placed at the feet of the statue of Our Lady Help of Christians and she was invoked to provide the rest. And she did. Someone came forward to arrange bus transport for the students. American soldiers were solicitous in sharing their resources and of their own initiative donated fuel, provisions and various other things.²³

²² CMPB, p. 48.

²³ CMPB, p. 126-131.

Also with regard to the organization of their activities our sisters had to face hardships due to the lack of funds to actualize their projects. But they were sustained by their trust in Divine Providence, not only in the initial period but also later on, particularly at the time of transferring the Provincial House from Banpong to Bangkok in accordance with the directives of Mother General and her Council in 1958.

“After much searching around, land was finally offered by the Salesians where their procure was situated on Saladeng Road. The Province being very poor, after one year the FMA did not still have the sum to pay the Salesians by the due date. But with the help of the Superiors and donations received from different sources the required amount was put together and to the great satisfaction of all we were able to keep our word”²⁴.

This new presence was inaugurated on 24 May 1960. Regarding the presence at Haad-yai begun in 1950, we have the testimony of the sisters who had gone to open this new institution about the insufficiency of funds for setting it up:

“Our Father St. John Bosco always started his works with meagre resources and much trust in God. Our own experience until now was that we too could do like this, but this time the undertaking seemed far beyond our strength and at a certain point we thought we could go no further. We lived through anxious moments, we prayed ... Probably this was needed to move our dear heavenly Mother! Finally the help came and the school was opened to welcome the students of the nursery and elementary classes ... and the lower and upper middle classes”²⁵.

²⁴ CMPB, p. 119.

²⁵ Archivio Generale FMA Roma [AGFMA], *Racconto di Sr Maria Baldo sulla fondazione della comunità ad Haad-yai anno 1950-51*.

To be poor was for our sisters also an exigency in order to express their solidarity with those entrusted to their care, with the people in general and with their individual and collective needs.

“Besides running the school, taking care of the women’s associations and of the kitchen and laundry of the Salesians, the sisters also started visiting the Christian families of the nearby villages. They were always welcomed in a festive manner, their visit being considered a real blessing from heaven. At times they also stayed overnight, accepting the hospitality of some family, sleeping on a mat spread on the floor like the people themselves, and eating whatever they offered with great cordiality. It was indeed the missionary life they had dreamed of!”²⁶.

During the Japanese occupation in 1942 the missionaries transformed themselves into “good Samaritans” multiplying the initiatives to extend assistance to the prisoners of war. They distributed medicines, food, clothes and kept up their morale by offering comfort, arranging for the administration of the sacraments, celebration of the Eucharist.²⁷

On 9 September 1954, a fire broke out in the town of Banpong and blazed from noon to 7.00 p.m. The fire caused by the wooden houses and oil lamps, the sole means of illumination, subsided only for want of these combustibles. Only a heap of burnt out rubble remained of the beautiful town, except for a few houses at the outer limits and the Salesian institution built across the railway, whose solidity served as a natural defence against the advance of the flames.

The terrorized girls watched helplessly from the school as their houses burnt down. Salesians, boys and FMA along with the bigger students, rushed to help, trying to carry to safety whatever could be salvaged from the flames. Our schools became refuge for everyone; the grounds were filled with merchandise of every sort – animals, sacks of rice, clothes, vessels, equipment, furniture, furnishings. During

²⁶ CMPB, p.36.

²⁷ CMPB, p. 63-64.

the first days they were converted into a camp for anyone without a house.

People from all over the country vied with each other with expressions of solidarity. The King, Queen and Ministers came personally bringing the first helps. Also the families of the boarders, who lived in the zone spared by the fire, brought clothes and provisions to be distributed to those who were so badly tested by fire. Fervent prayers of thanksgiving went up to the Lord and to the Madonna from the Salesians, FMA, Capuchin Sisters, Camillian Fathers and many others for the protection from danger. The town rose again more beautiful than before, rebuilt in masonry.²⁸

At Udonthani too our sisters had a wide range of social and developmental works on behalf of the poor families which were given provisions and useful things donated frequently and in abundance by the American soldiers, and clothing that came from other sources, even Australia.

Our sisters were generous with their help to the refugees from Laos, visiting them in the camps, comforting them lovingly and distributing foodstuffs, medicines and clothes.²⁹

These concrete lived examples of poverty attest to the adherence of the missionaries to the demands of their Constitutions, "Everyone should be content to have the worst things, and be prepared whenever required to suffer heat, cold, hunger, thirst, fatigue and contempt whenever it redounds to the glory of God, the spiritual good of the neighbor and one's own salvation"³⁰

The Virtue of Obedience was witnessed to by the example of their life in consistency with their Constitutions, "The virtue of obedience imposes on the sisters the duty of carrying out the dispositions of the Constitutions and of the Superiors"³¹.

²⁸ CMPB, p. 106.

²⁹ CMPB, p. 130.

³⁰ FMA Const. (1922), 51.

³¹ FMA Const. (1922), 58.

The existence of only a few communities in this mission land and the distance from the Superiors of the General Council on whom they directly depended, strengthened in the missionaries right from the establishment of the first institutions, the customary attitudes of consultation, docility and discernment in collaboration with them of the will of God on matters regarding the management of the institutions and their related apostolic activities.

Typical in this regard was the wait for the approval of the Superiors in order to take up an institute for the blind. This initiative was very much seconded by Msgr. R. Perros and Msgr. Pasotti, both of whom took great pains to get it entrusted to the Salesian sisters. Their apprehensions were obvious due to the lack of personnel and even more due to the urgency which did not allow time either for deliberation or to obtain the approval of the Provincial and the Rev. Mothers of the General Council, who were so to say left out of the scene.

A cablegram made its way across the ocean to seek permission. [...] Another brought back a negative response: the sisters in Siam were not prepared for such a task. The Lord willed that this reply should arrive a few hours after the deadline until which the Bishops and the eminent personalities had decided to wait for a reply.

The ecclesiastical authorities, certain that our Superiors would have accepted the institution, had given their solemn word to the Committee of the Institute composed of 25 members chosen from the cream of Siamese nobility. It was now impossible to retract without detriment to the image of the Catholic Church. The sisters were in a painful dilemma. But it did not last long. A rapid succession of airmail letters made the situation perfectly clear to the reverend General Council, and their full and whole-hearted consent arrived on 15 August, before the institute was actually entrusted to the sisters.³²

³² CMPB, p.61.

Our missionary sisters have given testimony “to obedience in the spirit of faith, seeing God in the Superiors”³³; they had filial reverence for and docility to Bishops, Provincials and Salesian priests to whom they were accountable or who requested their collaboration. In the same filial spirit they accepted the directives of animation and administration from the Superiors, both of the General Council as well as local, during the period of foundation and gradual expansion of the mission. Here are some examples of letters which exhorted the addressees to renew themselves in this virtue so much esteemed and inculcated by Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello.

“The spirit of lively faith that you always display and the unshaken trust that God offers also to this nation his hour of special Christian comforts, encourage me to augur that every day you may be happier in your religious life, every day better and more observant. If your obedience is prompt and serene, or better still, if it should require the sacrifice of our habits and views, in this faith and in this meritorious love we shall sing our victory”³⁴.

2.1.2 Practice of Christian Virtues

Positive references are not wanting in the lives of the FMA missionaries also with regard to the second article of the Constitutions which says, “The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, therefore, shall strive above everything else to practice the Christian virtues, especially charity, piety, kindness and the spirit of work and sacrifice”.

Some of the sisters of the first 30 years who are still alive testify that they had lived up to these virtuous attitudes through mutual support and accompaniment, despite the limits of their nature and professional upbringing. Some facets of these Christian virtues were warm hospitality, industriousness and a spirit of sacrifice, sobriety coupled with sincere joy, courage tempered with prudence and

³³ FMA Const. (1922), 59.

³⁴ FMA Provincial Archives, Bangkok, *Relazione della visitatrice straordinaria Sr Leonilde Maule, Bangkok 19.06.1959.*

discernment in undertaking apostolic and educational initiatives and services, solidarity with the people, untiring availability in responding to the needs of missionary apostolate, even at the cost of great sacrifice. It evoked great wonder in the people to see these religious who, donning an apron, worked tirelessly side by side with the workers to prepare a welcoming ambient for their dear daughters.³⁵

There are several testimonies regarding the humility of the sisters on various occasions, among which that of Haad-yai:

“Not everyone was happy that European sisters had come to open a school, because they feared strong competition. One of the influential people, owner of a private school not far from where we were to open ours, did everything possible to prevent us. He even approached the Director of Public Instruction in Bangkok to impede our obtaining permission to open the school. But one fine day a sudden storm, accompanied by lightning, thunder and fierce winds, razed to the ground our adversary’s school! The school, built of wood, was probably consumed by termites. The sad fact was that the poor guy could not re-open the school on time for the new academic year.

“What was more amazing was that the opening of our school being delayed due to his complaints, the people who were not aware of his underhand moves to stop us, continued to come to us for admission. [...] In the first year we admitted only girls from the first to the fourth elementary classes. Only students of the school affected by the storm were, out of consideration for the owner, denied admission. But knowing that his school would be opened only in the second semester, we asked if he would like to send his daughter provisionally to ours. The man was really moved by our thoughtfulness first of all in not taking his students and secondly in inviting his daughter to our school. He immediately accepted the offer, hoping probably that the child might pick up English well from us!

³⁵ CMPB, p. 86.

“This gentleman turned out to be very helpful to us thereafter and still continues to be a good friend of ours. See what Mary Help of Christians teaches and helps us to do for this dear pagan nation!”³⁶

Another example of humility is from Bangkok, the school for the blind, from where the sad fact of the first defection among the sisters took place. The sister who left levelled a series of accusations and humiliating allegations against those who remained. Accordingly voices began to circulate that the Italian sisters should be sent away and that the blind inmates were very unhappy on account of the departure of the Thai sister. The Committee began to give ear to these insinuations and the sisters on their part suffered in silence, praying to the Madonna to make truth prevail.

In the face of these insinuations the members of the Trust failed to appreciate the dedication of the FMA. The sisters nevertheless continued to lavish their care and attention on those dear youngsters in order to make them come to terms with their situation and assist them to become self-sufficient and to be of help to their families.³⁷

Another Christian virtue much cultivated by the FMA was piety, particularly Eucharistic and Marian, which have their nourishment and expression in the liturgy. Whenever they were about to begin a new foundation or buildings had to be put up, the usual request of the sisters was always to construct the chapel first before anything else, so that they could have the presence of the Eucharistic Lord in the house. Thus at Haadyai the construction of a chapel, where for the first time the Eucharistic sacrifice was celebrated on 3 May 1954, was a much awaited and longed for grace. The lack of a place where to preserve the Blessed Sacrament, to gather in prayer and to participate together with the whole community in the Holy Mass, was the greatest privation the sisters had to bear during the five long years from the beginning of the foundation. Besides, it was a great

³⁶ AGFMA, *Racconto di Sr Maria Baldo*.

³⁷ CMPB, p.76.

inconvenience having to go daily early in the morning, at times in the wind and in the rain, to the residence of the Salesians for the practices of piety.³⁸

Love for Eucharistic Jesus was inseparable from love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose presence was equally felt by the sisters both individually and as a community. According to one of the accounts, the first to confirm this was Sr Luigina Di Giorgio. While travelling by boat along the river, during the final tract before arriving at Bang Nok-Khuek, Sr Luigina suddenly burst into tears. Everyone gathered around trying to comfort her. Calming herself somewhat she was able to explain herself. 'It is not homesickness or regret', she said, 'but the exact sight of what I had seen in a dream before setting out. I had seen with absolute precision all what our eyes are beholding now – the canal with its dark water, the small boats crisscrossing it, the palms stretching skyward, the little houses perched on the bank, the huge bunches of bananas semi-hidden by the giant leaves ..., and finally we shall see the church of Our Lady which is awaiting us'. In fact, at the end of the trip they would see the tall spire of the belfry of the Church of the Nativity of Mary.³⁹

Love for Jesus in the Eucharist and for the Virgin Mary disposed our missionary sisters to take up initiatives of fervent preparation for the feasts and solemnities of the liturgical year as well as the celebration of special anniversaries. Such preparation was not limited to them only, but was done with the participation of the girls in their care and the people to whom they offered their developmental services in the area where they lived.⁴⁰

On the occasion of the definition of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in body and soul to heaven on 1 November 1950, event of exceptional importance for the whole church, the sons and daughters of Don Bosco, brought up as they were in his school,

³⁸ CMPB, p. 102.

³⁹ CMPB, p. 11.

⁴⁰ CMPB, p. 35.

could not but participate in the joy of the whole believing world and solemnly celebrate the great event.

That year as part of the celebrations of the Jubilee Year there was also the visit of the “Pilgrim Virgin” of Fatima, with the statue of the Madonna of Fatima arriving in Bangkok on 2 December 1950 at 13.00 hours. A motorcade consisting of 300 cars awaited the arrival of the Immaculate Virgin at the airport. For the first time hymns and prayers in honour of the Blessed Virgin re-echoed in that Buddhist city. Police forces were employed to ensure order, as the traffic was interrupted for four hours in the two main arteries of the city. Nothing of the like had ever happened in connection with a religious ceremony. 10,000 Catholics and 90,000 adherents of other religions consisting of Buddhists, animists and Muslims, participated. Three-fourths of the students were non-Catholics, each carrying a lily in hand, singing Mary’s praises. Catholic Ministers and Consuls of various nations too joined the procession. A similar sight was never seen in Thailand, where only a few years earlier in 1940, a real persecution had been unleashed against the Catholic Church.⁴¹

Not less solemn was the welcome accorded the “Madonna” at the Salesian mission of Ratburi on 11 December. On this occasion too the FMA did not spare themselves in the preparations for welcoming and honouring the Mother of God, participating in all the celebrations in Bangkok, at Banpong and Bang Nok Khuek. As though to reward them for their love, the Madonna sent the gift of a white dove that accompanied her all through the entire pilgrimage in Thailand.⁴²

It has been noticed that devotion to the Virgin Mother was always the first sign of positive response to the educative pastoral action of the sisters. A simple testimony of a blind boy on the feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December 1949 abundantly proves this. During the academy, in the presence of the Archbishop, relatives

⁴¹ CMPB, p. 92.

⁴² CMPB, p. 93-94.

and important personalities, while the hymn “*Andrò a vederla un dì...*” [I’ll meet her one day] was being sung, at one point a newly baptized boy burst out as though struck by a sudden revelation, exclaiming “Oh, what a joy! I never thought of it. In heaven I won’t be blind any more and I will be able to see the face of the Madonna!”⁴³

Communities and institutions of the FMA have been named after “Mary” in the certainty of her maternal presence; in her name and on dates of her liturgical feasts houses and important activities have been started; her statues and pictures have adorned places accessible to everyone. While announcing the construction of a new school building at Haad-yai, Sr Morellato the Provincial said, “I invite everyone to pray with faith. This year as we celebrate the centenary of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, we shall try to obtain from the Madonna this grace [of completing this building]”⁴⁴. She also invited the day students and the boarders to do the same. Everyone responded to the invitation.

The Madonna did not disappoint them. Before long a proposal for the sale of a large plot of land almost in the centre of the town arrived. It was exactly what they had always wanted... even if it had remained a forbidden dream on account of the exorbitant price the owner was asking. They had even, in keeping with a Salesian tradition, furtively thrown medals of the Help of Christians into the plot. Now it was up to the Madonna to remove the obstacles and help her daughters to construct a school where many youths would come to know and love her.⁴⁵

The year 1959, being the first centenary of the apparitions of the Madonna at Lourdes, was celebrated in Marian spirit. To commemorate this extraordinary event it was decided to build a beautiful grotto at the Narivooth school (Banpong). Blessed on 11

⁴³ [Anonymous], *Festa bianca nella casa dei ciechi*, in BS LXXIV (maggio 1950) 176.

⁴⁴ Quoted in CMPB, p. 101.

⁴⁵ CMPB, p. 101-102.

February, the date of the first apparition, it soon became a favourite destination for visits and prayers of both the sisters and the students, including Buddhists.⁴⁶

The new house of Bangkok on via Saladeng was opened on 24 May 1960. Promoted by Msgr. Chorin, Archbishop of Bangkok, it had the scope of providing social and religious assistance to Catholic youth who attended the high schools in the city and those who worked in private families of the capital. By the express wish of Rev. Mother General it was to be also the Provincial House. In fulfilment of a vow made by her, Sr Teresa Merlo ordered a beautiful statue of Mary Help of Christians from Italy, which was placed on a pedestal at the entrance to the courtyard, for the protection of her daughters and the boarders. The boarding was placed under the protection of Mary and named 'Auxilium'.⁴⁷

These examples testify how our sisters nourished their faith and their response to the Lord after the example of our Founders. For this reason they were always conscious of their Salesian vocation. Love for Don Bosco and for St Mary Dominic Mazzarello found expression in very spontaneous and joyful celebrations, especially following their canonizations. On Easter Sunday, 1 April 1934, Don Bosco was canonized and elevated to the highest honours of the altar by Pope Pius XI, who had known him personally. At the solemn ceremony of canonization the King and Queen of Thailand were present in St. Peter's, Rome, expressly come for rendering homage to the Saint who had sent his sons and daughters to their land. The canonization of Don Bosco was then solemnized in all the houses, but especially at Bang Nok Khuek, the centre of the Thai mission. The sisters as usual were very generous with their cooperation in rendering homage to their Father and Founder.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ CMPB, p. 118.

⁴⁷ CMPB, p. 121-122.

⁴⁸ CMPB, p. 41.

Regarding the canonization of Mary Mazzarello, we read in *Con Maria nel paese del buddismo*:

“Another happy event has brought immense joy to the entire Salesian Family: Blessed Maria Domenica Mazzarello, co-foundress of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, has been raised to the honours of the altar on 24 June 1951. At the propitious occasion also Thailand was represented. The choice fell on two missionaries of the first group who still have their parents in Italy, Sr Morellato and Sr Amati. Twenty years had passed since their arrival in Thailand and they had never imagined that they would once again see their family and motherland”⁴⁹.

We wouldn't like to omit another charismatic aspect of the Salesian vocation of the FMA continuously safeguarded and renewed, namely, love and fidelity to community life with all its implications both with regard to personal exigencies as well as to situations pertaining to living and working together.

In the animation and management of the works entrusted to each community the sisters sought to consolidate their bonds of fraternity through the joyous as well as the painful events, in order to make their educative presence fruitful among those entrusted to their care and among their collaborators in the educative field. We shall illustrate their experience of community life with an example from the period of the war, 14 years after the start of the mission. Following the frequent raids from the beginning of 1945 until the terrible one of 21 April the Salesians, Capuchins and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians took refuge along with others at Bang Nok Khuek. Only Sr Lauton and Sr Bonmassar remained to guard the house. During the quiet period at Bang Nok Khuek the three communities resumed their regular life in the hope of better times to come, intensifying their prayers that the good Lord might shorten for them and for the whole world the anxieties of the trial. The community of the Daughters of

⁴⁹ CMPB, p. 96-97.

Mary Help of Christians had also the joy of making their retreat and on 14 May, as the culmination of those days of greater intimacy with God, had the satisfaction of assisting at the religious profession of three Thai novices.

When the nightmare of the war finally ended on 15 August 1945, feast of the Assumption, at the news that also Japan had surrendered, these communities gathered together to thank the Lord who, amidst many threats and difficulties had preserved them safely. After two years of anxiety and separation, the religious could return to their houses and resume their activities. After some misadventures the sisters reached the house of Banpong towards 9.30 p.m., tired but happy to be back home. The following day was hectic putting things in order, but the joy was great of being together once again and narrating all the misfortunes and misadventures of their long period of forced separation.⁵⁰

2.2. *The Challenges as Salesian Educators*

The secondary scope of the Institute is to contribute to the salvation of neighbour by providing Christian education to the daughters of the populace. The commitment to the spiritual growth of the sisters in their vocation as FMA, consecrated women, apostles and educators was always desired, valued and nurtured with the best means at their disposal. This was a valid contribution which, together with the providential presence of the Lord and the tangible assistance of the Virgin Mother, enabled the sisters to plan and manage their institutions where children, youth, collaborators and benefactors found a place of welcome.

It is actually in their direct intervention in the fields of education, evangelization and pastoral activities that their witness of faithful love to the Lord has borne apostolic fruits. They were able to face and overcome challenges and difficulties in their everyday educative

⁵⁰ CMPB, p. 68-69.

experience, always with the ideal of contributing to the salvation of the persons entrusted to them.

The challenges were present right from the first years of their missionary presence. A.M. Alessi has a chapter dedicated to the difficulties of adaptation wherein he expressly describes how the first FMA missionaries took up their mission whole-heartedly, overcoming with their constant dedication the inevitable difficulties and inconveniences of daily life.⁵¹

It was a challenge in the first place to adapt themselves to the new ambient, culture and style of life, totally different from theirs and previously unknown. The new language rendered absolutely impossible any sort of communication or understanding. It was also in the interests of the Salesians that they learn the language at the earliest; so someone offered to teach them. For half an hour daily everyone attended the lesson, with the exception of Sr Di Giorgio who, with her fame of a proven tailor and her medical skills, immediately found full time work – cutting and stitching clothes for the missionaries, and treating the sick who flocked to the dispensary.

The missionaries of all the batches had to go through this process of learning, eventually with the help of the sisters themselves, taking also the exams in order to qualify themselves for teaching. Learning the language of the place has always been the first stumbling block they had to overcome. There were many an instance of not understanding and even of misunderstanding what was said, with the final outcome of a hearty laughter. Armed with a holy patience and much good will, the sisters like little children began to babble the first words and the different tonalities, repeating them hundreds of times in the course of the day. The glaring mistakes contributed to keeping alive the spirit of cheerfulness in the community.

In addition to this there was the need to adapt to the food, rather scarce and devoid of vitamins and calories. The only drink

⁵¹ Cf. CMPB, p. 30-34.

was tea and rain water collected in large tanks and hence lacking minerals, or river water carefully boiled.

The hot and sultry weather generally at room temperatures around 35°C came down to 20°C or so only for a couple of weeks in the year. This greatly weakened the physical constitution.⁵²

On account of these adverse conditions the sisters contracted sicknesses such as elephantiasis and malaria, on account of which some of them had to return to their homelands for health reasons.⁵³

Another challenging factor during this initial period was the introduction of indigenous sisters into the community. At their arrival the FMA were temporarily put up in the house of the “*auxiliary women*” attached to the girls’ school with 150 students. It was a community of eight women who had been assistants of the Salesians, advanced in age and afflicted with various ailments. They had dedicated themselves to the service of the Church and for many years rendered valuable assistance to the Salesians. Teaching of catechism had become their only activity. In the house there lived also orphan girls and some women who worked as maids.

Our sisters, brought up in other settings and with a different mentality, did everything possible to adapt themselves to the usages of the community out of respect for them and because the primary reason for which they were called was to cooperate with them in the formation of the personnel and to help in the work the Salesians were carrying out. It was the idea of the Salesian Bishop Msgr. Gaetano Pasotti to invite the FMA to take care of these women – Catholic women who had dedicated themselves to the service of the Lord and to the mission – and eventually to replace them.

Adaptation to the Thai situation demanded also knowledge of the Buddhist religion, of its local practices as well as a deeper knowledge in view of establishing positive relationships with its followers who were our charges, collaborators or acquaintances.

⁵² CMPB, p. 30-34.

⁵³ CMPB, p. 40.

Ninety-five percent of the Thai population consists of followers of Buddhism, declared "official national religion" by the Constitutions of 1932. It is impossible to understand the mentality, culture, civilization and traditions of these people without reference to Buddhism, which has always had and still has a decisive influence on the history, art, culture and customs of this country.

Buddhism also constitutes the greatest difficulty to the spread of Christianity which, after many centuries does not yet count 200,000 members. The majority of converts are native Chinese, Laotians, Annamites or from animist tribes that live in the north of the country.⁵⁴

In the beginning there was a certain freedom of religious expression, on account of which the celebrations, catechesis and pastoral activities could not only be conducted peacefully but were also attended by the people out of esteem for the missionaries. Subsequently for political motives, and at times due to a spirit of competition on the part of the Buddhists, conflicts arose.

With the outbreak of World War II the situation became even more tense. It was further aggravated by the Thai-Indochina conflict in 1940, which resulted in the rupture of diplomatic relations with France. The government demanded the restitution of the territories ceded to French Indochina in 1897. The deteriorating relationship with France paved the way for a certain amount of hostility against the Church. All the French missionaries in the capital and in the eastern provinces were confined to house arrest in Bangkok; many preferred voluntary exile instead. Even the native clergy, formed at the school of the French missionaries, were subjected to vexations and violence, inflicted by a fanatical group. The Salesians, majority of them Italians, were left in peace and could thus partly substitute the pastors who were forced to abandon their flocks.

The hostility towards the Catholic Church, however, grew even more violent. On 11 February 1941 the head of the government invited all the Thais to proclaim themselves Buddhists, inciting the Catholics

⁵⁴ CMPB, p. 18.

to renounce their Christian religion and declare themselves followers of the Buddha. The slogan they adopted was 'a true Thai is a Buddhist'!⁵⁵

The imprisonment and assassination of the seven Thai martyrs and the blessed martyr Fr Nicola Bunkerd Kitbamrung belong to this period. However, wherever we had established presences for the benefit of children and youth we were respected even when the government, especially some education ministers, adamantly insisted on displaying symbols of Buddhist religion in the schools. A.M. Alessi affirms, "The progress of the Church in this country of the East was therefore slow, difficult and painful. But today, in the country that may be termed the most Buddhist in the world, the prospects of peace and progress have opened also with regards to Catholicism for the good of the nation"⁵⁶.

Another challenge that put to the test the faith and fidelity of the sisters just 10 years after their arrival in Thailand was World War II with its immediate consequences, particularly the persecution of lay persons, religious and priests belonging to the nations involved in the conflict.

The global conflict: With the outbreak of World War II the situation became very tense. The hostility towards the Catholic Church, or to be more precise against the "French Church", became even more violent on account of which missionary fathers and sisters, forced to be confined to Bangkok, preferred voluntary exile. Though the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, majority of them Italians, were left in peace, after the episcopal consecration of Mgr. Pasotti the situation was such that practically all the Catholic schools had to be closed.

The same situation prevailed also at Banpong. Nevertheless Sr Rose Moore and Sr Cecilia Phalavasu, of Irish and Thai nationalities

⁵⁵ CMPB, p. 27, 56.

⁵⁶ CMPB, p. 29.

respectively, repeatedly went to Ratburi, the provincial headquarters, to obtain permission for re-opening the school in the new scholastic year. They prayed, invoked the assistance of the Help of Christians and finally on 28 March 1940 the education minister gave them permission to re-open the school, but only for the pupils of compulsory schooling, and that too only the elementary section. Later, with repeated requests and journeys to Banpong-Ratburi-Bangkok and vice versa, they got permission to take in all the students of compulsory schooling from 8 to 14 years of age. In those trying circumstances it seemed a 'miracle' to be able to contact so many girls and educate them.⁵⁷

Japanese occupation: In 1942 from Burma the Japanese entered Thailand, an ally of Germany and Italy then. It was the cause of serious danger for our institutions and our girls. The beautiful feast of the Immaculate Conception was saddened with the alarming news that the Japanese had entered Thai territory, spreading destruction and panic. The people, majority of them Chinese, fled to the forests for safety. The sisters sent the boarders home and prepared themselves for the worst. On 19 December a Japanese official took into custody Sr Rose Moore who was Irish but having a British passport. Due to the insistence of Sr Maria Baldo, the superior, she was allowed to be detained in a small building of the mission, alone and guarded by seven soldiers. On Christmas day, however, she was taken along with two Salesian clerics who were enemy nationals of the Japanese to a concentration camp in Bangkok where there were already 500 prisoners.

Even during the period of detention Sr Rose continued to be a source of great edification for all, generous with her assistance in alleviating the sufferings of the internees, so much so she was freed before the others. With great joy she returned to the community on 18 February 1942.

The discrimination against the Catholics continued more or less openly. Religious instruction was forbidden in the schools. So our

⁵⁷ CMPB, p. 55-59.

sisters conducted catechism classes for the Catholics clandestinely in small groups, hiding themselves in the convent of the Capuchins or in the ironing room of the Salesians. If the Catholics wanted to get jobs they had to renounce their faith. The saddest sight was the inhuman way the prisoners of war were treated.

In the beginning of 1943 the authorities ordered the evacuation of Bangkok and Banpong; foreigners were especially forbidden to remain at Banpong which was declared a war zone. Our sisters were particularly concerned about finding a place and persons to whom they could entrust the three young Thai sisters. On this occasion they experienced the solidarity and the kindness of the sisters of other congregations. The Sisters of St Paul of Chartres offered them their house at Siracha in the South of Thailand.⁵⁸

From prison to exile: One of the hardest trials during the war was the absolute lack of news from relatives and the total separation from the Superiors in Turin and even from the province headquarters at Madras. Of great consolation were the radio message of the Rector Major, Fr Pietro Ricaldone and a letter of Mother General, Sr Linda Lucotti, received through the Red Cross after a four months' delay.

A fresh storm raged with the surrender of Italy on 8 September 1943. The Italians who were till then allies of Japan suddenly became enemies and the Italian missionary fathers and sisters were unwittingly caught up in the new situation. That evening the Japanese police checked the documents of the Salesians, FMA and Capuchins, ordering them not to leave the house. The police also went to arrest Sr Maria Baldo and Sr Stefania Bonmassar who were at Bang Nok Khuek. But knowing the situation, they left the place and spent the night at Ratburi, from where early next morning they took the train to Banpong. On arrival there, they got out on the opposite side of the station and reached the house without being noticed by anyone. To prevent their possible deportation by the Japanese, on 11 September the Thai authorities declared the Italian sisters under arrest and confined them

⁵⁸ CMPB, p. 60-64.

to the convent of the Capuchin sisters, while the Thai Capuchin sisters joined the Thai FMA in our school. The two groups were forbidden to meet. But knowing the good they were doing in the education of youth, they were allowed to continue to run the school which remained in the hands of the three Thai FMA and the three novices. They were told to remove the chapel from the school building and not to leave any religious symbols in the class rooms so as not to provoke the animosity of those who were opposed to Catholic schools.⁵⁹

Promotion of local vocations and cultural preparation of personnel: Another two challenges our sisters had to face were the promotion of local vocations for responding to the increasing number of pupils, institutions and other educational structures, and the cultural preparation of personnel for a constant updating of the quality of their educative and pastoral action.

The problem of indigenous vocations has always been the most persistent in Thailand, given the scanty number of Catholics, the opposition of families and the lack of aptitude on the part of candidates for community life. Only after seven years of the Institute's presence did the first two Thai youngsters profess in 1938, and one of them left the congregation as a perpetually professed member. After that till 1962 there were only 12 others, who joined at intervals of three, four or five years. Thailand still belonged to the Indian Province of St. Thomas then.

From 1931 to 1961 missionary sisters arrived only every two or even three years to reinforce the numbers – in all 14 expeditions. Until 1959 some of these were also expected to look after the formation of the diocesan sisters. Bishop Pasotti as also his successor Msgr Pietro Carretto had this new congregation very much at heart and wanted to give them a solid formation with a specific Salesian stamp. Hence they appealed to our sisters who, notwithstanding the shortage of personnel, finally consented.

⁵⁹ CMPB, p.65-66.

The number of the FMA, missionaries and indigenous sisters together, was never sufficient to look after the girls whose number kept increasing year by year in all the institutions. They always felt their inadequacy in front of the demands of instruction and education of the girls whom the Lord drew to our houses and of the trust of the parents who entrusted their daughters to their care. The realization of their limits, however, was always coupled with their commitment to getting the necessary qualifications for running the institutions with the help also of lay persons, who were indispensable especially for teaching in the schools.

The significant growth of the institutions year by year is ample evidence of the commitment and continual updating on the part of the sisters despite the experience of poverty and the adverse socio-political conditions.

3. Answers and Results

It's encouraging to view the coherent and creative response of the FMA during the first 30 years in Thailand with reference also to the Institute's second scope already quoted, namely, that of the education of girls especially those poor also in the foreign missions.⁶⁰ They have given proof of wise planning and prudent administration in carrying out the activities that were suggested by the circumstances. We shall present them briefly.

3.1. The Village of Bang Nok Khuek

The first field of apostolate of the FMA in Thailand was at Bang Nok Khuek, as collaborators of the Salesians. Just six months after their arrival the sisters were able to handle the none too easy language and hence in a position to take full responsibility for the management of the school and the various parish activities. Some changes were introduced tactfully and with respect to the elderly native teachers. Each Sister had her responsibility, a new scholastic

⁶⁰ Cf. FMA Const. (1922), 3.

time table was adopted and the number of the orphans was increased, for which a new teacher was assumed. Complying with the request of a few families they also opened a nursery school in the village of Wat Nai.

Another activity which made the work of the sisters known and appreciated was the dispensary. Sr Luigina di Giorgio dedicated herself to this service with great enthusiasm and obtained surprising cures, though still incapable of speaking the Thai language.⁶¹

As more space was needed for the school, the possibility of purchasing a large two-storey building in masonry – the ex-seminary of the Salesians – was promptly considered and the school was transferred there. The Provincial, Mother Clotilde Cogliolo wanted to see it herself in order the better to make the arrangements for its purchase.

3.2. *Banpong, the First FMA Institution in Thailand*

The Salesians already working at Banpong in the province of Ratburi insisted on having the help of the sisters. Msgr. Pasotti while inviting them insisted, “Here you have a vast field of work and it is high time that you begin a second presence”⁶².

They started off at Banpong in 1936 by assisting the Salesians in the management of the kitchen, laundry and wardrobe. Only in 1938, after several procrastinations from the start of the academic year, the sisters were constituted into a religious community dedicated to the Sacred Heart and started the school housed in wooden structures.

On her return in March 1939 the Provincial, Mother Cogliolo, completed the transfer of the sisters from Bang Nok Khuek to the house of Banpong, which became their first independent institution. Four sisters stayed on there in the first house to help the sisters of the diocesan congregation – one as superior of the community, another

⁶¹ CMPB, p.35-36.

⁶² Quoted in CMPB, p.48.

as the mistress of novices, and the other two in charge of the school, workshop, dispensary and parish activities – until the time when the nascent congregation would be in a position to manage on its own.

To accommodate the increased number of students the house of Banpong was further expanded with a new building blessed on 16 October 1952. The sacrifices encountered from the beginning permitted the FMA to lay a sure foundation for the marvelous work that would come up there – the Narivooth School, one of the most sought after schools in Thailand.⁶³

3.3. *School for the Blind, Bangkok*

Towards the end of 1946 the Provincial, Fr Pietro Carretto, successor to Fr Giovanni Casetta, encouraged the superior Sr Maria Baldo to accept the invitation of a rich American lady, Miss Genoveffa Caulfield, to take over her Institute for the Blind. Herself blind from the age of three, she had started a Trust for the education of the blind in Thailand with the programme “Help the blind to help themselves”. Before returning to the USA she wanted to entrust her institution to reliable persons and so thought of the FMA.

It was a completely new field of apostolate for the FMA, difficult and demanding at the same time. Msgr. Perros, Archbishop of Bangkok, too intervened so that the sisters might accept the offer lest it should go to the protestants who were very eager to take it up.

With the consent of the Mother General Linda Luccotti the sisters gave their assent, even though they foresaw the difficulties ahead. The sisters were entrusted with the direction of the institute, and Sr Rose Moore and Sr Cecilia Phalavasu took charge of it in September 1947. The ownership, however, remained with the Trust, which had the right of supervision and control. The Trust consisted of a committee of 25 persons chosen from the cream of Thai nobility.

It is always difficult to begin a centre for the care of persons with serious disabilities. It’s even more difficult to continue one like

⁶³ CMPB, p.45,48,52-54.

this meant for both sexes and different ages, especially by people without any specific preparation in the assistance and education of the blind. Furthermore, the sisters found themselves in an extremely poor setup, lacking many things. However they rolled up their sleeves and got to work courageously.

Eventually the facilities were improved and despite certain relational problems within the Committee, the sisters faithfully lent their collaboration. The government itself constructed a large three-storey building with halls and efficient didactic tools capable of integrating teaching with other educative experiences so that the blind students could be imparted both intellectual and moral education, which would prepare them for their eventual insertion into a society in the process of development. The sisters and pupils moved to the new building on 24 February 1950.

Here the boys and girls of the boarding school attended regular courses, while those of the high school went to schools outside. Those better endowed were given the possibility of attending University either at Bangkok or in the USA, where Miss Caulfield followed them up and sent them to pursue degree courses. Our sisters intervened personally and continuously in offering the students the double orientation of studies or trades by conscientizing the lay people in responsible positions to take care of the education of the pupils. Even the acquisition of reading and writing skills using the Braille system was endorsed and promoted by them. Great care was taken also for teaching music with the use of common as well as typical Thai instruments. Thus two hundred blind students aged between six and fourteen, each with his/her painful past, learnt to appreciate the gift of life, and through study and work made the best of their talents and assured for themselves a better future.⁶⁴

The sisters considered themselves fortunate to dedicate their best energies to the poor unfortunate youth, creatures exceedingly sensitive to all expressions of concern and responsive to every noble

⁶⁴ CMPB, p.71-78.

and generous sentiment. Their only aim was to make the lives of the youngsters more useful and serene and lead them on the path to heaven.⁶⁵

3.4. *Haad-yai, the Third FMA Institution in Thailand*

During her special visit in March 1949, the General Councillor Sr Carolina Novasconi considered the proposal of Msgr. Pasotti, "Mother, now that the storm raised by the war is over, I think the work of the sisters will expand if you send fresh personnel"⁶⁶. While observing that the requests were many that kept arriving from different nations, she promised to consider the need to help the sisters so that the good they were doing with their apostolate could be extended wider. He then presented her the possibility of a presence at Hua Hin, a town which according to the Bishop had a great future besides being in a healthy location. They went for an inspection of the place, but could not comply with the desire of the Salesians.

The request to send missionary sisters was heeded later in the same year 1949 for the first time after the war, with the arrival of the fourth group of missionaries. The three new sisters and some of the Thai vocations were greatly encouraged at the prospect of opening a new field of apostolate, already planned from 25 August 1949. On the occasion of the visit of the Provincial Sr Teresa Merlo the possibility of opening a new house at Haad-yai, a commercial city in the extreme south of Thailand, was deliberated.

The Salesians were already there, invited by a wealthy Chinese who had donated a large piece of land to various religious confessions for starting social works. Msgr. Pasotti and the Salesian Provincial insisted with the FMA Provincial saying that it was the most modern and most important city in the south and that their presence would undoubtedly be a valid contribution to evangelization in that part of

⁶⁵ FMA Madras (Ed.), *Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1922-1947*, The Good Pastor Press, Madras 1948, pp.57-62.

⁶⁶ Quoted in CMPB, p.81.

the country where Catholic minorities lived deprived of all religious assistance.⁶⁷

Twenty years after our arrival in Thailand the sisters were invited by a protestant lady to open a school for girls at Haad-yai and the sisters were eager to start soon. Msgr. Pasotti prudently exhorted them to go slow and discern well before making a decision. Haad-yai was a non-Christian centre and the Catholic Church did not have a support base in the south; hence it would be difficult to start a school there, though at a later period it would still have been possible. Furthermore, before starting the school it would be necessary to be well prepared with modern school premises and well trained qualified personnel knowing English.

The Superiors at the level of the Congregation and of the Province were contacted for permission, which reached through the Vicar General of Msgr. Pasotti. The superior was handed an urgent letter asking her to prepare immediately the papers for opening a school at Haad-yai. The sisters were filled with joy at the thought of a vast new field where to make known the name of God and of the Blessed Virgin.

Divine providence sent help from unexpected quarters to defray the initial expenses. A house constructed in wood was bought and on 10 June 1950 Thidanukhro School was opened. The joy and excitement of the three Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was indescribable as they heard the sweet voices of 350 children repeating word by word the Sign of the Cross and the Hail Mary!

By the following visit of Mother Teresa Merlo the sisters had, with the permission of Mother General, found a plot of 31 Rai (42,000 square meters) for the further development of the school exactly at the place where they had dropped medals of the Madonna. This time too Mary Help of Christians heard their prayer. The Provincial who was coming to Thailand for the second time visited Haad-yai for the first time. She was surprised at seeing so many students crammed in

⁶⁷ CMPB, p.81-83.

such a limited space and advised that adequate premises be provided. It was high time to construct up to date buildings.

On 24 May 1958 Thidanukhro School was shifted to more convenient and comfortable halls. On 24th May 1961 the nursery and the boarding, constructed with the proceeds from the sale of the first 'small house' which very much recalled Mornese and other contributions from the Province, were inaugurated. Also this school of ours, very much esteemed by the authorities and people, made a name for itself among the finest and best managed schools in Southern Thailand. It was a source of great joy for us as we could thus make the Catholic Church shine forth. With the teaching of catechism and Christian morals to more than 1000 pupils, almost all of them non-Christians, we could make God and the Blessed Virgin known, which is the scope of our life.⁶⁸

3.5. *Bangkok – Hostel and New Provincial Office*

Shifting the Provincial office from Banpong to Bangkok was right from the beginning also a response to the exhortation of the Superiors General who wanted the FMA presence in the capital in order the better to serve the needs of the houses. Another reason for starting a second presence in Bangkok was the urgency in opening a students' hostel for young women who flocked to the capital to attend the University and were forced to take up residence in private houses or in public hostels with all the consequent risks and dangers.

The chronicles mention 24 May 1960 as the date of opening of the new house, indicating clearly its scope. The foundation endorsed by Msgr. Chorin, Archbishop of Bangkok, had the scope of providing social and religious assistance to Catholic girls who attended high schools in the city and those who worked as maids in private families of the capital. As per the express wish of Mother General it was also to be the Provincial House.⁶⁹ On 25 June the Archbishop himself

⁶⁸ AGFMA, *Racconto di Sr Maria Baldo 1931-1970*.

⁶⁹ Cf CMPB, p.119-121.

blessed the chapel and declared it a “semi-public oratory” entrusting its pastoral care to the Salesians of Don Bosco.

How many generations of youth have passed the most beautiful period of their life within these walls! How many of them have been settled in life thanks to the intervention of the sisters, and how many more have found here a port of safety from the dangers of a big city! The hostel was placed under the protection of our Blessed Mother and was called ‘*Auxilium*’.⁷⁰

3.6. *Udonthani, the First FMA Presence in North-East Thailand*

The fifth FMA presence in Thailand was at Udonthani. With the transfer of the Provincial office to the capital new avenues of apostolate were opened for the sisters. The Salesian Provincial Fr Ruzzeddu proposed a new presence in the north, desired by the Prefect Apostolic Msgr. James Duhart, Redemptorist, who wanted also for the girls a work like that of the Salesians, with elementary, middle and high school.⁷¹

Despite the acute shortage of personnel and finance in which the Province found itself the proposal was accepted. Msgr. Duhart himself contributed much towards the construction of the school, boarding, chapel and residence of the sisters for starting off the presence there. Besides the school, yielding to the insistence of the Bishop, the sisters opened also a crèche for abandoned children. The guardian angel of these babies deprived of the most basic affection of parents was Sr Teresina Larghi, very affectionate to these little ones literally hungry for affection and caresses besides for food. Always bending over their cradles, she was ready with a smile for one, while amusing another by rocking the baby in her arms that it might stop whining, quick to attend to anyone who claimed her

⁷⁰ CMPB, p. 122.

⁷¹ CMPB, p.124.

attention. Many of them, snatched from death through the loving care of Sr Teresina, were later adopted by families from different nations.⁷²

Our sisters were also generous with their assistance to the refugees from Laos, to whom they distributed food, medicine and clothes, visiting them in the camps and consoling them with great charity.

To ensure the continuity of these activities the sisters always had at heart the formation of the young members by providing suitable personnel, premises and programmes to respond to the requirements of their specific spiritual and apostolic formation, even to the extent of sending them to the provincial headquarters in India.

4. A Particular Instance of Sharing and Transmitting the Charism

The diocesan congregation of the *Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* is for us the first fruits of the experience and the direct transmission of the vocational charism entrusted to Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello by the Spirit. The two Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Sr Luigina Di Giorgio and Sr Antonietta Morellato, were the first instruments docile to the action of God for the formative and pastoral journey of the members of this Congregation. These sisters carried out the service requested of them in guiding the first steps of the nascent Congregation, in the spirit of the FMA Constitutions – those approved in 1922 – which they themselves professed, as reiterated by Sr Maria Sompong Thabping in her work on the role of the FMA in laying the foundations of religious life of the Institute of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.⁷³

⁷² CMPB, p.130.

⁷³ Cf. Maria SOMPHONG THABPING, *Tho.Mo.O.Phu ob-rom wanlak chiwit nakbuat khong Phu-rapchai duang-roethai niramom khong Phra-nag* [The FMA who laid the foundations of the religious life of the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary], Hua-Hin Tha, SIHM 2003.

The implantation of the charism by the first FMA in Thailand is recognized and testified with gratitude by the SIHM Sisters with their lives and by their testimony at the conclusion of the book just cited. "There's no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends". These words were fully realized in Jesus. His disciples and all the missionaries after them have borne witness to this great love for one's neighbour. Leaving their parents, brothers and sisters they have offered their life by following Jesus in the mission lands, communicating the good news and his life so that everyone may be saved.

The initiative of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in sending missionaries to Thailand produced many apostolic fruits, among them giving life to the new religious family '*Ci-songkhro*' and taking care of it in collaboration with Msgr. Gaetano Pasotti its founder. The fruits did not consist only of dying in order to give new life, but also nurturing it with dedication until it grew up and became strong.

Conclusion

Every community of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians established in this missionary land and every service entrusted to them was administered adopting the style of animation proper to the preventive system. The spirituality and the style of life of the preventive system urged the FMA and all their collaborators to a constant renewal of their educative presence.

The sensitivity to recognize, esteem and bolster reason, religion and loving kindness in the formation of the educators and in the interactions with the youth was gradually guaranteed through formative moments incorporated in the daily, monthly and annual programmes. Our sisters were specially attentive to the choice of teachers who, till the 1970s were unmarried and hence more free to dedicate their time and energies to the service of education in our settings. Our sisters tried to sustain in them the educative intentionality specific to our charism in order to make them capable of collaborating in the project of forming the identity of our young beneficiaries – that

of being “*good Christians and honest citizens*” with the Salesian characteristics of “*piety, study/work and joy*”. In administering and animating their activities, the sisters were mindful also of the Buddhist religious reality of their charges, respecting and upholding their cultural values.

Our students of these first thirty years are witnesses of the good they received from the sisters and teachers. These are more available than those of later years in attending the annual meeting of the past pupils.

The missionary experience of our sisters of the first 14 groups of missionaries and of the first seven batches of indigenous vocations is much more significant and laden with rich testimonies than what the limits of this paper will permit to recount. This is, however, more than sufficient exhortation for us in this first decade of the third millennium. We are more than indebted to them for the gift they made of themselves for the expansion of the Kingdom of God in Thailand through their witness of bridal relation with Him and their dedication in starting and consolidating various educational services.

THE IMPLANTATION OF THE FMA IN NORTH-EAST INDIA VIS-À-VIS THE SERVICE OF EDUCATION: IDEALS, ANSWERS, RESULTS

*Bernadette Sangma**

Introduction

This article looks at the first thirty years of the presence and implantation of the Salesian charism on the soil of North-East India. The first group of six FMA missionaries disembarked in this region on 8 December 1923. During the span of time under consideration, there were eight foundations of which seven were in the North-East and one in West Bengal.

The study focuses on the foundation, consolidation and growth of the FMA in the region with special reference to educational services, in order to appraise the extent of human promotion afforded to poor children and orphans, and particularly to girls and rural women of the region through education, and to study the impact of such services on the Church and the society at large.

1. The FMA in North-East India

The role of the FMA in the mission of North-East India can be gathered from the many reports on the life and growth of the local Churches in the different parts of the region. Of particular significance is a letter written by Msgr. Stefano Ferrando on the Salesian Sister in the Mission.¹ With reference to one of the communities in the region,

* FMA, is consultant to the General Council in the area of the empowerment of women.

¹ Cf. Archivio Salesiano Centrale (ASC) B709 (fascicolo 2) *Letter* [hereafter Lett.] *Ferrando - Ricaldone*, Shillong, 20 gennaio 1939. The same is published in Stefano Ferrando, *La suora salesiana in missione* in BS LXIII (maggio 1939) 145-147.

the letter describes the works of the Salesian missionary sisters which ranged from tours to the villages both as trailblazers and as consolidators of the evangelising-catechising work of the priests to educational activities in favour especially of girls and women.

In fact education always constituted a mark of the charismatic identity of the Institute even in the mission lands, where educational interventions were a priority in the different contexts into which it launched out. This was actually the principal focus of Don Bosco too, who recommended to the missionaries, "Take special care of the sick, of the children, of the old and of the poor [...]"²

Education was the hallmark also of the FMA mission in North-East India even as they embraced diverse missionary activities in response to the needs of the place and the time. In living the multi-faceted mission that was required of them, the strong educational perspective gave a specific charismatic slant to their work.

At the time the FMA arrived in the region in 1923 education, even at a primary level, was still a privilege of a few townfolk who could afford it. The situation was worse still with regard to the education of girls and women, especially in rural areas. The FMA joined hands with the Loreto Sisters and the Queen of the Missions as they furthered the project of education of the girls in the region. This study on the FMA in North-East India from 1923 to 1953 will focus specifically on the educational works of the FMA at various levels and in various settings.

2. The Sources

The sources of this study are principally the official documents of the Institute, communications with the General Councils both of the Salesians and FMA, letters, chronicles and other documents.

² [Giovanni Bosco], *Recuerdos de San Juan Bosco a los primeros misioneros*, Introduzione e testo critico a cura di Jesús Borrego. (= Piccola Biblioteca dell' Istituto Storico Salesiano, 2). Roma, LAS 1984, p. 43.

The lack of publications on the educational presence of the FMA in North-East India required a vast research in the archives not only of those strictly pertaining to the Institute but also of other Religious Congregations and of the Salesian Congregation in particular. The central archives that were consulted are: Central Archive of the Salesians - Rome, Archive of the Salvatorian Sisters - Rome, Archive of the Queen of the Missions - Rome, Archive of the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate - Paris and Archive of the FMA - Rome.

A special mention needs to be made of the Central Archive of the Salesians where the research met with stunning surprise in terms of the availability of many precious manuscripts of some of the pioneers and other sisters who worked in the missions of North-East India. Apart from the said materials, there were accounts, articles and reports written by the Salesian missionary priests and Bishops regarding the mission of the FMA in the region.

The Salvatorian Family has published a series of studies and documentation on the Salvatorian history in the *Studia de Historia Salvatoriana*. There already exists a volume documenting the life and activity of the Salvatorian Sisters in the Apostolic Prefecture of Assam 1891-1915. This research, therefore, drew on the published sources which provided valuable and rich information.

The archive of the Sisters of the Queen of the Missions yielded some unpublished typewritten materials regarding the first years of the presence of the Congregation in the region and some of the interesting accounts at the time of replacement of the Salvatorian Sisters in the houses of Shillong and Raliang after their expulsion during the First World War.

Some pertinent information was obtained by post from the Central Archive of the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate in Paris regarding their short-lived but intense mission in Gauhati.³ They

³ The city today is known as Guwahati, but throughout the course of this presentation it will be referred to by its old name, Gauhati, excepting cases of direct quotations.

too suffered the fate of the Salvatorian Sisters at the outbreak of the First World War. It is to be noted that the name of the Congregation then was Catechist Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception.

The General Archive of the FMA has well maintained material on the work of the Institute in the different parts of the world. Moreover, the General Archives of the Salesians possess in comparison a greater amount of material on the activity of the sisters in North East India. The various types of documents in the Archive of the FMA are chronicles, letters, proceedings of the Provincial Council meetings; requests for new foundations, more sisters and financial help.⁴

Apart from the above mentioned documents, there is the *Notiziario* of the congregation with a significant number of articles written by the FMA missionaries in North-East India.

The research in the Provincial archives of the Province of St. Thomas the Apostle, Madras proved very advantageous. It led to the discovery of significant documents such as the proceedings of the Provincial Councils, letters and requests which constituted valuable sources of information. The minutes of the Provincial Council for the years 1940-1949 could not however be traced. The period includes the years of the Second World War during which the majority of the sisters who were of Italian nationality were restricted from outdoor movements resulting in the impossibility of having council meetings.⁵

For the period under consideration, the only materials that could be consulted in the Provincial Archive of Shillong were the chronicles of the different houses including those that are closed. Evidently much of the materials concerning the Province remained in the Province of St. Thomas the Apostle to which the houses of the North-East belonged upto 1953.

⁴ Cf. PIERA CAVAGLIA, *Archivio Generale dell'Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Comunicazione di Suor Piera Cavaglia al Seminario "Scripta Volant. La conservazione della nostra memoria", Madrid, 1-4 novembre 2001. Unpublished).

⁵ Cf. MARY BOUT, *A Pearl of Great Price. The Story of Mother Maria Avio, FMA, Provincial of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, Shillong: Don Bosco Press 1974, p. 110.

The archives of the individual houses that were consulted were: St. Mary's Convent - Gauhati, St. Mary Mazzarello Convent - Jowai, Sacred Heart Convent - Mawlai, St. Joseph's Convent - Tezpur. However, the only valid documents found in most of them were the copies of the chronicles. Two important notebooks were found almost accidentally in the house of St. Mary's Convent, Gauhati which shed much light on the beginnings of the schools in this first community of the region.

Other pertinent documents such as the Reports of the annual visits of the Provincials along with those of the Extraordinary Visits of other Superiors are not retraceable from any of the houses in the region. One of the probable reasons leading to the poverty of the archives of the individual houses could perhaps be attributed to the Chinese invasion of North-East India in 1962. Sr Josephine Gaod, a missionary in the region from 1939, testifies that as the Chinese advanced into the Indian territory reaching up to Tezpur in Assam, the then Provincial, Sr Cesira Gallina asked the remaining sisters in the houses to burn all the documents and to flatten the tombs of the orphans fearing that they may become the cause for unjust accusations.⁶ But it is difficult to ascertain the validity of this argument.

The documents found in the archives are mainly manuscripts and typewritten copies of the annual reports provided first by the Prefect Apostolic and later by the Bishops to the Propaganda Fide as well as to the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation. There are also personal and official letters from the fathers and sisters to the Provincials or to the Major Superiors, both Salesians and the FMA. Interestingly, a good number of these letters were published in the *Bollettino Salesiano*. In fact, all the articles of this bulletin cited in the present research are either entire letters or extracts of the letters of Bishops, Provincials, fathers and sisters who were in the different missions of North-East India. Some of the articles contain all the

⁶ Oral testimony of Sr Josephine Gaod, Shillong, 24 November 1998, in Personal Archive, Audio cassette: Interview of Sr Josephine Gaod by Sr Bernadette Sangma.

details regarding the address and date of the letter and nearly all the articles preserve the format of a letter. Unfortunately the original copy of many of those letters cannot be traced. A considerable number of letters and extracts of reports were retraced also from *Gioventù Missionaria* as will be observed from the pages that follow.

In some cases, the original copies of the letters published in the *Bollettino Salesiano* and *Gioventù Missionaria* can be found in the Archives either of the Salesians or of the FMA and this offered the possibility of making a comparative study to probe the authenticity of the articles in the just mentioned publications. The resulting discovery of the genuineness of the documents with minor changes or additions led to the choice of using the articles in the said reviews recognizing their historical value and worth.

As regards the chronicles of the houses, some of the houses have well-written chronicles with a good coverage of the various activities of the house, whereas others provide very scanty information with lacunae on important activities. In general, the chronicles present the beginnings of the house, day to day life of the community, specific events, evolution of its mission and development of the presence of the FMA in various geographical locations. The chronicles also reflected the ideals of the community, their theological, anthropological views and their vision of the world in general. As regards the educational mission of the community, the chronicles of some of the houses offered interesting notes on the methodology of teaching used in the schools. The description of the visits of the civil scholastic authorities showed that there was much appreciation of the method of teaching adopted by the sisters. However, the lack of any type of documentation and the non-existence of the lesson plans, preparation books of teachers and the notebooks of the pupils of those years constituted an obstacle to the understanding of the same.

The reports of the civil authorities – Ministers of Education, Ministers of Industry, School Inspectors, Deputy Inspectors, Vice-Inspectors – constitute another set of documents, both manuscript and type written. They give a good account of the running of the schools and trade schools, their organisation, educational methodology,

quality of service etc. They also speak about financial constraints and the consequent handicap, and at times also about the contribution given and the support afforded by the government. Unfortunately, such reports exist only concerning the first house founded in the region, St. Mary's Convent, Gauhati.

Another category of documents is the letters from and to the Superiors. A significant number were from the members of the General Council, Provincials, Bishops and Salesian superiors to the local superiors, communities or individual sisters. At times they contain guidelines on how to go about in facing some delicate problems, on relationships with civil authorities, Salesians, pupils, teachers and doctors. Sometimes they contain recommendations on community life, timetable, observance of rules and regulations, prayer life, health and discipline. They shed greater light on some situations which are either obscure or unclear. Some of the individual letters of the sisters to the Superiors provided sources of rich information in that they provide detailed accounts of the living out of the mission, the methods used, challenges faced and the fatigues encountered.

Besides the above listed documents, there are other sources such as newspaper cuttings, articles from the journals, contract papers, testimonies.

3. The Role of the FMA in the Field of Education

The educational mission of eight communities in the different parts of North-East India and West Bengal founded between 1923 and 1953 took the shape of various educational institutions. They were designed to respond to the urgent needs of the context in which the communities were situated. The house of Bandel was the only community outside the region. The others were scattered in the different parts of the region – in the plains such as Gauhati; Tezpur, Dibrugarh and in the hills such as Jowai and Shillong – and were implanted within the different ethnic communities, both tribal and non tribal. The context, in which the sisters worked, therefore, bore their own peculiarities as regards culture, tradition, language and customs. However, it can be said that there were some commonalities as regards

the general conditions and need of education, particularly for girls. For example, in the entire region there existed a general lack of schools, mass illiteracy particularly of women and girls in rural areas, diseases and high mortality rate especially of women and consequently the existence of numerous orphans.

In response to such a situation, the sisters opened formal schools for girls giving priority to those of remote villages who would otherwise have no access to education. Consequently there arose a felt need for boarding homes for school-going girls and young women of the vocational training centres. Other important educational institutions run by the sisters were the various orphanages in almost all the areas in which they worked. In true Salesian style, the oratories constituted one of the informal means of educating the young people through a range of animation programmes, recreation and amusements.

It is remarkable to observe that from the first years of the presence of the FMA in the region much importance was attributed to the education and promotion of rural women. The initiatives and activities in this field constituted another face of the regular formal education and vocational training that was given to the girls and young women of the villages. While the younger generations were given priority in the formal settings, the enhancement of the older generations was realised through those limited and affordable means that could in some way better their personal lives, their families and the communities on the whole. The mission accomplished by the sisters, year after year, with much dedication and commitment did make a difference in the lives of numerous women whom they encountered during the village tours, house visits, marriage preparation courses and ecclesial gatherings. It would suffice to quote one of the remarks of Msgr. Stefano Ferrando, "Great improvement has taken place among the women through their contact with the sisters. During this year [1936-37], they visited 135 communities remaining at least a day in each one".⁷

⁷ ASC A8870332 Ferrando, *Relazione missionaria illustrante la statistica 1936-1937*. Other such remarks can also be found in ASC A8870322 Ferrando, *Attività missionaria nel distretto di Tezpur*; ASC A8870320 *Lett. Ferrando -*

4. Salient Features of the Style of Education

The outstanding elements of the style of education adopted by the FMA in North-East India can be drawn from the many affirmations disseminated in their writings. From them it is possible to discover the features that indicate the basic methodological aspects of the Salesian education. They clearly evince the underlying anthropological, theological and teleological concepts of an educational system that has its source in the pedagogy of Don Bosco. Accordingly they defined their priorities, means and strategies, seeking to impart a truly integral education in the different contexts of North-East India.

4.1. *The Role of Religion*

The principles of education of the FMA in North-East India reflect the great heritage received from Don Bosco. Fidelity to his system of education in the different settings of the whole Institute constituted the entire section of the Manuals and Regulations of the FMA.⁸ Accordingly, there were constant recommendations by the Superiors in their circular letters to read and assimilate the system in order to put it into practice in their educational relationships with the young people.⁹ Faithful to such teachings, the FMA of North-East India lived the educational heritage of Don Bosco to a truly striking degree. His principles of education were so deeply embedded in them

Ricaldone, Shillong, 24 agosto 1936; ASC B709 (fascicolo 2), *Lett. Ferrando - Ricaldone, Shillong*, 20 gennaio 1939. This last letter can be read in S. Ferrando, *La suora salesiana in missione...*, p. 146.

⁸ Cf. ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Manuale - Regolamenti delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice fondate l'anno 1872 da San Giovanni Bosco*, Nizza Monferrato, Istituto FMA, 1929, pp. 128-157.

⁹ Cf. Luisa VASCHETTI, *Lettera circolare 120b*, 24 dicembre 1928, Nizza Monferrato, Scuola tip. Privata 1928; *Lettera circolare 121*, 24 gennaio 1929, Nizza Monferrato, Scuola tip. Privata 1929; cf. Linda Lucotti, *Lettere circolari 120, 122, 129, 131, 141, 146, 219, 220, 229, 265, 266*, Nizza Monferrato-Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1928-1943, and Angela Vespa, *Lettere circolari 265, 268, 270, 273, 276, 282, 291, 282, 291, 297, 305, 313, 316, 319, 325, 328, 334, 340, 346, 349, 362, 365*, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1943-1952.

that it will not be an exaggeration to say that one can attain a perfect understanding of the system of Don Bosco drawing on how they lived it in their day to day contact with the girls, young women and adults. The central focus accorded to the salvation of souls and the resulting primacy of religious education, the pedagogy of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, Marian pedagogy are all important pillars of the education advocated and practised by Don Bosco, which found a high degree of correspondence in the educational praxis of the FMA missionaries in North-East India. Like Mary Mazzarello and the first FMA communities, they lived it in a typically feminine style as is evident from the following proposition:

“To make ourselves all things to all; to be all eyes in order to watch over with motherly attention, to be all heart in order to search for the spiritual and temporal well-being of the girls whom Divine Providence entrusts to us; to nurture with our understanding, shown through kindness and tolerance, the confidence of the girls which makes them serene and open in the manifestation of their virtues and defects, cheerful through the enjoyment of the great good deriving from peace with God and with men.”¹⁰

Spurred on by such orientations, the sisters in North-East India sought to incarnate the system in the different contexts of the region, focussing most on the religious and moral aspects of formation. The multi-religious context required them to make differentiated proposals, that were duly taken care of as they aspired to inculcate a life of values irrespective of religious affiliations.

The motto of Don Bosco *da mihi animas coetera tolle* and his zeal and enthusiasm found analogous rejoinders in the sisters of North-East India, whose ardour for souls rendered them greatly enterprising and full of initiatives in their educational mission. In the initial years, there were insurmountable difficulties of lodging, food and educational facilities for the orphans and poor girls from remote

¹⁰A. VESPA, *Lettera circolare 316*, 24 gennaio 1948, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1948.

villages. Yet, they forged ahead accepting many needy children not just as members of the family but, more so, as souls for the Kingdom of God. The interest for the salvation of souls is evident in one of the first writings about the mission in North-East India:

“How it breaks our hearts to see so many poor people struck by all sorts of illnesses caused by ‘humidity and misery’, to see that life is neglected because they do not know how to appreciate its benefits and to see them die along the roads, in the forests and in the public hospitals without a ray of divine light to enlighten their souls and speak to them of life beyond there where human sufferings will cease to exist. Born in tears, they also die in tears.

“Divine Providence entrusted to us also a portion of such unfortunate creatures. We extended our hearts and hands to give them a festal welcome in the name of Jesus Christ and with the hope of forming them into fervent Christians.”¹¹

In the early years of crèche and orphanage, many little ones in fact could not survive the consequences of the sufferings endured during their tender age. Thus, as they arrived the first thing the sisters would ensure the babies and children, especially if they were in critical conditions of survival, was Baptism so as to guarantee their participation in the bliss of God. A great number of babies died in spite of constant care and attention afforded them day and night. This caused untold sufferings to the sisters, but they were always consoled by the thought that the little ones expired with their untarnished Baptismal innocence and that they would number among God’s angels in heaven. Such considerations gave them not only consolation, but also a holy joy and satisfaction. Even on their visits to the families the sick babies in critical condition and with no hope of survival would be baptised whether they were of Catholic, Protestant or non-Christian parents. The sisters were wont to refer to it as a help afforded to such babies

¹¹ Innocenza VALLINO, *Una pietosa proposta* in BS LVIII (novembre 1924) 291.

“to fly to heaven among the angels”.¹² Such practices of the sisters derived their origin and inspiration from the *Pontifical Works of the Holy Childhood* which was widespread and had as its scope the salvation of non-Christian children, who were sick or abandoned or at the point of death through Baptism. This practice was propagated and recommended especially to those who worked on the frontlines in mission lands.

The sisters toured the villages far and wide and from many such rounds they returned to the house with children and girls to be educated and formed in accordance with Christian principles. Every single child brought under their care was for them a soul added to the number of God’s children and a victory over the devil as can be noticed from what they affirmed: “Our orphans are all from far off villages. Our sisters make long journeys on land and along the rivers to go in search of them and are truly happy when they can bring home some of them because they are souls who have been snatched away from the devil.”¹³

The tours entailed a lot of sacrifices of various kinds requiring them to cover long distances on foot, suffering hunger and thirst. Besides, they had to face lodging inconveniences resulting from the continuous shifting from village to village. Yet such difficulties were considered as mere trifles or nothing in comparison with the holy joy they experienced in making Christ known to a vast number of persons or in confirming them in their faith. Such dedication and ardour are thus documented:

“Tiredness... discomfort... who minds them? ... They are part and parcel of everyday life and are those aspects that

¹² Archive Immaculate Heart of Mary, Shillong (AIHM-SH), *Chronicle [Chro.] Sacred Heart Convent - Mawlai 1941, November 3; AIHM-SH Chron. Sacred Heart Convent - Mawlai 1941, November 19; AIHM-SH Chron. Sacred Heart Convent - Mawlai 1941, June 3; AIHM-SH Chron. Sacred Heart Convent - Mawlai 1942, June 24.*

¹³ Tullia DE BERARDINIS, *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice nell’India* in BS LIV (aprile 1930) 115.

assure fecundity to our poor undertakings. Therefore, nothing can deprive us of our joy even when, for hours and hours we walk barefoot through the paddy fields under the scorching sun with our legs swollen and numb that they almost refuse to hold us up, or when we take shelter in some huts from where goats and hens have temporarily been shifted, when in the night we are awakened by the unwanted surprise visit of pestering leeches mercilessly making us shed our blood without the glory of a luminous martyrdom.”¹⁴

The sacrifices were seen as a guarantee of fruitfulness to their demanding mission. Therefore, they were ready to pay a heavy price even physically. Furthermore, the willing correspondence and the openness of the people to their mission of proclaiming Christ and his Kingdom was indeed a great stimulus in intensifying their zeal and readiness to suffer. Such hardships contributed only to savour the special predilection of God who deigned to bless them with a promising field of work. These considerations abound in their annotations:

“Even during our other visits to the villages which lasted longer, the promises and the consolations we received in our first contacts with the different tribes of the region made us forget the fatigue and the discomforts of the tiresome days of walking. It awakened in us lively sentiments of gratitude to God for being called to work in such a rich and fertile field.”¹⁵

The ultimate aim of the sisters was always the salvation of souls. Whatever they did carried such an objective as a final seal. Therefore, whether they spoke explicitly about God in the catechetical and religious instructions, or assisted the sick, visited families and villages, taught in schools and training centres, looked after the orphans and boarding girls, everything ultimately spun around the axis of *da*

¹⁴ FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE (FMA), *Dalla nuova fondazione di Tezpur in Il Notiziario VII*, (ottobre-dicembre 1936) 3.

¹⁵ Cecilia DA ROIT, *Un promettente centro missionario nell'Assam in Il Notiziario delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice XI* (ottobre-novembre 1940) 4.

mihi animas. The description recorded in the chronicle of St. Mary's Gauhati about one of their visits to a village for the distribution of medicine to the sick stands out as proof of this constant and conspicuous focus.

“An extraordinarily great number which put together will perhaps reach five hundred, came to us to be cured of their various skin diseases, which are much widespread in hot places specially here where the water and the sun are the major causes for such diseases.

“We cure their body, but we aim at their souls so as to take them to God, our beginning and our end.”¹⁶

The primacy of the salvation of souls in Don Bosco is clearly reflected in similar considerations of the sisters. Everything else was subjected or oriented to it. However, the priority of the spiritual aspect did not deflect their attention from the many human needs of the people.

The priority given to the salvation of souls can be traced also from the language of the sisters. Often they were accustomed in their writings to refer to persons as souls. It can well be concluded that for them the people they encountered, the children they cared for, the grown ups they served, were above all souls to be led to God. In this sense, it is interesting to note the description given of the foundation of the house at Tezpur, referring to it as “a centre of activities for a district with 500,000 souls, which still lives under the shadow of paganism”.¹⁷

In their mission the “*Da mihi animas*” was the *leit motiv* of all their thoughts, actions, movements and desires. Their oft repeated prayer to God was to be able to approach and touch the hearts of the people and to convert them to Him. Sometimes their supplications

¹⁶ Archive Mother of God, Guwahati (AMG-GH), *Chron. St. Mary's Convent - Gauhati* 1925, January 31; see also AIHM-SH, *Chron. Mazzarello Convent - Jowai* 1926, March 25.

¹⁷ FMA, *Dalla nuova fondazione di Tezpur*, p. 2.

sounded like a true bargain with God. They declared themselves unmindful of hardships, deprivations and difficulties for a return of efficacy in words and deeds which could result in drawing a multitude of souls closer to Him.

With their great zeal for the salvation of souls, it follows naturally that the sisters concentrated their utmost attention on religious education. The primacy of religious education or the teaching of Catechism was in fact a prescription in the Manuals and the Regulations of the Institute.¹⁸ Their concern to teach Catechism to all categories of persons beginning from the children of the nursery reaching up to the mothers of families saw the sisters enthusiastically committed in all the communities of the region.

It must be said that the girls, and in some cases also boys, who came to the sisters were not all Catholics. There were some who belonged to other religions, particularly, Hinduism, Islam and other Christian denominations. As much as they desired to gain souls and enlarge the fold of the Catholic Church, the sisters were also careful not to force their religious beliefs on the children or the adults they came into contact with. On their part the sisters would transmit the essentials by imparting an education to values and a life of prayer, conducive and acceptable to their religions. Their hope in such cases was to be able to do good through example and good words.¹⁹ Apart from such a distinction, the recurring element was the eagerness with which the sisters sought to inculcate a life of values and deep prayer in all the children, girls and women under their care. This was not difficult in the Indian context of those days, given the great religiosity and sense of the sacred that reigned within the families, be they Hindu, Muslim or others.

When it concerned the Catholic girls of the boarding and the orphans, instead, the Catechism lessons were accorded highest priority. The orientation for a strong focus on the teaching of Catechism was

¹⁸ FMA, *Manuale - Regolamenti delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, p. 149.

¹⁹ Cf. AMG-GH, *Chron. St. Mary's Convent - Gauhati 1941*, September 1.

determined from the initial days of the educational mission in North-East India and to confer such a direction was Sr Innocenza Vallino, the leader of the first group of the FMA who arrived in the region. Of her it is said, "Sr Vallino had very clear ideas about the upbringing of the orphans. They were to acquire a solid religious knowledge and piety [...] keep them on the right path all their lives and ensure their salvation".²⁰ The great zeal she had for the teaching of Catechism is testified to by Sr Luigina Saletta:

"We [...] transferred our work to a different locality of Gauhati where there was a better chance of expansion. I remember well Sr Vallino's desire of having a good boarding for the girls of the villages. She was keen on having them taught Christian doctrine. She spoke often of Mother Morano with whom she had been acquainted in Sicily. She was emulating her zeal in the teaching of Catechism."²¹

The methodology that was employed concentrated very much on making the girls memorise the contents of the Catechism. This approach was a privileged mode of impressing the truths of the faith and was a common method in the whole Institute. This option was re-confirmed by the members of the General Chapter XI in 1947. The motivating force underlying such a choice can be understood from the explanation that said:

"We would not want, however, [that] *reviving the energies from within* be understood in such a way as to exclude, for example, learning by heart in the teaching of Catechism.

"No, the study of the formula is essential because a precise and scientific wording is required in order to be able to express theological truths without falling into imprecision and inadequacy. This precise formula is given in the Catechism; it will be difficult, superior at times to the intelligence of the

²⁰ DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1922-1947*, p. 44. The term 'orphans' was inclusive of boarders.

²¹ Giuseppe DAL BROI, *From the Alps to the Himalayas. Life Sketch of Sr Innocenza Vallino*, Shillong, Don Bosco Press 1974, p. 23.

children, but it does not matter. The formula will remain impressed in the memory if it is learnt with the slightest explanation corresponding to their age. With the passing of the years and through experience, they will become and will remain a guiding light and a practical norm of life.”²²

Accordingly, this method of memorising the contents was a predominant learning technique offered to the children by the FMA in North-East India, while the gradual assimilation of the content and the subsequent change in the lifestyle was induced by diverse other factors.²³

The sisters sought every possible means to make the Catechism lessons and exams special and memorable events in the lives of the children. The extraordinary preparations in dress and ambient provided glamour, whilst the manner of conducting lent solemnity to the event. Such a style of imparting the truths of religion can be observed from the following citation. It speaks specifically of the role played by Sr Vallino, but it certainly had an impact on the style of teaching of other FMA in the region, who imbibed the same spirit.

“Her [Sr Innocenza Vallino] zeal in teaching the Christian doctrine seemed exaggerated to some. She insisted that the children learn the answers by heart. At times the little ones were quicker in learning than the grown-ups. The examination on the Catechism was given the greatest importance. All the contestants had to be nicely dressed, the table had to be decked with the best cover and adorned with flowers. All the sisters had to be present for the occasion. The questions were asked in all seriousness.”²⁴

²² ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Atti del Capitolo Generale XI*, Torino, Casa Generalizia 1947, pp. 147-148.

²³ Cf. Innocenza VALLINO, *Un po' di resoconto* in *Gioventù missionaria* (GM) III (gennaio 1925) pp. 8-9; Luigina SALETTA, *La candidata apostola dei Boro* in (GM) XXVIII (maggio 1950) pp. 10-11.

²⁴ G. DAL BROI, *From the Alps to the Himalayas...*, p. 24.

The chronicles of St. Joseph's Convent, Tezpur, report that at times the closure of the scholastic year and the visit of the Provincial to the community constituted propitious occasions for the organisation of Catechism competition for the girls.²⁵ These initiatives were prompted by the faithful observance of the Manuals and Regulations of the Institute, which required to "possibly organise every year competitions or preferably Catechism tests; the exam on religious instruction be done with seriousness, distributing prizes to those who obtain best results".²⁶ The presiding over of such events by important personalities was to bestow greater solemnity to the occasion and thereby stimulate the eagerness of the children to know and assimilate the truths of faith. It would further contribute to making such events memorable for the whole of their lives.

Besides solemnizing the function at the local level, there were other incentives offered for the study of Catechism. Competitions were organised also at regional levels with all the young people of the different houses and villages participating. The grandeur of such occasions would have motivated the girls to prepare themselves well. The objective of such initiatives was to make them know more about their faith so that they would be steadfast and strong. One such contest was organised in 1939 which evidently was in response to the invitation of intensifying the teaching of Catechism as a preparation for the centenary of Don Bosco's first Catechism class on 8 December 1841, which marked the beginning of his works. The report regarding the competition stated:

"Of the many competitions which are being held during this period of Catechism crusade, the one that was conducted

²⁵ Cf. AMG-GH *Chron. St. Joseph's Convent - Tezpur* 1949, June 28; AMG-GH *Chron. St. Joseph's Convent - Tezpur* 1951, June 20.

²⁶ FMA, *Manuale - Regolamenti delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, pp. 151-152; see also Eulalia Bosco, *Lettera circolare 115*, 24 febbraio 1928, Nizza Monferrato, Scuola tip. Privata 1928; A. VESPA, *Lettere circolari 319*, 24 aprile 1948, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1948]; Carolina NOVASCONI, *Lettera circolare 266*, 24 April 1943, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1943.

for the girls gathered in the mission of Gauhati deserves special mention. The girls who come from different parts of the remote areas [...], under the lively spell of the charity of Christ open themselves to faith and love to study Catechism with a preferential love.

“The idea, therefore, to hold the Catechism competition during the solemn occasion of the *jingiaseng* or the general gathering of the Christians of the entire mission this year was welcomed with great enthusiasm. All of them, great and small, wanted to participate in it; more so because the prizes were very attractive. The first prize for the winner consisted of Rs. 5 (equivalent to 40 Italian Lire), which is a considerable sum for our poor girls who are not used to seeing much money!

“The outcome of the competition was very consoling because everyone had studied very well and each one was animated by the much coveted prize. The Christians who were present for the occasion were very much interested but the happiest one was the Bishop, who was glad to be the Chief Guest of this little feast in which he could see sure promises for the future.”²⁷

The sisters too were happy to see the interest and the enthusiasm of the girls in studying Catechism. What gave them greater joy was the assimilation of the contents which could be assessed by the change in attitudes and behaviour of the girls. The sisters attested to the transformation in the lives of the girls, their increased obedience, greater love for prayer and kindly relationships with the companions as the consequence of the translation of the contents of the Catechism lessons into life. Besides such behavioural changes, the sisters had the joy of seeing the girls grow in the spirit of charity and altruism, as is narrated of the winner of the above mentioned regional Catechism competition:

²⁷ FMA, *Catechismo vissuto tra le piccole Assamesi in Il Notiziario delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice X* (agosto-settembre 1939) 3-4. The same article is also published in BS LXIII (novembre 1939) 332-333.

“The much contended prize was won by a twelve year old girl who is one of the best girls of the house. What would she have done with that sum? ... Her companions were curious to know and they besieged her with their questions, but the winner had her plans already and she would reveal it only to the sisters. She was among the few fortunate ones who still had a family to go to during the holidays. She thought of taking with her a little orphan who was entrusted to her care and who was always sad because she had come to the convent just lately and was missing her village. The money received would have served for the journey and other expenses ... Thus, the prize of the Catechism was used for works of charity. The poor orphan returned to the convent after some weeks and very happily showed us the beautiful new dress that her companion bought for her with much generosity.

“This was the prize also for the missionaries, for they saw that the young winner of the competition did not only know the Catechism mentally, but had it also in her heart and lived it.”²⁸

Other occasions of intense teaching of the truths of faith were the periods of preparation for the reception of the various Sacraments. The candidates were made to feel the solemnity of the event and were also closely accompanied in living the Sacraments in their everyday life.

4.2. *Human Formation in Preparation for Adult Life*

The paramount attention given to the growth in religious and spiritual life with the corresponding insistence on faith formation and value education is more than evident. It would fall into arid spiritualism and, therefore, education that could lead to inactivity in the face of the concrete realities of life, were it not to be complemented by an equally insistent emphasis given to formation which prepared them for a decent living.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

This integrated vision constitutes the heritage of Don Bosco. The primacy given to the eternal destiny and religious purposes did not detract him from active involvement to bring about a change in the physical and material conditions of life. Following such teachings, the preparation of the orphans and the boarders to face an adult life constituted one of the priority areas of the Institute. To that end, it was recommended that the sisters refer themselves to the existing Regulation which provided useful guidelines for the organisation of the orphanages in the spirit of Don Bosco and in the feminine style.²⁹ It was affirmed:

“The orphanages that best respond to the directives of the saintly Founder and the desires of Mother General are those that have the Elementary school, Vocational or Professional training centres and Specialisation Courses; those in which the Elementary schools guarantee a diploma, the Vocational centres which are organised with a set time-table for study and for practical exercises, following a criteria that should enable the orphans to learn a trade and become tailors or experts in knitwear etc. etc. after a period of five years.

“We would desire that all our orphanages and, to the extent possible, even the boarding homes opened in the missions, be organised in this manner. Today more than ever it is essential that our girls be in a position to earn their living honestly when they get out of our houses. Not the least essential, especially when they lack God fearing relatives who will assume responsibility over them, is the attention given to render them capable of earning a living as a Christian.”³⁰

²⁹ Cf. FMA, *Regolamento delle case di educazione dirette dalle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1895. The booklet is actually a transcription of Giovanni Bosco, *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1877, applying it to the community of women. See also A. VESPA, *Lettera circolare* 365, 24 October 1952, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1952.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; see also A. VESPA, *Lettere circolari* 297, 343, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1946, 1950.

The resonance of such orientations can be perceived looking at the organisation of the various orphanage-cum-boarding homes in North-East India, although the directives could not be observed to the letter given the differences of situations and possibilities. Among the aims of education, the element that figured much was what they called “preparation for life”. Under this term were included various aspects covering intellectual, social, domestic, sanitary and professional formation so as to guarantee the acquisition of essential tools to make a dignified living. This vision, therefore, complemented religious education and the two were much like the two sides of the same coin in the educational plan of the sisters. It can be observed from the following annotations:

“Thanks to Mary Help of Christians, the sisters overcame the diffidence of the people towards the Catholic faith. Besides, with the help of Divine Providence they managed to buy a better house where they could accept and care for poor and abandoned young girls. These were the foundation stones of a flourishing orphanage. There are around fifteen orphans, who are given faith formation along with a preparation to face the future that awaits them through an elementary education and practical training in domestic work, tailoring, knitting, weaving and agriculture.”³¹

As the little orphans grew up they were made to frequent regular classes. In all the houses that ran orphanages, viz., St. Mary’s Convent - Gauhati, Mazzarello Convent - Jowai, Sacred Heart Convent - Mawlai, St. Joseph’s Convent - Tezpur, there were convent-run elementary schools. Therefore, as soon the children reached school going age they were immediately put to regular schooling. After the elementary school, the orphan boys were always shifted to the care of the Salesian fathers for their further education and formation. The girls instead continued their formation with the sisters. Besides the orphan girls, there were poor village girls who were recruited to the

³¹ FMA, *Piccole Propagandiste tra le colline Khassi* [sic!] in (GM) XVIII (ottobre 1940) 148-149.

boarding to give them Christian education and training in trades. Both the categories of girls received equal attention and care as well as the same formation. There was a strong recommendation to make the girls complete their elementary education and to facilitate further education for those who were capable. One such orientation of the Provincial during the annual visitation of the community, though it concerned the house of Mawlai, enunciates a policy common to all the houses. The report said:

“Mother Provincial asked the sisters not to accept the girls without a written promise [from the parents] that their daughters would be allowed to complete their elementary studies. After consulting the Salesian Superior of the Missions, those who succeeded in their studies could be kept as boarders in Mawlai, where they could attend the school of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.”³²

It is clear that the above recommendation concerned the girls of the boarding. The fact that the sisters were recommended to get a written promise from the parents implies that continuity in education did not present an easy task for them. The value of education was not understood by the parents, and in many cases the girls were stopped prematurely.³³ In most instances such a decision was made in order to give the girls in marriage at an early age or to introduce them to the world of work as can be figured out from the following passage:

“How difficult it is to get the girls here! The families do not want to part with them because they can be employed in the tea gardens even if they earn very little per day. They are not

³² Mary BOUT, *The Diamond Years of the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco*. Vol. I. *The Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco (FMA) in the Province of St. Thomas the Apostle of South India*. 1922-1953, Madras, [Province of St. Thomas the Apostle] 1986, p. 321.

³³ Cf. Hughes John MORRIS, *The History of the Welsh Calvinist Foreign Mission. To the End of the Year 1904*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing Company 1996, pp. 96-97; see also Christopher BECKER, *History of the Catholic Missions in North-East India*, Shillong, Vendrame Missiological Institute 1980, p. 87.

at all bothered about their education. It is enough for them that they know to cook rice. All the rest is completely insignificant.”³⁴

Besides the difficulties deriving from the lack of understanding of the value of education on the part of the parents, there were others that were determined by the condition of the children themselves. Sr Severina Schiapparelli testifies, “The children came from far away places, they were poor, delicate in health and quite unused to discipline. All this made it difficult to get anything out of them”.³⁵ Poverty, poor health, malnutrition and all the sufferings endured at an early age certainly had great impact on the growth and development of some children, particularly orphans, and there were cases that were irreversible as the one that is presented in the following report:

“Diar [...] was pale, quiet, without strength and without life. She loved to be all by herself, away from her companions and almost insensitive to the attentions given her by the others. Also from the intellectual point of view she was deficient. At school, it was not possible to make her learn even the first alphabet. At work, the only thing she could do was to knit stockings slowly which she liked very much.”³⁶

Apart from schooling, there were other aspects of formation which received minute and detailed attention from the sisters. They were particularly eager to endow the girls with all the requirements for becoming women capable of maintaining order and cleanliness in the house, knowing the basics in health, child-care, food, clothing and kitchen garden.³⁷ It is clear that the human formation of the girls was aimed at preparing them for family life. Here, the sisters were guided

³⁴ Maria AVIO, *Ostacoli dell'apostolato missionario* in GM V (febbraio 1927) 24.

³⁵ M. BOUT, *The Ambassadors Return*. Vol. II. *Mini-biographies of Deceased FMA (in India). They Blazed the Way*, Shillong, FMA-India [undated], p. 41.

³⁶ I. VALLINO, *Caterina* in GM VII (ottobre 1929) 188.

³⁷ Cf. DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1922-1947*, pp. 44-45.

by a deep conviction that women play an irreplaceable role in effecting a change in the family and consequently in the society. This objective was next only to religious education which, as seen previously, insisted on the formation of women with the conviction that the family is a domestic church and within it women play a predominant role in the faith formation of the family members, especially children. Such considerations and the multifaceted formation derived from them can be observed from the following testimony about Sr Innocenza Vallino, who was the leader of the mission in the North-East. It affirmed:

“Next to Religion it was a sound domestic training which [Sr Innocenza Vallino] aimed at giving them. They were to know to keep even the poorest room spotlessly clean, how to cook their simple meals and wash their clothes, how to grow a few vegetables and rear poultry, how to sew their clothes and weave their *sarees* and finally how to look after the little ones. Thus, prepared for Christian and domestic life in a warm, cheerful atmosphere, she felt confident they would do well and enhance the cause of God far more than one could tell.”³⁸

The objective was further enlarged to cover other important facets of life. This emerges from the recommendations of the Provincial as she made her annual visit to the house of St. Mary’s Convent. The report said, “She insisted that the girls learn to stitch, darn and patch their clothes before learning embroidery. They were also to be taught hygiene, first aid and the symptoms of infectious diseases”.³⁹

The education afforded to the girls, therefore, embraced every aspect of family life. Thus, the girls were prepared to become women adept in the art of housekeeping, no matter how poor their habitations. They learnt to blend poverty with dignity and decency in the maintenance of their homes and surroundings, as well as in dress and

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ M. BOUR, *The Diamond Years of the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco*, I, p. 322.

clothing. Cleanliness and hygiene helped to keep off some sicknesses, and the possibility of applying their knowledge in first aid and diseases helped to enhance better health conditions.

In addition to the training received in domestic matters, the girls were taught some trades which could offer them job opportunities or the possibility of earning a living. It can be said that the sisters were very much up to the mark in situating themselves in the context of those times. They identified those areas which opened up to employment opportunities and trained the girls accordingly. This can be deduced from a statement made in the first years of their mission. It said, "We have started weaving classes, the art which will guarantee our girls a sure means of livelihood for their future".⁴⁰ Unfortunately, there are no records that could serve to evaluate this statement and know the extent of the effectiveness of such a training for women who passed through their centres. Besides weaving, other principal occupations taught were tailoring, embroidery and knitting. After the opening of the community attached to Ganesh Das hospital, some orphans were afforded nurses' training which opened up immediate possibility of employment.⁴¹

The sisters were particularly interested in training the girls to earn something because, in their rounds to the villages, they realised that the betterment of the situation of women alone could really make a difference in the living conditions of the families. Targeting women's self sustenance, therefore, was a strategic choice to effect a lasting change in the family and in the society.

4.3. *Education to Cheerfulness*

The imperative of cheerfulness in the Salesian educational system derives its origin from the almost instinctive understanding of Don Bosco on the need of the young people for joy, games,

⁴⁰ I. VALLINO, *Un po' di resoconto* in GM III (gennaio 1925) 9.

⁴¹ Cf. DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1922–1947*, p. 57.

amusements and enjoyment. He was convinced, however, that the source of true joy is the Good News of the Gospel, a religion of love and a life of grace.⁴² This balanced combination of the state of grace and nature found its expression in the daily demands for a serious application to study, work and other commitments along with recreation, games and amusements which were attractive and appealing to the young people.

In keeping with such indications, the sisters in North-East India assigned a predominant place to entertainment and amusements in all their settings. Great importance was given to the moments of recreation in the daily schedule of the orphanages, boarding homes and schools. The feasts, visits of important persons and special occasions were ascribed a joyous atmosphere through songs, dramas, stage performances and dances.⁴³

What is most surprising is that in spite of the utter poverty of the beginnings, the sisters were wont to offer special sources of enjoyment and relaxation to the children. Poverty never seemed to have stood in the way of the sisters when it concerned providing particular occasions of joy like outings.⁴⁴ At times, these moments were offered to the girls as a reward for their good performance and as an incentive to better behaviour and a more serious application and assimilation of the values and lessons imparted. The joy and satisfaction afforded to the girls can be traced from annotations as the one in the chronicle of St. Mary's Convent, Gauhati, which says,

⁴² Cf. Giovanni Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per cura del sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*, Torino, G.B. Paravia 1861 pp. 16-28 in *Opere Edite XIII* (= Centro Studi Don Bosco, Università Pontificia Salesiana), Roma, Editrice LAS 1976-1977, pp. [170-187].

⁴³ FMA, *Feste celebrative nel nostro mondo* in *Il Notiziario XXII* (agosto-settembre 1951) 2-3.

⁴⁴ Cf. AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary's Convent - Gauhati* 1925, May 24; AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary's Convent - Gauhati* 1930, June 23-25; AMG-GH *Chron. St. Joseph's Convent - Tezpur* 1947, August 16.

“Today, as a reward for the study of Catechism, the superior thought of taking all the girls for a long outing. They left the house at 10.30 am taking with them all the utensils of the kitchen for cooking rice in the open. After a day of relaxation they all returned home fully satisfied”.⁴⁵

The children were offered varied and new experiences on other occasions too, as revealed by the following report: “The girls that remained in the house during the holidays went for a very exciting outing to the airport by bus. They enjoyed it immensely because they had never seen aeroplanes. Thanks to the kindness of an official, they boarded a plane and observed it to the great satisfaction of everyone”.⁴⁶ Certainly, it must have been a memorable day for the girls.

The way the holidays for the orphans and boarders was organised was also striking. Though the financial state of the houses was deplorable, the sisters did their utmost to make their holidays impressive. A number of times they took them to visit different places. The chronicle of St. Mary’s Convent, Gauhati, noted one of them:

“During the school holidays a number of girls returned to their families for summer vacation which will last for the whole month of July. Around thirty girls who remained in the house were taken by us for fifteen days to Sonapur where they were lodged in the house of Mr. Middleton, who in his generosity gratuitously provided us food and lodging for all the days we spent in Sonapur”.⁴⁷

Another year, fifty two boarders along with their assistants Sr Alma Ghidoni and Sr Angela Daglio were taken to the community of Tezpur to spend a month’s holidays in that community.⁴⁸ It comes out strikingly that they were unmindful of all the hardships involved in providing the girls with such opportunities.

⁴⁵ AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary’s Convent - Gauhati* 1938, May 26.

⁴⁶ AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary’s Convent - Gauhati* 1949, July 15.

⁴⁷ AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary’s Convent - Gauhati* 1934, June 25-30.

⁴⁸ AMG-GH *Cf Chron. St. Mary’s Convent - Gauhati* 1937, February 6.

4.4. *Educational Continuity Offered to the Past Pupils*

The service of education to the young girls that started in 1923 had witnessed many young women crossing the threshold of the FMA houses after having equipped themselves morally, intellectually and professionally to take their place in society. In the chronicle of St. Mary's Gauhati, the departure of Rebecca, one of the first girls of the boarding school, is recorded together with a note that she was going to be married and that she promised to be faithful to the teachings she received during her years of education.⁴⁹ The event was certainly a significant one and worthy of record as the efforts of the sisters began to result in women who would form the nucleus of families in their villages.

In the spirit of our Father and Founder Don Bosco, these past pupils were never left entirely to themselves. Much effort was made to accompany them in their journey of life. The manner in which they continued their educational relationship with the past pupils may be said to be mirrored in the exhortations in this regard:

"It is essential that our past pupils feel that they are truly loved by the sisters. In order to make them cultivate good sentiments it is not enough to give them a good smile or say some cordial words perhaps by way of some compliments. No! It is essential to be guided by 'true' kindness and 'true' cordiality. It is essential that we 'sincerely' take part in their pains, in their hopes, in their preoccupations, and that we be 'sincerely' interested in their lives. In a word, we must consider them as souls dear to us, close to us and entrusted to us by the Lord, in such a way that they in their turn feel that we follow them up with vigilant thoughts just as when they were girls in our oratories, workrooms, colleges and hostels."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Cf. AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary's Convent* - Gauhati 1927, March 19.

⁵⁰ E. Bosco, *Circular letter 131*, October 24, 1930, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1930. See also E. Bosco, *Circular letters 158, 163*, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1933. Similar writings focussing on the care and attention to be afforded to the past

The resonance of these exhortations among the sisters of North-East India may be perceived from the efforts they made to give the past pupils a constant follow-up in contexts that presented no little difficulties, both considering the distances and the financial status of the communities. The sisters, in fact, made long journeys to the villages for the sole purpose of meeting the past pupils, gathering them and instructing them on their “responsibilities of living as good Christians and good mothers of families”⁵¹. At times they traversed great distances to call them for the annual meetings.⁵²

The first annual congress of the past pupils was organised by St. Mary’s Convent in 1934 jointly with the Salesians. It is recorded that most of the religious instructions were given by the Salesian fathers while the sisters complemented them with lessons on health and domestic economy.⁵³ The continued attention on forming good mothers of families may be deduced from such initiatives. The report of a meeting in Mazzarello Convent in 1935 highlights a further dimension of the vitality of the past pupils. It says, “Several of the girls who returned to the villages after spending some years with the sisters have become little apostles eager to convert their brethren. Lately the past pupils union was organised. Some came walking from villages that were twenty-four miles distant”⁵⁴.

It must have been difficult for the sisters to be faithful to the recommendations of organising annual meetings in the first years, and in fact it was not realised on a yearly basis. Nevertheless, it is certain that they reached out to them to the best of the possibilities they had at hand. Another congress of the past pupils was organised by the community of St. Mary’s Convent, Gauhati, 20-24 May 1937.

pupils can be found also in C. NOVASCONI, *Circular letters 274, 306, 315, 375*, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1944-1953.

⁵¹ AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary’s Convent - Gauhati 1937*, May 21.

⁵² Cf. AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary’s Convent - Gauhati 1934*, May 19.

⁵³ Cf. AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary’s Convent - Gauhati 1934*, May 23.

⁵⁴ M. BOUT, *The Diamond Years of the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco*, I, p. 270.

The past pupils were dispersed all over the Brahmaputra valley. It can therefore be imagined how difficult it would have been for them to come together. Moreover, the first showers of the year in the month of May and the subsequent bad weather rendered it more difficult for them to bridge the long distances that separated them. This notwithstanding, the meeting was attended by around thirty of them.

The initiative consisted of three full days' programme jointly for the FMA and SDB past pupils. Msgr. Scuderi, the Provincial of the Salesians, spoke on the first day regarding Catholic Action.⁵⁵ The topic of the second day dealt with the responsibility of the past pupils in giving good example, on being pious and the need of their helping the Salesians and the FMA in their mission. In the afternoon the instructions were given by the sisters in their premises. Their talks centred around the role of women in family and on the responsibility of being good Christians. Their hope was that the four days would produce much fruit in the lives of the past pupils, as expressed in the account of the concluding ceremony:

“In the afternoon, after the conference in our house, we accompanied them to the mission to receive the souvenirs of the meeting at the conclusion of the Congress. May they be able to carry home the fruit of the four days of happiness spent in the company of their superiors, assistants and above all of the time spent on looking into their souls. May the Lord keep them good as models of Christian life in their poor villages where morality and good habits are not yet known.”⁵⁶

The close follow up of the past pupils is seen in the way the sisters tried to trace them at different places and offer them the help necessary, especially in cases of estrangement. In fact, the sisters

⁵⁵ The necessity of encouraging and introducing the past pupils to join the Association of the Catholic Action is an oft repeated topic of the Circular letters of the General Council (cf. E. BOSCO, *Lettere circolari* 131, 133, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1930. See also C. NOVASCONI, *Lettere circolari* 248, 24 January 1951, Torino, Scuola tip. Privata 1951.)

⁵⁶ AMG-GH *Chron. St. Mary's Convent - Gauhati* 1937, May 23.

who worked in hospitals narrate how they offered assistance, consolation and reconciliation with God to their past pupils, who arrived in their dying moments. One such instance is reported by the sisters of Ganesh Das hospital:

“Margherita, an orphan from Jowai, was settled in life but had no moral strength to cope with her difficulties. She succumbed easily and became seriously ill. The mercy of God brought her to the sisters who, while trying to give physical relief, tried also to reconcile her to God. A priest visited her often, and the sisters attended to her lovingly reminding her of the beautiful and innocent years of her childhood. The grace of God triumphed. With visible signs of repentance she received the last Sacraments and prayed to Our Lady to come and take her. She died on a Saturday and we hope she enjoys the bliss of heaven.”⁵⁷

Such care and concern of the sisters show that besides caring for their all-round education, they offered a continued formation and follow-up, aiming particularly at the spiritual and moral coherence in their lives and the salvation of their souls.

4.5. *Motherly Tenderness as a Distinctive Trait in Care and Relationships*

In most educational settings of the FMA in North-East India, the sisters took care predominantly of the orphans and the poor girls of the remote areas of the region. The lives of the majority of them were, even at a very tender age, already marked by profound and visible traces of suffering. The sisters were overwhelmed by the condition in which some of the children arrived – their painful stories, their destitution – and were induced to action with a typical feminine sensitivity and dexterity. Of their relationships with the orphans it is written: “Born in suffering and abandonment, they find in the sisters

⁵⁷ M. BOUT, *The Diamond Year of the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco (F.M.A.) in the Province of St. Thomas the Apostle of South India 1940-1953*, Vol. II, Madras, Pauline Printers 1986, p. 127.

many good mothers who, besides caring for their spiritual needs, pay attention to their formation and education and make of them good girls who will one day form the nucleus of Christian families”.⁵⁸

The educational relationship that should characterise the care afforded especially to the orphans is feminine tenderness – a specific way in which the FMA translated the dimension of loving kindness in the educational system of Don Bosco. The situation of the orphans as they entered the houses of the FMA in North-East India revealed tragic situations suffered in the very early years of their lives. The wants and the vacuum of maternal or parental love left lasting marks in their lives, requiring much effort on the part of the sisters to fill the void and make them grow as integrated persons.

Many of the children at the time of their arrival, especially the small ones, were fearful and would wail desperately at the sight of the sisters. Their tender touch was necessary to instil calm and serenity to the troubled little ones and gradually win them over. At times they would conquer them with the help of gifts, as is narrated:

“The following morning we quickly returned to the hospital to take the little orphan under our care [...]”

“The father had died the night before and his remains were placed in the waters of the sacred river which according to the belief of the Hindus would give eternal life to the children of Brahma.

“We found the little innocent one playing along the corridors of the hospital. Just a few candies were sufficient to attract him. We brought him to the mission where together with many other brothers he felt at home just like a swallow in its warm nest.”⁵⁹

There were times, instead, when bigger children arrived all by themselves. In many cases they were runaways and children with

⁵⁸ ASC B709 (fascicolo 2) *Lett. Ferrando - Ricaldone*, Shillong, 20th January 1939. The same can be referred to in S. FERRANDO, *La suora salesiana in missione*, p. 146.

⁵⁹ FMA, *Sotto le ali della Provvidenza* in GM XII (agosto 1934) 155.

heart-rending stories. The greater majority of them were orphans who, after the loss of their parents, were sold or bartered to pay off the debts of their deceased parents. It did not matter how much was due. The small orphans were taken as servants even for insignificant amounts and they would remain so until someone paid off the debt or they did so by themselves as grown-ups. This latter possibility, however, could be contemplated only if they succeeded to outlive the ill-treatment and abuse at their tender age.⁶⁰

The destitution and inhuman treatment rendered the children extremely vulnerable. Thus the condition in which they arrived presented a truly pitiful sight. It was in such moments that the care and attention of the sisters appeared in an eminently feminine style. The way they approached such children, the tenderness with which they surrounded them and helped dispel their initial fear and diffidence, the assistance and relief given to their physical needs testify to the loving care bestowed on such unfortunate children, as eloquently reported in some writings:

“She arrived at our mission in the evening just before nightfall. Timid and fearful, she stopped at the main gate and looked at the small cottage which was a peaceful and cheerful nest of our dear orphans; but she did not dare to enter. At the end, overcome perhaps by her need for food and attracted by the cheerful cries of our orphans she came forward. Horror, wonder and compassion filled our hearts as we saw her. The girls instead appeared ecstatic as she stood in one corner of the compound.

“I went close to her and tried to caress her, but the girl being too used to lashes, felt frightened. I observed her. The ears were bleeding and were without the interior lobes. The face was so full of scars and the two fingers of the right hand were broken!

“Poor little martyr! Whoever reduced you to such a state? What is the mystery that surrounds your tender life?

⁶⁰ Cf. I. VALLINO, *Cipriano, il piccolo schiavo* in GM IX (maggio 1931) 86.

“Seeing herself surrounded by care and attention, but with a timid and faint voice she said, ‘I’m hungry’.

“The pot of hot and abundant rice had just been removed from the fire. She was given a good portion in a plate with a curry made of potatoes. Seeing it, her eyes beamed with joy. With much ease, she made small balls of rice and ate them with the utmost satisfaction.

“Once her hunger was satisfied, she became friendly and began to narrate her painful story. Orphaned and alone, she remained in her remote native land until she was sold to a heartless woman. She was then subjected to all sorts of fatigue. She was not always able to resist the weight of the hard labour, was poorly nourished and at times she refused to obey. These constituted the reasons for the girl to be brutally thrashed. One day her wicked and furious mistress wounded her ears, her face and her fingers and mercilessly reduced her to such a pitiable state.

“A warm bath gave relief to the wounds of the unfortunate child. She was then dressed in new clothes and her hair combed after which her appearance was less appalling.”⁶¹

The initial fear of the girl when a sister approached and tried to caress her is easily understandable, because such a reaction on the part of destitute and abused children is quite normal. Used to the violent hands of adults frequently lashing and heaping blows on them, they hardly have known hands that care.

The maternal aptitude of the sisters can be gauged from the way they approached the children in their visits to the villages. They would never bypass the children without enquiring about them and in the case of orphans they would not spare anything to get them to the house. Many times this implied paying off the debts; but they did so in order to guarantee them a home and a family. In fact many of the orphans saw in the sisters other mothers and in the other children their brothers and sisters.

⁶¹ FMA, *Piccola martire* in GM XIII (febbraio 1935) 33.

The motherly role played by the sisters induced them to assume complete responsibility over the orphans. This implied not only paying off the debt of the deceased parents, taking care of them and seeing to their upbringing in every aspect, but in some cases, also administration of the family property even if it might have been small or insignificant. When such custody was required, the sisters were seen going about it with great precision. The case of two orphan children goes a long way to prove how they played the parent figure for the children. One of them was in their orphanage and the other was still in servitude due to the debts incurred by the deceased mother. The sisters paid off the debt and thereby obtained the guardianship over the children and then proceeded to claim the property of the family. Such a gesture was significant not so much with regard to the property which was worth almost nothing but for the act which demonstrated the assumption of the guardianship completely and seriously. A record regarding this goes:

“Now that we have the two children, it was our duty to protect the goods of the family. With much interest we proceeded to find out and compile the list...

“As is the custom of the place, there were two witnesses in front of whom we noted down all the objects. [They consisted of] ‘a pot to cook rice, another one for the curry [...]; two brass glasses, two sickles, a basket, some fishing hooks, a ring made of tin, a handful of rice, some garlic and some salt’.

“All these were put in a basket and brought to our house much to the admiration of the Catholics as well as the pagans who were present. On being informed of the reason they gave their approval to the act accomplished.”⁶²

The cases like the one quoted above showed how earnestly the sisters took upon themselves the parental role, particularly that of a mother. Such a part played by the FMA amidst the children was

⁶² I. VALLINO, *Cipriano, il piccolo schiavo*, p. 87.

underscored even by the Salesian Fathers and Bishops. In fact, especially in the first years, many girls were brought to the sisters by them as they returned from their missionary tours. To entrust such children to them was a sure guarantee that their integral formation would be cared for. In one of his reports about the Diocese of Shillong, Msgr. Stefano Ferrando wrote:

“Thirty poor children cheer up the atmosphere of the house and the work of the Holy Childhood which is a real blessing to the locality around. How many poor creatures are brought, baptised and taken care of in this blessed house! Born in suffering and abandonment the children find in the sisters many good mothers who, besides their spiritual well being, take care of their education and formation, making them grow as good girls who will one day become the nucleus of good Christian families.”⁶³

The feminine dimension of the presence of the FMA amidst the children, therefore, was very evident. It is in this way that they contributed to the formation of good mothers and strong and committed women of families.

4.6. *Some Aspects Regarding Culture and Beliefs*

Some references have already been made to the culture of the various categories of people in North-East India and the implications for the mission of the FMA. It has been pointed out that the women in the plains of Assam could be approached only by the sisters because of the cultural restrictions that did not permit them to have any acquaintances with men other than their own family members. Women were valued only in function of household chores, on account of which parents were hesitant or unwilling to educate the girls, and early marriage was prevalent even among the hill tribes. The sisters make numberless references to another common practice, especially in Jowai and its surroundings as well as in the Bhoi area of Khasi Hills –

⁶³ ASC B709 (fascicolo 2) *Lett. Ferrando - Ricaldone*, Shillong, 20th January 1939. See also S. FERRANDO, *La Suora salesiana in missione*, p. 146.

taking orphan children in servitude until the debt incurred by the parents is paid.

Other allusions especially to the beliefs and superstitions of the people appear from the accounts of the sisters regarding healthcare services. This was predominant in Jaintia and Khasi Hills where the cause of particular sicknesses was attributed to God. In some cases the patients struck by such diseases could not be approached by anyone because of the total isolation. In other cases, they would offer sacrifices invoking their cure, as can be observed:

“One of the existing superstitions is to believe that their sicknesses are the work of spirits and gods. For example, people who suffer due to big boils would complain to us how the spirits had not yet left their boils even after offering many propitiatory sacrifices and paid one or more witch doctors to perform ritual ceremonies.”⁶⁴

In the same article, the sisters narrate how they treated two women and how this approach helped to bring about a change of mentality with regard to sicknesses and presumably also regarding God. The account reads:

“One day, a young woman who had two big boils on the neck could not bear the pain any longer and therefore wanted us to see her. We found her lying under the scorching sun as she struggled and moaned in pain. Her poor face had not seen water (not to speak of soap because they do not use them; they usually rub the different parts of the body with a smooth stone) and therefore her hygienic condition was extremely conducive to getting boils. We began washing and cleaning the sick one and then some days later we did a simple operation by cutting the boils. The people of the place who were around to watch us were greatly surprised to see the stinking pus coming out of the two boils instead of the spirits! “The happy outcome of the operation which relieved the sick woman of her pain gave rise to hectic movements in the

⁶⁴ I. VALLINO, *Tra la gente di Joway* [sic!] in GM VI (luglio 1928) 131.

entire village. They immediately invited us to bring relief to other persons with the same problem especially to a woman who had a big boil on her shoulder. Everyone had concluded that the poor woman was *hajan ka jingiap* (close to death) and that all the sacrificial offerings to the spirits and the prolonged dirge of the witch doctors, which was very expensive, had been in vain. As soon as she saw us she gave a loud cry, which almost frightened us, and fell motionless. The curious people crowded around while the husband [...] continued to patch his pants in one corner of the hut.

“After having treated her for some days we managed to let out the ‘spirits’ from the boil in which they had nested. Had we succeeded to introduce Jesus into her heart from then onwards how happy we would have been!

“However, we are not discouraged. The operations on the boils, which to the eyes of the simple people are miraculous facts, served to increase the fondness of the poor people towards us. On market days especially, there is a rush of people to our poor house to ask us *dawai wieh, dawai rih, dawai kie shoh, dawang pang kpoh*, etc., that is, an unending series of medicines according to their illnesses that everyone learnt to take as if they were candies.”⁶⁵

Consequently, the healthcare services of the sisters served also to help the people overcome some of their superstitious beliefs and learn to adopt both hygienic and medical measures in the cure and prevention of diseases. The interventions of the sisters led to the betterment of the living conditions, especially of the poor people in the villages deprived of access to healthcare facilities.

It appears that the sisters were critical about some cultural practices and beliefs especially those which in some way or other were harmful or superstitious. However, there can also be found some powerful insights in the direction of what we commonly call inculturation today. This can be noted in their writings as passing

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

remarks while describing some of the traditional religious ceremonies, interpreting them in accordance with Christian concepts.

“In the first years of my missionary life in Assam [North-East India], I travelled through the Khasi Hills during my tours to the villages in the months of January and February. On such rounds, I was always struck by the thick strings of cotton hung on every bridge, small or big, and across every stream even if it was simply a rivulet. No one dared to remove or even touch them because they told me that *they would serve for the souls who during these months are on their way home...*

“And they explained to me that when a pagan dies far from home, according to the local custom, his body is cremated where he dies. But during the months of January and February which are considered sacred months for this purpose, the ashes collected into an earthen urn are taken to the village of origin to be placed in the mausoleum of the family, sometimes within the house itself. This transfer takes place following a specific ceremony, with a procession of relatives and friends, with moans... lamentations... sacrifices and oblations for the departed. It finishes with a solemn banquet for the living [...].

“As the ashes return to the house, so should the soul too return home; not to the earthly one however, but to the house of happiness. During the journey (and here’s the thought of expiation which vaguely refers to the Christian concept of purgatory) the soul could find obstacles along the streams of water... It could remain trapped there because of the impossibility of crossing it without the providential help of those strings which are placed there by merciful hands in order to facilitate the journey towards happiness.”⁶⁶

The sisters were certainly struck by such ideas similar to the Christian teaching on the purification of the soul before entering the bliss of paradise. In the same article is narrated another incident of

⁶⁶ C. DA ROIT, *Anime in cammino per tornare a casa* in GM XXIX (novembre 1951) 10.

the Khasi Bhoi area alluding to the same concept of the journey of the soul towards happiness:

“I had another proof of the belief of this people on the expiation of the soul beyond the grave in my missionary tour to the so-called tribes of the Khasi Bhoi area. After much walking through a vast forest, in a place far removed from the habitations I saw a small hut whose height perhaps was not even 80 cm. It was built on the model of the ordinary house in the Khasi village, that is, with much care and precision.

“‘Whoever had the pleasure of coming till here and making this beautiful hut which can serve only for the pastime of the children?’ I asked.

“‘No, it is not made for amusement,’ replied seriously the two good Catholics who accompanied me. ‘Can you not see down there that clearing? It is a cremation place of the pagans. They certainly would have cremated someone in these days and here they prepared a hut for the soul because they believe that the soul could rest and remain here for all the time it requires to wait until it is permitted to proceed to the place of happiness’.”⁶⁷

From the attempts made to interpret the beliefs and practices of the people in terms of Christian truths, it can be said that the sisters had an insight into the process of inculturation of the faith in the region. The time was not yet ripe for them to make headway in such a direction, but their intuitions were ahead of their context and time.

Concluding Observations

The first thirty years of the history of the FMA in North-East India shows that, as in any other venture animated by great passion and love, it enjoyed the freshness of the energy, enthusiasm, missionary and charismatic thrust of the pioneers in the field. It could be observed that they set off with an incomparable zeal, unmindful of the sacrifices

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

and demands and facing the challenges with indomitable courage. The beginnings, above all, were marked by many and varied impediments deriving from the lack of financial resources and insufficient personnel. Besides, the region with its paradoxical combination of diversified characteristic traits did not present an easy ground for the sisters. Thus, while the region could be hailed for its richly endowed natural resources, its fertile valleys and dense forests, its thriving flora and fauna, it could also be censured for the poor living conditions of the people and widespread mortal and infectious diseases that loomed in all corners. Again, while the region presented itself unique for the living together of numberless ethnic groups with the originality of their cultures, traditions, costumes and folklore, it presented an insurmountable difficulty in knowing the multiple and diverse languages to facilitate communication with the people. Even at an educational level, it presented difficulties not only for the sisters but also for the children, slowing down the process of their learning and progress in studies.

The FMA were pioneering women religious in most of the mission centres opened by them in the first years. Generally their work consisted in running orphanages, the education of girls, vocational training of young women and village visits for the education and faith formation of adult women. These were areas untouched by the political administration and not contemplated for many parts of the region especially those rural. In fact when the FMA arrived into the region there were hardly any schools away from the few towns. Thus, the educational mission of the FMA was an urgent need of the times to which they responded with great audacity especially through the opening of vernacular medium schools when they themselves hardly knew to speak the language. Besides, it was striking to note that in some communities like Jowai, they made tentative efforts to open more schools in the villages.

Given the fact that the majority of the girls of the boarding schools were recruited from the rural areas, it can be said that the FMA together with the Sisters of the Queen of the Missions, were

pioneers in efforts to uplift the rural people through the education of girls and women.

Vocational training was another field in which the FMA invested a lot of energy and resources. Its primary aim of rendering young women capable of sustaining themselves economically bespeaks a far-sighted vision in line with the promotion of women in an era when movements for self determination by women around the world were unheard of. Thus, even at the level of intent alone, such enterprises of the sisters can be termed highly significant for the women of the region.

The FMA can be rightly called the pioneers in the systematic village visiting mission in North-East India which later on came to be known as the mission of the touring sisters. In this field and in the marriage preparation courses which was specific of the community of Tezpur, the focus of the sisters was on adult women and their formation not only in the area of faith life, but also in the basics of literacy, domestic economy, home keeping, hygiene, childcare, maintenance of kitchen garden and fundamentals of healthcare.⁶⁸ The significance of the services rendered by the FMA in this field can be further gauged considering the fact that in the valleys of Assam, the formation of the feminine section was exclusively their mission since the women could not be approached either by the missionary priests or by the local male catechists.

With regard to the mission of touring the villages, it is essential to highlight the role of the FMA in the formation offered to the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians in imbibing and living out their charism. In the first years of the foundation together with the FMA touring sister they learnt the different aspects of such a mission.

⁶⁸ Cf. FREDERICK DOWNS, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. V. Part 5. *North-East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Bangalore, The Church History Association of India 1992, p. 155.

From the time of their arrival till today in many different contexts of the North-East the FMA have made pioneering efforts in the field of education of girls and women. They have made remarkable contribution to education in the region in general and to the education of women in particular, with a special focus on the most marginalized sections of the villages and remote interior areas of the region.

In conclusion, it is possible to affirm with certainty that the FMA did play a significant role in the field of the education of women in the region. Initially and for the thirty years of history under consideration they gave utmost priority to uplifting the girls and women of rural areas. Their presence, therefore, did have a significant impact on the lives of the people of the rural areas, especially the feminine section.

COMMUNICATIONS

THE IMPLANTATION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN THE PHILIPPINES IN THE FIRST THIRTY YEARS (1951-1981)

*Remo Bati**

Introduction

In discussing the implantation of the Salesian charism in the Philippines, being a story-teller rather than a historian, reference must be made to my book on the Salesian pioneers in the Philippines.¹ It is, however, not a strictly scientific or systematic history of the origin of the Salesian Congregation in the Philippines, rather a *compilation of interviews* consisting of personal impressions, memoirs and experiences of individuals who had known, lived with and loved our Salesian pioneers. As such it would fall into the category of what is known as “oral history”. The book is based on the testimony of a total of 150 interviewees.

The scope of my work was to remember our founding fathers and to help preserve their legacy by keeping a record of the Salesian charism transmitted by the pioneers to our Filipinos, so that it may serve as one of our constant references for a “return to Don Bosco.”

The book revolves around the great figure of Don Bosco and his famous dream of the Ten Diamonds in 1881. The book contains principally the testimonies of people who shared from their own personal experiences how those pioneers “caught” the meaning of the dream, projected it so magnificently in their lives and “passed on the brilliance of Don Bosco’s charism and spirit” to their successors and to the younger generation of Filipino youth. That is why the book is entitled “*Passing on his Brilliance*”.

* Salesian, is Rector and Parish Priest of San Ildefonso, Makati, Manila.

¹ Remo Bati, *Passing on his Brilliance. Salesian Pioneers in the Philippines 1951-1963*, [Makati City, Don Bosco Press Inc. 2008].

Therefore the present paper is a blending of (a) historical events, based mostly on the books written by our two Filipino Salesian historians, Fr Nestor Impelido and Fr Gregorio Bicomong on the origin of the Salesian work in the Philippines, and (b) oral history, based on personal testimonies of confreres, members of the Salesian family and people who had been in contact with the pioneers right from the very beginning when they started their mission in the Philippines in 1951, among them also the present author, who was then 13 year of age and old enough to remember.

1. Origin of the Salesian Work in the Philippines

It was a common belief that Salesian pioneers came to the Philippines in 1951 only by force of circumstances. These foreign missionaries were expelled from China and were believed to have found the Philippines as the nearest destination to continue their work for the young. However, recent documented historical research done by our confrere Fr Gregorio Bicomong proved otherwise. It took sixty long years from the first request for the Salesians in 1891² to their arrival in the Philippines in 1951. Divine Providence had it already in its plan throughout the years of preparation and dedicated labour of the congregation before the seed of Salesianity was actually implanted on Philippine soil.

Fr Nestor Impelido, another historian, who also made an in-depth study on the beginnings of the Salesian mission in the Philippines, has corroborated these data. It is nonetheless true that the majority of Salesians who were pioneers in this country were former foreign missionaries from China who were expelled by the communists. Their expulsion was an overriding factor for the arrival of the Salesians to the Philippines.³ It is a fact that the China Province has contributed

² Cf. Gregorio BICOMONG, *The Arrival of Don Bosco in the Philippines (1891-1951)*, Makati City, Don Bosco Press Inc. 2001, pp.1-11.

³ Cf. Nestor IMPELIDO, *Salesians in the Philippines (1949-1963): Historical Notes*, in Nestor C. IMPELIDO (ed.), *The Beginning of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Vol. I. (= ACSSA - Varia, 2). Hong Kong, [no publisher] 2006, pp. 139-163.

much to the establishment of Salesian work in the Philippines. For seven years the Philippines were, as a Delegation, in direct dependence on China Province based in Hong Kong. The “Chinese experience” was something that the first Salesians brought with them to the country.

2. Challenges and Corresponding Answers

2.1. Socio-Political Situation

The Salesians came to the Philippines in a post-war era. The country was still in the process of recovery after the devastation caused by the Second World War. At the same time the Philippines were striving little by little to keep in tune with the growing industrialization in the Asian region as well as in the whole world. The Philippines needed much help from outside, from any sector that could meet the demands for workers and technicians in the industrialized field.⁴

The Salesians, majority of them from the industrialized West, were challenged to make the Filipino young “industrially capable”. In response to the prevalent need of the country, the Salesians concentrated on putting up schools. The Salesian Society and its members were, in fact, known to be teachers and educators of the young, following the charism of their Father and Teacher, Don Bosco. They were good in “running” schools, particularly technical schools. This was a benchmark of theirs in China. Their schools offering courses in mechanics, electricals, electro-mechanics answered the call of the times for the nation to be industrially equipped. Further, tailoring, shoemaking and carpentry courses provided the necessary training for the young to find some employment, thus providing them the means of livelihood, particularly for the low income families and the poor Filipino youth.

In fact, the Salesian technical schools in Victorias (1952), followed by Mandaluyong (1953), Makati and Cebu (1954) were considered to be the best technical high schools in the Philippines, not

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

only because of their very well equipped workshops and laboratories but also on account of very well qualified and hard working Salesian lay brothers, who imparted their expertise in their own field of work. Their response to the needs of the time was highly appreciated and publicly recognized by government and Church authorities.

Many witnesses, among them myself, testify to the dedication, expertise and typical Salesian traits of our pioneering lay brothers, such as assistance, cheerfulness, religiosity, simple lifestyle and modesty. Among those frequently mentioned in my interviews as exemplifying those attributes were: Bro. Andrew Bragion in the Machine Shop, Bro. Mario Rossi in the Electrical Shop, Bro. Thomas Orsolin and Bro. John de Reggi in the Carpentry Shop, Bro. Rafael Mrzel and Bro. Lorenzo Nardin in the Tailoring Shop, Bro. Salvatore Massi and Bro. Romildo Gamba in the Shoemaking Shop. Their presence made history. Men of their caliber seem to be getting very scarce nowadays. Witnesses are full of praise for them.⁵

2.2. *Educational Situation*

At the time of the arrival of the Salesians the Philippines were prevalently agricultural with some accent on mechanization. There was still much to be done then, with regards to the situation of education in the country. Quality education was still in the hands of the private sector, dominated by religious orders, whose schools were still the more prominent and sought after ones. Obviously, only the economically affluent or stable were capable of studying in such exclusive schools.⁶

In response to this educational situation, the Salesians provided good education for the economically capable as well as those financially deprived and unable. Their opening technical schools was very timely and in harmony with the government's ideal of meeting the current

⁵ Cf. R. BATI, *Passing on his Brilliance...*, pp.189-223.

⁶ Agoncillo GUERRERO, *History of the Filipino People*, Manila, Manila Press 1950, pp. 555-558.

need for technical education and the training of skilled craftsmen. It was also an answer to the Philippine Church's call on behalf of deprived and economically emarginated youth, in terms of education and future.

The pioneering Salesians, faithful to Don Bosco's charism and having brought the newness of technical education to the Filipino youth, particularly to the poor, contributed another novelty by opening oratories or youth centers, some of which were festive and some daily. It was always high on the agenda after that of the school, for every foundation they started. The schools were also available for Oratory apostolate on weekends. Among the many activities in these youth centers, the young were given wholesome sports and religious instruction.⁷ It had become one of the distinguishing marks of a Salesian school.

Quite a good number of us Filipino Salesians of the "first hour" were members of a Youth Center before being attracted to enter the seminary by their idolized Salesians. It was really something new for the Filipino youth to see for the first time men wearing cassocks playing football, joking, telling a lot of stories about Don Bosco, happily mixing with everyone, particularly with the poor. They loved what we, the young people at that time loved; so we could not help loving them in return. It was only later on that we discovered that it was Don Bosco's secret way to attract the young to follow him. It was a revelation for us! During my interviews Salesians like Fr Charles Braga, Fr Luigi Ferrari, Fr John Clifford, Fr Maurillo Candusso, Fr Jose Bosch, Fr John Righetti, Bro. Nicholas Tambascia, Bro. Rafael Mrzel, Bro. John de Reggi were among those most remembered as the life and animators of the oratories or youth centers. How much good was done and how many vocations were fished out in that big net called the Oratory, where prayer and games were blended in an atmosphere of the family. Sad to say, we have lost much of it at present.

⁷ Nestor C. IMPELIDO, *Salesians in the Philippines. Establishment and Development from Delegation to Province (1951-1963)*. (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Studi, 24). Roma, LAS 2007, p. 239.

2.3. *Ecclesiastical Situation*

One of the realities confronted by the religious orders at the time of the arrival of the Salesians was the religious pluralism and aberrations which resulted with the coming of the Americans at the beginning of the 20th century. With the Americans came Protestantism with its various ramifications and variations. Among the local religious sects were the Aglipayans and the “Iglesia ni Kristo”, which were more diffused and more active in the work of proselytism.

The Salesians, inspired by Don Bosco’s example as a catechist of the young since his tender years, gave utmost importance to the teaching of catechism in their schools, oratories or youth centers to protect the young from being proselytized by other religions around. The sacramental and Marian devotions of Don Bosco were deeply inculcated into the minds and hearts of the young “Bosconians” so as to make of these devotions a way of life rather than mere pious practices – another typical Salesian characteristic!

In fairness to all our Salesian pioneers both dead and those still alive, it must be said that most of them were zealous catechists both in the classrooms and in youth centers, untiring confessors and great Eucharistic and Marian devotees, real men of deep interior life, whereby the glow of the Ten Diamonds could really be felt in their daily encounter with the young. Among the 150 people interviewed the names of Fr Peter Garbero and Fr John Benna excelled as catechists – men who were on fire to talk of our Christian faith in season and out of season. Fr Peter, for example, despite his old age, tried to learn Filipino and Ilonggo dialects in order to catechize the young wherever he met them, whether on the playground, on beaches, in schools, in youth centers or anywhere else.

Among those considered to be “martyrs of confession” – for they loved to hear confessions even for hours and hours – were Fr Maurillo Candusso, Fr Jose Bosch, Fr John Rizzato, Fr Peter Garbero, Fr George Schwarz and Fr Adolf Faroni (still living). As for Eucharistic and Marian devotion, Fr Charles Braga, Fr Luis Carreno,

Fr Rizzato, Fr Quaranta and Fr Godfrey Roozen were, with their words and examples, among the great propagators of these devotions.⁸

There had also been requests from various Bishops for the Salesians to take care of their parishes. In fact, already in the fourth year after their arrival (1955) the parish of San Ildefonso was entrusted to the Salesians, followed by Lourdes Parish in Cebu in 1957 and St. Joseph Parish in Victorias in 1979. Others followed soon. These parishes could easily be recognized as Salesian because of the priority given to the evangelization of the young and of their "preferential option for the poor". Some, though not parish priests, were indirectly involved in our parochial activities, especially for the poor.

The pioneering parish priests who were most cherished by their parishioners as their "Good Shepherd" with a typical Salesian heart were Fr Jose Bosch, Fr Godfrey Roozen, Fr John Rizzato and Fr John Benna (still living). Others, who were considered "champions of the poor" were Fr John Monchiero, Fr Maurillo Candusso and Fr Joseph Guarino.⁹

The reminiscences I have gathered about these Salesians are so edifying that one would almost be inclined to start the process of canonization of some of them like Fr Maurillo Candusso and Fr John Monchiero. That of Fr Charles Braga, as you well know, was launched last July at Sondrio, his native place in northern Italy.

When I had the occasion to hand over personally to the Rector Major at the Generalate a copy of the volume *Passing on his Brilliance*, browsing through it he remarked that the testimonies mentioned in the book about Fr Charles Braga could help much to know him better and serve as our contribution towards the process of his beatification/canonization.

⁸ R. BATI, *Passing on His Brilliance* ..., pp. 162-177.

⁹ R. BATI, *Passing on His Brilliance* ..., pp. 284-294.

3. Development and Expansion in the First Thirty Years

From 1930 up to 1952 the Provincial of the Mary Help of Christians Province of China was Fr Charles Braga. He was succeeded by Fr Mario Aquistapace (1952-1968). When the Philippines were canonically erected as a Vice-Province (*Visitatoria*) in 1958, Fr Charles Braga was sent by Fr Acquistapace as Provincial Delegate to the Philippines. In general, there was a good and close rapport between the pioneers and the Superiors in Turin. The latter would often be consulted for guidance and help.¹⁰

The first decade of their presence was a time of expansion with foundations taking place almost in rapid succession: Tarlac (1951), Victorias (1951), Mandaluyong (1953), Makati (1954), Cebu (1954), San Ildefonso (1955), Pampanga (1958), Tondo (1968), Paranaque (1972), Theologate (1974), Our Lady of Lourdes (1976), Santa Cruz (1978), St. John Bosco Parish (1976), Lawaan (1978).

This rapid expansion of the Salesian presence could be attributed to the extraordinary and daring zeal of Fr Charles Braga's leadership. Behind him were years of experience as missionary and as Provincial in China (23 years Superior in China and 7 years in the Philippines – a total of 30 years). It was during his Provincialship that the past pupils were initially organized in Tarlac, Mandaluyong and Victorias (1959-1960).

It was also during Fr Braga's term that the aspirantate was started in Mandaluyong (1954) and then transferred to Victorias for seven years (1955-1962). Later, Don Bosco Juniorate was opened in Pampanga to accommodate more aspirants (1962-1991). The Novitiate started in Mandaluyong (1955) also underwent several transfers: from Mandaluyong to Victorias (1955), then to Muntinlupa (1956-1961), afterwards to San Fernando (1962) and finally to Canlubang (1963).¹¹

When Fr Alfred Cogliandro assumed the Provincialship in October 1963, he concentrated more on consolidation and personnel

¹⁰ N.C. IMPELIDO, *Salesians in the Philippines ...*, pp. 31-39.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-126.

building. It was during his first year as Provincial that the Seminary College of Canlubang was opened (1963) through the initiative of another daring and ingenious Spanish missionary from India, Fr Jose Carreño. He stopped sending clerics to Hong Kong for philosophy and let them continue their philosophical and college studies in the Philippines instead.

Fr Alfred Cogliandro was succeeded by Fr Aloysius Ferrari (1969-1975). As Provincial, he made it a point that in every Salesian House there was an oratory or youth center. He insisted on Salesian assistance in the playground. The Salesian Cooperators and Volunteers of Don Bosco were organized. It was also during his term that the Manpower Training Program for the out of school youth was introduced in Tondo, from where it developed and expanded to almost all Salesian settings.

Fr Jose Carbonell from Alcoy, Spain, was the third Provincial (1975-1981). He continued the existing programs, guiding and strengthening the young and nurturing the Philippine Province with his words and example. He was an authentic Salesian, ever faithful to Don Bosco's spirit and charisma, to whom the confreres looked up, especially as an indefatigable worker.

4. Results

Within thirty years Don Bosco schools became so popular and so prestigious in the Philippines that civic and government authorities came to visit our humble schools and praise them through the media. The Department of Education and Culture exalted the Salesian schools along with few others in a national congress for schools "as the only ones which answer the needs of the nation". The Salesian lay brothers were mainly responsible for the technical schools for which the Salesians became well known. They were generally in charge of the shops of the schools, which through their expertise became technical and innovative.¹²

¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 265-304.

Some alumni of the first hours, educated and formed by the Salesian pioneers, became outstanding servant-leaders in the field of business, politics, sports, art and media at the national level.¹³

Vocations to the Salesian life, both to the priesthood and to the brotherhood had flourished during those first thirty years, so much so that there were 48 Filipino priests, 15 lay brothers, 111 clerics and 24 novices – a total of 198. If we include the 59 foreigners, there were 257 confreres altogether in the Philippine Province at the end of 1981. The first missionary expedition of four Filipinos and 2 foreigners to Papua New Guinea took place in 1980.¹⁴

Conclusion

The Salesians' specific contribution to evangelization is Don Bosco's charismatic touch and spirit, clearly manifested in almost all Salesian settings, whether schools, oratories, youth centers, training centers or hostels. Many poor youth found jobs through technical training. Salesian parishes have a variety of social and charitable services for the "poorest of the poor" in the respective areas.

The implantation of the Salesian charism in the Philippines during the first thirty years was so obvious and so tangible that we attribute it most to our valiant and zealous Salesian pioneers, who lived the Salesian ideals and passed on to the next generation the rich Salesian heritage.

¹³ R. BATI, *Passing on his Brilliance ...*, pp. 350-363.

¹⁴ Cf. Charles MANLANGIT, *The Salesian Family Directory 1980-1981*, Makati City, Don Bosco Press 1981.

IMPLANTATION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN JAPAN. REFLECTIONS OF FR CIMATTI ON THE FORMATION OF PERSONNEL IN LOCO

*Gaetano Compri**

Introduction

The first nine Salesian missionaries arrived in Japan on 8 February 1926 under the leadership of Fr Vincenzo Cimatti. They were entrusted with the two provinces of Miyazaki and Oita, far away from the big cities, where they succeeded the missionaries of the Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP). It was a region where it was difficult to begin Salesian apostolate. It took some years before they could begin something there, and more years still to have the first Japanese Salesians.

After dedicating a year to the study of the language, they assumed charge of the only three parishes in the area – Miyazaki, Oita, Nakatsu. They felt unprepared for the job, but Fr Cimatti judged that the best way to understand Japan and to learn the language was to “take the plunge”. That’s what they did in fact and the results proved the efficacy of the method.

Four years later, in the thick of the great world economic crisis of 1929, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the first eight clerics, who had just finished their novitiate, arrived from Italy. Also a small aspirantate was started at Nakatsu. The grave economic situation was aggravated by the needs of the formation of the young personnel.

* Salesian, missionary in Japan from 1955, lived 7 years with Fr Cimatti. He is Director of the Cimatti Museum of Tokyo and Vice-Postulator of the cause of the beatification of Venerable Vincenzo Cimatti.

Finally in 1933, in addition to the parish of Mikawashima in the suburbs of Tokyo, it was possible to open the Petit Seminary (aspirantate) of Miyazaki and in 1934 the Technical School of Tokyo, which became the first really Salesian foundations.

1. Two Letters of Fr Cimatti

The shortest way, according to me, to know the growth of the Salesian activities in Japan would be through *two letters of Fr Vincenzo Cimatti* reproduced below. I have tried to reduce them to the bare essentials, eliminating the portions that are not relevant.

The first letter, a report sent to Fr Pietro Ricaldone, describes the growth of Salesian works up to the starting of the novitiate and of the studentate in Tokyo in 1935. The first students of philosophy (Fr Tassinari and companions) had arrived in 1930, having made their novitiate in Italy. The studentate of philosophy was opened in a small rented house at Miyazaki, in the zone of Oyodo. Finding it inadequate, the same year it was shifted to Takanabe, 10 KM from Miyazaki, again in a rented house. There they remained till November 1933, when the Petit Seminary was constructed at Miyazaki, which was the aspirantate but took in also the few students of philosophy who arrived from Italy. From here came out later the first Japanese novices in 1935. The first students of theology (Fr Tassinari and companions) were sent instead, as per the decision of the Superiors, to study in the studentate of Hong Kong, where too as feared things didn't go well on account of the political situation.

The second letter of 1937 to Fr Pietro Berruti is actually a report submitted to him on the occasion of the Extraordinary Visitation done by Fr Berruti and Fr Candela, who arrived on 15 July 1937. The document describes the situation and the problems as they appeared in 1937, when the first and second group of clerics, missionaries in Japan, returned from Hong Kong after their theological studies. The results were disappointing. Half of them returned to Italy. Japan was at war with China and this created problems.

After this experiment our clerics attended the Diocesan Major Seminary of Tokyo till 1944, when the Salesian studentate of Tokyo was opened near the technical school. From there it was shifted in 1950 to the present premises of Chofu.

The problem of indigenous vocations was for Fr Cimatti a question of life and death for the Salesian and missionary work. He was of the opinion that as far as possible formation should be carried out locally. The letter explains the motives thereof, which according to me are valid even today.

2. The Text

2.1. *Letter to Fr Pietro Ricaldone, Rector Major of the Salesians*¹

Tokyo, 29 December 1935

Dear and Rev. Fr Ricaldone,

[...]

(1) Means utilized

Trying to see things from the point of view of Don Bosco, right from the beginning we used to say, "Let us try to do as he did". Like him we too were under certain aspects in many and various difficulties – new, in this large country, ignorant of the language and customs, surrounded by thousands of youth in need of help, especially spiritual – sent to this part of the great Japanese Empire, tilled initially by the great Apostle St. Francis Xavier, made fruitful by the blood of several martyrs, and subsequently on which the zealous missionaries of the Foreign Missions of Paris toiled in order to found stably the Catholic Church here. We could not as Salesians but have for guide Don Bosco and the souvenirs he gave to the first missionaries. We have tried to gather the youth – the *Oratories* in their embryonic form, and right

¹ ASC A8130113 *Lettera Cimatti-Ricaldone, Tokyo 29 December 1935*. The original Italian version follows the English text.

from the beginning daily oratories – in the three residences of Miyazaki, Oita and Nakatsu. Music, drama, films, the usual games played in our oratories, made their appearance in the miniature grounds and in the modest meeting rooms.

[...]

Alongside the oratory activities, while trying with all the possible forms of apostolate to motivate the Christians of the other residences to Christian life and Catholic action and to encourage and instruct the catechumens, we also attempted to set in motion the *apostolate of the press*. Leaflets, replies to objections, publicity pamphlets on different topics of various sorts, a tiny monthly (later fortnightly) periodical “Don Bosco”, the lives of Don Bosco and Dominic Savio were published.

[...]

Other forms of publicity were the *conferences*, delivered not only in the halls of the missions, but also in theaters and public halls, and in a special way, instrumental and vocal *music concerts* even beyond the confines of our own mission were a marvelous help to advance Catholic and Salesian publicity.

[...]

(2) *The more salient stages*

The year 1926 passes in intense preparation at Miyazaki.

In 1927 the three residences of Miyazaki, Oita and Nakatsu, depending on the Diocese of Nagasaki and subsequently on that of Fukuoka, are taken up. Along the lines agreed upon at your memorable visit of 1927, we are trying to lay the foundations of our future work according to a minimum programme: get in touch with the Christians, make known the Salesian Congregation, make contact with the pagans.

In 1928 the mission, bifurcated from the Diocese of Fukuoka, is erected into the *independent mission* of Miyazaki; hectic work is continued everywhere busily according to the initial programme.

In 1929 the chapel dedicated to St. Teresa of Jesus and to Mary Star of the Sea is added to the residence of TANO with the meeting hall and store for the local farmers and land for cultivation.

In 1930 at MIYAZAKI the “Morning Star” KINDERGARTEN is started – one of the biggest and best in the city – currently run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who have already opened a small boarding for the promotion of religious vocations.

In the populous city of BEPPU a new missionary residence is started on our own land, enriched now with a beautiful little church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians. Besides the daily Oratory and the care of the Christians, facility is offered to numerous visitors to the city, both Japanese and foreign Christians, to fulfil their religious duties especially during the season of the seashore or mud-bath treatment. [...]

In this city the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have their novitiate and aspirantate and a flourishing Holy Childhood institute at a magnificent spot.

Again in 1930 a *Petit Seminary* for indigenous vocations was started at NAKATSU, which was shifted to our own premises at Miyazaki in 1933. Having grown in terms of the number of students and regularity of teachers, and being regarded well by the authorities, it obtained the approval of the prefect. This indispensable institution has already started producing fruits and healthy branches, which have been transplanted to the Major Seminary of Tokyo for philosophical and theological studies.

[...]

In 1931 it was possible to establish at OITA a *Printing School*, and from this holy forge of propaganda, in addition to continuing the previous publications on a larger scale, the CATHOLIC READINGS were started with the same scope that Don Bosco too had. [...]

From 1934 the Printing School was shifted to TOKYO and was organized into a full fledged Professional School. The building constructed in a healthy and quiet part of the Japanese Metropolis

was approved by the competent authority as corresponding to the scope, and the teaching imparted in accordance with the programmes of the Empire and the spirit of Don Bosco. In 1935 it received legal recognition by the prefect, the first step towards the recognition of the school by the Ministry of Education.

[...]

The year 1932 witnessed the beginnings of the *Hospice of MIYAZAKI* [...]. It is the fruitful result of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul. This work of charity flowers and bears fruit more and more.² [...]

In 1933 Salesian presence crossed the borders of the Mission, and thanks to the kindness and fatherly goodness of Mons. Chambon, Archbishop of Tokyo, Salesian apostolate is started in the capital, at Mikawashima, the poorest, most spiritually neglected and neediest zone of Tokyo, with the fundamental activity, viz. the ORATORY.

[...]

The work started at TAKANABE years back, where, from 1930, the studentate of philosophy was situated in a rented house for several years, crystallizes with the purchase of our own land for the works of the mission.

[...]

Finally 1935 brought the greatest Salesian consolation to our hearts.

The Sacred Heart Novitiate of Tokyo is a reality. Eleven recruits (five Italians and six Japanese) have on 28 December started their novitiate in the name of Don Bosco. [...]

Precisely these days the *Salesian STUDENTATE OF PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY* has been inaugurated beside the novitiate. The Archbishop of Tokyo His Excellency Msgr. Chambon, father and benefactor of the Salesians, solemnly blessed it on 8 December. [...]

² From here was born in 1937 the indigenous Congregation of the Sisters of Charity.

Since where Don Bosco is, there should be the youth, as if by magic, there rises the festive oratory between the professional school, the novitiate and the studentate.

[...]

On 21 December, as I already mentioned, we received the decree of the official recognition of Don Bosco Professional School in Tokyo – printing and tailoring sections – which will help extend our sphere of action in the education of the working youth of Tokyo, from the point of view of both the importance the school has acquired before the authorities and the public, as well as the increased number of students and the assurance for their future thanks to the officially recognized courses.

[...]

Most affectionately, Fr V. Cimatti, Salesian.

Lettera a Don Pietro Ricaldone, Rettor Maggiore dei salesiani

Tokyo, 29 dicembre 1935

Amatissimo e Rev.mo Sig. Don Ricaldone,

[...]

(1) I mezzi adoperati.

Ci siamo messi dal punto di vista di Don Bosco, e ci siamo detti fin dal principio: “Tentiamo di fare come Lui”. Noi eravamo come Lui, sotto certi aspetti in molte e svariate difficoltà – nuovi, in questo grande paese, ignari della lingua, delle costumanze – circondati da migliaia di giovani bisognosi di aiuti specialmente spirituali – mandati in questa zona del grande Impero giapponese, dissodata inizialmente dal grande Apostolo S. Francesco Saverio, fecondata dal sangue di tanti martiri, e lavorato in seguito dagli zelanti missionari delle Missioni Estere di Parigi, per fondarvi stabilmente la Chiesa cattolica, non potevamo noi salesianamente avere altra guida che Don Bosco ed i

ricordi che lasciò ai suoi primi missionari. E abbiamo tentato di circondarci di gioventù – ecco i primi embrioni di *Oratori* – e fin dagli inizi quotidiani – nelle tre residenze di Miyazaki, Oita e Nakatsu. La musica, il teatro, le proiezioni luminose, i soliti giuochi dei nostri oratori fecero la loro comparsa nei minuscoli cortili, nelle modeste sale di riunione.

[...]

Accanto all'attività oratoriana, mentre si cercava con tutte le forme proprie dell'apostolato di attivare alla vita cristiana ed all'azione cattolica i cristiani delle altre residenze, suscitare ed istruire i catecumeni, si cercò di dare impulso all'attività della *buona stampa*. Foglietti volanti, risposte ad obiezioni, piccoli fascicoletti di propaganda su argomenti di vario genere, un minuscolo periodico, il "Don Bosco" mensile, poi bimensile, e la vita di Don Bosco e di Savio Domenico.

[...]

Altre forme di propaganda furono le *conferenze* non solo nelle sale delle missioni, ma nei teatri, nelle sale pubbliche, ed in modo speciale servirono allo scopo i *concerti musicali* strumentali e vocali, che varcarono anche i limiti della nostra missione, e servirono mirabilmente alla propaganda cattolica e salesiana.

[...]

(2) *Le tappe più salienti.*

Il 1926 si passa in intensa preparazione a Miyazaki.

Nel 1927 si inizia la presa di possesso delle tre residenze di Miyazaki, Oita e Nakatsu, alle dipendenze della diocesi di Nagasaki e successivamente di quella di Fukuoka. Secondo le tracce con Lei concordate nella memorabile sua visita del 1927, tentiamo di mettere le basi del futuro lavoro secondo un programma minimo: contatto coi cristiani, far conoscere l'Opera Salesiana, avvicinamento ai pagani.

Nel 1928 la missione, smembrata dalla diocesi di Fukuoka, è eretta in *missione indipendente* di Miyazaki: continua alacramente dovunque il lavoro programmatico iniziale.

Nel 1929 si aggiunge la residenza di TANO con cappella dedicata a S. Teresa di G. e a Maria stella del mare, con casa missionaria, sala di adunanze e magazzino per gli agricoltori del luogo e terreni di coltivazione.

Nel 1930 a MIYAZAKI si inizia l'ASILO infantile "Stella del mattino" – uno fra i più ampi e migliori della città – attualmente alle dipendenze delle Figlie di Maria A., che già hanno iniziato anche un collegio per formazione di vocazioni religiose.

Nella popolosa città di BEPPU si inizia pure su terreno proprio una nuova residenza missionaria, arricchita ora di una graziosa chiesetta dedicata a Maria A. Oltre l'Oratorio quotidiano e la cura dei cristiani, si dà comodità ai numerosi visitatori della città, cristiani giapponesi e stranieri, specialmente nella stagione delle cure balneari o dei fanghi, di adempiere ai loro doveri religiosi. [...]

In questa città le Figlie di Maria A. in magnifica posizione hanno il loro noviziato e aspirantato ed una fiorente istituzione della S. Infanzia.

Pure nel 1930 si inizia a NAKATSU il piccolo *Seminario* indigeno, che nel 1933 viene trasportato in sede propria a Miyazaki ed ampliandosi per numero di allievi, per regolarità di insegnanti, ben visto dalle autorità ottenne l'approvazione prefettizia. Già comincia a produrre i suoi frutti e buoni rami di questa necessaria istituzione, che sono trapiantati al Gran Seminario regionale di Tokyo per gli studi di filosofia e teologia.

[...]

Nel 1931 si poté realizzare a OITA l'inizio della *Scuola tipografica*; e da questa santa fucina di propaganda, oltre alla continuazione più in grande delle pubblicazioni precedenti, si iniziarono le LETTURE CATTOLICHE, cogli stessi intendimenti programmatici di Don Bosco [...]

Dal 1934 la Scuola tipografica è trasportata a TOKYO e viene organizzandosi come Scuola professionale completa. L'edificio costruito in posizione salubre e tranquilla della metropoli giapponese

fu approvata dalla competente autorità come corrispondente allo scopo, così pure l'insegnamento impartito secondo i programmi dell'Impero e secondo lo spirito di Don Bosco. Nel 1935 fu concesso il legale riconoscimento prefettizio, primo passo al riconoscimento della scuola per parte del Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale.

[...]

Nel 1932 vede sorgere gli inizi dell'*Ospizio* di Miyazaki [...]. È l'effetto fruttuoso delle conferenze di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli. Fiorisce e fruttifica sempre più quest'opera benefica [...].

Nel 1933 l'Opera salesiana varca i confini della Missione, e, per la caritatevole e paterna bontà di Mons. Chambon, Arcivescovo di Tokyo, incomincia nella capitale coll'Opera salesiana base, l'ORATORIO, il lavoro di apostolato a Mikawashima, zona più povera, più spiritualmente abbandonata e bisognosa di Tokyo.

[...]

Il lavoro da anni incominciato a TAKANABE, dove dal 1930 ebbe per vari anni sede in casa di fitto lo studentato filosofico, si concreta coll'acquisto di terreno proprio per le opere della missione.

[...]

Il 1935 finalmente ci apre il cuore alla massima consolazione salesiana.

È un fatto compiuto il *Noviziato* S. Cuore a Tokyo. Undici reclute (cinque italiani e sei giapponesi) hanno incominciato nel nome di Don Bosco il loro noviziato il 28 Dicembre. [...]

Ed accanto al *Noviziato* è inaugurato proprio in questi giorni lo *Studentato Filosofico e Teologico* salesiano. L'otto dicembre fu benedetto solennemente da S. E. Mons. Chambon, Arcivescovo di Tokyo, padre e benefattore dei Salesiani. [...]

E come per incanto, siccome dove c'è Don Bosco devono esserci i giovani, ecco sorgere tra la scuola professionale e il noviziato e studentato, l'Oratorio festivo. [...]

Ed il 21 Dicembre, come già accennai, giungeva il decreto di riconoscimento ufficiale della scuola professionale Don Bosco a Tokyo,

sezione tipografica e sarti, che darà modo di allargare la sfera d'azione educativa della gioventù operaia di Tokyo, sia per l'importanza che viene ad assumere la scuola, di fronte alle autorità e al pubblico, sia per l'accresciuto numero di allievi e per il loro avvenire assicurato dall'insegnamento ufficialmente riconosciuto.

[...]

Aff.mo Don V. Cimatti, sales.

2.2. Letter to Fr Pietro Berruti, Vicar of the Rector Major³

(8 September 1937)

REFLECTIONS ON THE FORMATION OF PERSONNEL IN LOCO OR ABROAD

[...]

ANTECEDENTS⁴

1. The problem of indigenous vocations was dealt with from the beginning of the apostolate of the first Salesians of Japan. To date the following results have been attained.

ASPIRANTATE at Nakatsu, 21 nos. (local)

PETIT SEMINARY, Miyazaki, 46 nos.

MAJOR SEMINARY, Tokyo, 10 locals [joined the diocese from Miyazaki]

THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE, Salesians attending Tokyo [Seminary], 8 nos.

Indigenous Salesian vocations: 2 students of philosophy, 2 coadjutors, 3 novices.

³ ASC G009 (Cimatti V.) Raccolta degli scritti, Vol. S 10, which is a typewritten copy.

⁴ Situation of 1937

Foreign Salesian vocations: 7 students of philosophy, 6 novices
[...]

3. All this was done with the consent and assistance of the Church in what concerns the Mission, and with the consent and assistance of the Superiors in what regards the Congregation.
[...]
5. The present solution (theology in the seminary of Tokyo) was allowed by the Superiors *ad tempus*. Our late lamented Fr Fascie wrote: "It is the will of the Superiors that Japan has its own studentate of theology at the earliest." The reasons, I think, that induced the Superiors to allow the foundation of the studentate of theology [to attend the Seminary] at Tokyo were listed by the undersigned in the request itself. They can be briefly summarized as follows:
 - a. possibility of access to the Major Seminary where there are good professors for the fundamental courses; organized also with attention to the requirements of Japan;
 - b. the minor courses: in the Seminary (it would be ideal if the students can attend the courses in Japanese), or in the house;
 - c. precious relationships with the professors and with future missionaries, Salesians or not. It is a source of invaluable support for those who know the Japanese spirit;
 - d. the studies done in Tokyo have a tremendous significance for the Japanese, the authorities as much as others; for these people Tokyo is everything;
 - e. excellent Salesian propaganda in every sense;
 - f. abundant spirit of emulation for us and for the Japanese.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Time lost in travelling and spirit of digression for the thoughtless.
2. Granted the different levels of preparation, for many of our students the studies in the seminary could be quite meager.

3. It is an exception.

With regard to a common studentate for the Far East at Hong Kong (or any other place), the following observations are respectfully made, or better, the Superiors are requested to keep in mind these considerations, which we hold to be of the highest importance in solving this issue.

1. Even without taking into account the experiment (unfortunately without success) already carried out of Japanese theologians at Hong Kong and the reasons for its failure,
 - a. the unhealthy climate of Hong Kong (oh, that little valley!)
 - b. difference of food in Chinagive premonition of another failure from the material and sanitary point of view
2. The formation of the personnel locally should be in keeping with the needs and requirements of the mission. For four years – and precisely the most precious ones – the personnel is removed from this formation:
 - a. of language
 - b. of customs, feasts, etc. and the practice of the same
 - c. and other things which can be carried out only locally, on the many occasions that emerge naturally.

The mission of China is totally different from that of Japan in every respect (the only common element being the glory of God and the salvation of souls).

The superiors, however much they claim to be impartial, cannot help showing interest in the needs of the Mission in which they live and for the most part (I think) in the theologians for whom they work. More so the Provincial of China, and it is natural and human. The help of the teachers who come from the regions that maintain the students, will (instead of uniting them) make the division among them sharper.

Rather than leaving the students to the care of others, it is better to keep them in Italy, close to the Superiors, close to Don Bosco

and Mary Help of Christians – thus we will at least have good priests and good Salesians. In case, for reasons of health or otherwise (changed family situations) they are not able to return, they are already home.

It may be said that with this the problem of the formation of personnel in loco falls – and it may be asked if it is not better to have also the formation of the novices and students there. In any case better in Italy than anywhere else.

3. From the Japanese point of view difficulties increase
 - a. Sending our students to China (to Hong Kong and Hong Kong is China) is harmful. The Superiors know what is the condition of foreigners in Japan – and how serious and dishonorable the condition in which we find ourselves in having to send our students to China for their formation. It is an extremely delicate point, to which I would like to draw the attention of the Superiors with all my strength, however little it be;
 - b. With this exodus we totally underrate the importance of imparting formation in loco. I hope the Visitors are aware of the difficulties that we as foreign missionaries face in Japan:
 - (1) Difficulty to identify ourselves with the spirit of Japan, and as long as we don't arrive at this there will always be a barrier between us – we will not love this great Country – and for this reason also religion will not advance a step. Difficulty of language: none of us knows it well. Some clerics are faring well... But if we stop... Those who returned from Hong Kong now need a teacher as much if not more than before.
 - (2) Difficulty to blend ourselves with the needs of these souls who (like those of China and Siam) have their foundation in their civil history, their customs, morals, laws, codes, etc. The Japanese who need to be

managed in morals, laws, etc. and who clash with those of other nations (if there are). Religious problems, which torment these souls, and which need to be resolved in theology for these souls... if not, we are eternally at the starting point... that is, the missionary brings his ideas learnt in theology and applies them to the Japanese with their European mentality... And the eternal will remain separated from these dear souls, whom St. Francis called "my delight" (and they are! Oh, if they were! Our Delight!)

- (3) Difficulty to divest ourselves of ourselves in order to become them, the greatest sacrifice, moreover the greatest need.

I ask myself how it may be possible to realize all this outside the Japanese ambient, I mean, how would it be possible to bring about this Japanization which already faces so many difficulties here in Japan itself.

- (4) We are beginning to have Japanese confreres. Let the Superiors imagine what would be the result if these dear sons have to be sent to Hong Kong.

I think the things mentioned were supposed to help clarify the difficult problem. All of us advise against, or better, if we were asked by the Superiors we would respond in the negative regarding Hong Kong or any other place for that matter.

Better in Italy itself, if the Superiors don't consider it opportune to allow the studentate in Japan.

For me (personally), if an exodus becomes indispensable, it is better to study thoroughly the whole problem of the formation of personnel in loco, and return to the old system.

Fr V. Cimatti, Salesian.

Lettera a Don Pietro Berruti, Vicario del Rettor Maggiore

[8 settembre 1937]

PENSIERI SULLA FORMAZIONE DEL PERSONALE IN LOCO O ALL'ESTERO

[...]

ANTEFATTI

1. Il problema delle vocazioni indigene fu affrontato fin dall'inizio del lavoro di apostolato dei primi salesiani del Giappone. A tutt'oggi si ha il seguente risultato.

ASPIRANTATO a Nakatsu N. 21 (indigeni).

PICCOLO SEMINARIO, Miyazaki, N. 46.

GRAN SEMINARIO, Tokyo N. 10 indigeni.

SCUOLA TEOLOGICA, sales. Frequent. Tokyo, N. 8 Sales.

Vocazioni sales. indigene 2 chierici filosofia, 2 coadiutori,
3 novizi.

Vocazioni salesiane estere 7 filosofi e 6 novizi.

[...]

3. Tutto questo si fece col consenso e aiuto della Chiesa per quanto si riferisce alla Missione; col consenso ed aiuto dei Superiori per ciò che si riferisce alla Congregazione.

[...]

5. La soluzione attuale (teologia nel seminario di Tokyo) fu permessa dai Superiori ad tempus. Mi scriveva il compianto Don Fascie: "È però volontà dei Superiori che il Giappone abbia il suo studentato teologico al più presto". I motivi che – penso – indussero i Superiori ad autorizzare la fondazione dello studentato teologico a Tokyo, furono dal sottoscritto elencati nella domanda: brevemente si possono così riassumere:

- a. facilità di accedere al Gran Seminario dove vi sono buoni professori per le materie fondamentali; svolte in relazione anche alle necessità del Giappone;
- b. le materie secondarie: in Seminario (se gli allievi possono seguire i corsi in giapponese, sarebbe l'ideale!), o in casa;
- c. preziose relazioni con i professori e coi futuri missionari – salesiani o no. È un appoggio incalcolabile per chi conosce lo spirito giapponese;
- d. gli studi fatti a Tokyo hanno un gran significato per i giapponesi, tanto per le autorità che per gli altri: Tokyo per questo popolo è tutto;
- e. ottima propaganda salesiana in ogni senso;
- f. fecondo spirito di emulazione per i nostri e per i giapponesi.

INCONVENIENTI

1. Perdita di tempo nei viaggi e spirito di divagazione per i leggeri.
2. Data la differenza degli studi preparatori, per vari dei nostri, la scuola del seminario può rappresentare uno studio esiguo.
3. È un'eccezione.

Alla proposta di uno studentato centrale per l'Estremo Oriente ad Hong Kong (o altrove) si fanno rispettosamente le seguenti osservazioni, o meglio si pregano i Superiori a tener presenti questi pensieri, che riteniamo della massima importanza nella soluzione della questione.

1. Pur non tenendo conto della prova (purtroppo non riuscita) già fatta di teologi giapponesi ad Hong Kong e dei motivi di non riuscita;
 - a. il clima non buono a Hong Kong (ah, quella valletta!);
 - b. l'alimentazione diversa in Cina,fanno prevedere già altro insuccesso dal punto di vista materiale e sanitario.

2. La formazione del personale in posto deve essere, pare, in conformità alle esigenze e bisogni della missione. Per quattro anni, e proprio i più preziosi, il personale è sottratto a questa formazione:
 - a. di lingua
 - b. di usanze, feste, ecc. e modalità delle medesime
 - c. e di altre cose che solo in posto, per tante occasioni che sorgono naturalmente, si possono effettuare.

La missione della Cina è “*toto coelo*” differente da quella del Giappone sotto tutti gli aspetti (l'unico uguale la gloria di Dio e la salute delle anime).

I Superiori, per quanto indipendenti si vogliano pensare, non potranno non investirsi dei bisogni della Missione in cui vivono e per la massima parte (penso) dei teologi per cui lavorano. L'Ispettore cinese ancor di più: ed è naturale ed umano. L'aiuto di insegnanti provenienti dalle regioni che mantengono studenti, acuiranno di più la divisione in gruppi (anziché unire).

Piuttosto che avere i chierici in altre mani è meglio averli in Italia, presso i Superiori, presso Don Bosco e Maria Ausiliatrice – Avremo così almeno buoni preti, buoni salesiani. E se per i motivi di salute o altro (mutate condizioni di famiglia) non potessero ritornare, sono già in sede.

Si può dire che con questo cade il problema della formazione del personale in posto – ed è a domandarsi se non sia meglio piantar lì anche la formazione in posto dei novizi e studenti. Ad ogni modo meglio in Italia che altrove.

3. Dal punto di vista giapponese poi crescono le difficoltà:
 - a. l'invio dei nostri in Cina (ad Hong Kong: ed Hong Kong è Cina) è assai nocivo. Ai Superiori è noto in che condizioni siano gli stranieri in Giappone – e quanto sia grave e per noi disonorifica la condizione in cui ci veniamo a trovare nel dover asserire che si inviano i nostri in Cina per la loro formazione. È questione di estrema delicatezza e su questo

richiamo con tutte le mie forze – per quanto povere siano – l’attenzione dei Superiori;

b. con questo esodo veniamo a svalORIZZARE del tutto il lavoro di formazione in posto. Penso che i Visitatori si siano resi conto delle difficoltà, che come missionari stranieri incontriamo in Giappone:

- (1) Difficoltà di immedesimarci dello spirito giapponese, e finché non c’è questo sarà sempre fra noi la barriera – non si amerà questo gran Paese – e la religione, anche per questo, non muoverà un passo. Difficoltà di lingua: nessuno di noi la possiede bene. Qualche chierico fa buona prova... Ma se cesserà... Quelli tornati da Hong Kong hanno ora bisogno del maestro come prima, se non di più.
- (2) Difficoltà di compenetrarci coi bisogni di queste anime (che come quelle della Cina e Siam) hanno il loro fondamento nella loro storia civile, nelle loro abitudini, nella loro morale. Leggi, codici ecc., giapponesi che devono essere maneggiati nella morale, nel diritto, ecc. e che fanno a pugni con quelli di altre nazioni (se li hanno). Problemi religiosi, che tormentano queste anime, e che devono essere risolti in teologia per queste anime... se no, si è eternamente da capo... cioè il missionario porta le sue idee apprese in teologia e le applica ai giapponesi colla sua mentalità europea... E sarà l’eterno separato da queste care anime, che S. Francesco chiamava “delizie sue” (e lo sono! oh, se lo sono! delizie nostre!).
- (3) Difficoltà di svestirci di noi per divenire loro, il massimo sacrificio, ma altresì la massima necessità.

Mi domando, come fuori dell’ambiente giapponese tutto questo si possa effettuare con frutto, intendo dire come possa effettuarsi questa giapponesizzazione, che trova già tante difficoltà in posto stesso.

- (4) Cominciamo ad avere confratelli giapponesi. Pensino i Superiori che cosa si concluderà se questi cari figliuoli dovessero essere inviati ad Hong Kong.

Le cose accennate mi pare debbono servire a chiarire il difficile problema. Noi tutti sconsigliamo, o meglio, se fossimo interrogati dai Superiori risponderemmo negative per Hong Kong o altrove.

Meglio l'Italia, se i Superiori ritengono non poter concedere il permesso per lo studentato in sede giapponese.

Per me (personalmente) se deve effettuarsi l'esodo, è meglio studiare a fondo l'intero problema sulla formazione del personale in posto, e tornare all'antico.

Don V. Cimatti, sales.

Conclusion

In the last two lines of this letter Fr Cimatti makes an enigmatic reference: "if an exodus becomes indispensable..." In fact, the political situation of Japan in those days dominated by the military raised fears of the expulsion of all foreign nationals. Hence there was urgent need to form indigenous personnel. Fortunately, since Italy and Germany were allies of Japan, this situation did not arise, but from 1941 the foreign missionaries had to yield all the directorial posts to the Japanese clergy. Fr Cimatti, Prefect Apostolic of Miyazaki and Oita, too submitted his resignation. Missionaries from enemy nations were evicted.

Once the war started, almost all the Japanese confreres were called to the army, and many of them lost their lives.

From this and from the exasperated nationalism prevalent in the other Asian nations, it is evident that one of the fundamental problems – and one of the most urgent – for the implantation of the Salesian charism in Asia is precisely the formation of indigenous personnel. This is actually what they sought to realize in the post-war era.

Currently, of the approximately 120 Salesians in Japan more than 90 are Japanese.

WINDING ROAD... STEADY STEPS. SALESIAN CHARISM IN THE FIRST 30 YEARS OF FMA IN CHINA

*Laura ChauPui Har**

Introduction

While abiding by the theme of the Seminar, the title of this paper has been enhanced so as to correspond better to the documentation used and on account of its surprising similarity to the major epochs of Chinese history. Here we address ourselves to the period from the arrival in China of the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) in 1923 up to their expulsion by the then newly established communist government in 1950.

A brief presentation of the turbulent political context of China that witnessed the arrival of the FMA pioneers sets the stage for their first 30 years of activity. A table juxtaposing the political developments during this period with the progress of missionary work gives a graphic idea of the highly volatile and explosive situation of wars and revolutions that compounded the challenges the sisters faced in their apostolate of education, evangelization and nurturing of indigenous vocations.

The paper sheds light on the contribution of the FMA to the advance of the Salesian spirit in China through their availability, sacrifice, indomitable courage in facing severe challenges and above all their fidelity to the spirit of "*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*" by offering to youth and the needy services in keeping with the charism of the Institute and in response to the needs of the place and time.

* FMA, Co-ordinator of Distance Learning Programme at Holy Spirit Seminary College, Hong Kong.

1. Background Briefing

After ten bloody attempts and some twenty-seven years of indomitable struggle that claimed innumerable lives of the revolutionist heroes Dr. Sun Yat-sen, recognized as the 'Father of the Nation', finally declared the birth of the Republic of China on 1 January 1912. This had actually brought an end to thousands of years of imperial dynastic rule in China. *The Times* of London appraised the event thus:

"History has witnessed few such surprising revolutions, and perhaps none of equal magnitude, which has been carried out in all its later stages with so little bloodshed. Whether the last of those stages has been reached is one of the secrets of the future. Some of those who know China best cannot but doubt whether a form of government so utterly alien to Oriental conceptions and to Oriental traditions as a Republic can be suddenly substituted for a monarchy in a nation of four hundred millions of men, whom Kings with semi-divine attributes have ruled since the first dim twilight of history."¹

It is not difficult to understand the chaos and disorder that followed. There were massive power struggles between the old regime – the fading mandarins of the bygone reign – and the reformers, with their latest conflicting ideologies. At the periphery of the central power and armed forces, one could only imagine the lawless scoundrels, ruffians, bandits and gangsters flipping around all over. It was under such traumatic conditions that our courageous missionary pioneers set foot on China, exactly during the 1920s, '*the darkest period in the Republic*', and the very spot where the Southern revolutionist government was counteracting the warlords in the North.

¹ Quoted in Henry McALLEAVY, *The Modern History of China*, New York, Praeger Publisher 1967, p. 186.

2. Defining the Boundary

As we all know the spectrum of “the Salesian charism” is vast and multi-faceted both in its expressions and actualizations, and thus cannot easily be boiled down to few pages. Hence this paper will limit itself to some of its features stated under the entry “charism” in the latest edition (1982) of the FMA Constitutions. In art. 76 we read:

“We carry out our mission in the unity of our charism and the plurality of social-cultural situations, with the adaptability, courage and creativity which urged Don Bosco to go to the young.

“Normally this is done through the works proper to the Institute, oratories, youth centres, schools, and our initiatives for education, training and helping young people.

“As far as possible, we respond to the particular need of the local church and area also in other ways, always keeping with the character of the Institute.

“In every place and in whatever situation we may be, let us make these words of our Founder our own: ‘I have promised God that I shall work for my poor boys to my last breath’.”

Even a cursory glance at the chronological table below will suffice to identify many an element referred to above.

3. Winding Road... Steady Steps

3.1. *The Torn Yellow Earth, the Running Stream*

The ‘life cycle’ of our sisters’ mission in China has been short – just a span of 30 years. The main source of their history is their ‘*cronaca*’, the written records left by those sisters. When scrolling down those pages one may be surprised seeing that one year of their life history could at times be just an A5 size page of narration. However, looking at the backdrop of the socio-political situation in which our sisters lived, the ever restless life-wrestling world around them, it is not difficult to imagine how overwhelmed they were as they struggled

to cope with the events of their everyday lives. Too often almost as a routine they had to run for their lives from the intensive non-stop bombardment that lasted for half an hour or more². Yet admirably, our sisters were fully engaged in active missionary and community services. The following table tries to offer a scenario of the major national events of China in juxtaposition with our sisters' life in those years.

Year	Political tensions and contentions ³	FMA expeditions ⁴
1912 Jan.	The birth of the Republic of China, led by Sun Yat-sen	
Feb.	Elected Yuen Shik-kai (Cheng mandarin) as 'provisional president'. Yan ambitiously sets up his own Northern Army	
1913	Kuomintang (the <i>National Party</i>) ⁵ comes into being	
1916	Yuen Shik-kai dies. National Govt established in the South	
1916-1927 Warlordism: full scale civil wars – North & South		
1917-	China enters World War I	
1919	Japanese occupation of Shantung – National May 4 Student Movement	
1920	New Canton Military Government led by Sun established	

² [Anonymous], *Storia della Missione FMA in Cina, Anni 1923-1945*. Internal documents of FMA, Hong Kong, China Province, p. 26.

³ H. McALLEAVY, *The Modern History of China*, pp. 182-327; Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, New York, Oxford University Press 1983², pp. 452-644.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.1923-1954.

⁵ Currently the national ruling party in Taiwan.

1921	Foundation of <i>Chinese Communist Party</i>	
1923 15 March		Arrival of six FMA missionaries in Ho Sai
1924		Shiu Chow ⁶ - Mary Help of Christians College for girls
1925 March		Shelters for the blind and aged women - orphanage
	Sun Yat-sen dies	
1926		New missionaries from Italy. New clinic in Ho Sai
1927	Co-existence of three self-styled Chinese governments: the warlords in Peking, the Nationalists, the Communists	
1928-1937	Fragile Unification - The Nationalist Government	'Santa Infanzia' opened for abandoned and physically impaired young girls. 1 st batch of missionaries homewards
1934		Lok Chong - new clinic Shanghai - primary & professional schools, boarding, hospital services, parish work
1936		Ho Sai - novitiate canonically established
1937-1939 Sino-Japanese War (The Nanking Massacre in Dec. 1937)		
1938	↓	Ho Sai - First 4 Chinese FMA
1939		Novitiate moved to Shanghai

⁶ A historical strategic place in South China, situated at the north of Kwangtung (Guangdong) and thus the site of numerous battlefields, both north bound and south bound. It had always served as the entrance to the heart of China and up to the capital for merchants and especially for Catholic missionaries like Matteo Ricci. The Vicariate Apostolic of Shiu Chow was erected in 1920. This China Mission was entrusted to Fr (later Msgr.) Luigi Versiglia, who established the FMA at Ho Sai & Lok Chong.

1939-1945 World War II – China joins the Allies		
1940	↓	†Sr Maria Tch'an dies in Shanghai – 2 yrs of profession
1941		4 new professions
1942		2 new professions
1944		†Sr Rosa Tong dies in Shanghai – 3 years of profession †Sr Maria Russo dies in Shiu Chow
1945-1949 Civil War – Nationalists vs Communists		
1945	↓	†Sr Giovanna Rossi dies in Ho Sai Two German missionaries take shelter in Macau. First house in Macau
1946 16 May		Province of China canonically erected with 26 sisters, 5 houses
1949		5 new professions
1 October 1949 Establishment of the People's Republic of China		
1950		3 new professions
1953 All missionaries and local sisters (except 5) were forced to leave China and settled in Hong Kong		

As recorded in an internal document, the demography of the FMA in China from 1923-1954 is as follows⁷:

FMA 53: Missionaries	- 34
Local sisters	- 19
● Deceased	- 04
● Repatriated	- 17 (missionaries)
● Moved to other provinces	- 04 (missionaries)

⁷ *Storia della Missione FMA in Cina – Anni 1923-1945*, p. 83.

3.2. *A Tale of Two Cities*⁸ (non-fiction): Vicariate Apostolic of Shiu Cho - Shanghai

3.2.1 To Be or Not to Be

To highlight the 50th anniversary in 1922 of the foundation of the Institute of the FMA, the embarkation of missionaries to new horizons could only have been most significant and desirable. It was then that Msgr. Luigi Versiglia, the Apostolic Vicar of Shiu Chow, where there were already 60,000 inhabitants, urged in his appeal for helping hands from the FMA. They were expected to share his load in the education and evangelization of young girls and women, and especially for the formation of indigenous vocations, including those who would be the pioneers of a local religious congregation he was planning to found. He finally succeeded in welcoming six missionaries from Italy, who arrived at Shiu Chow on 15 March 1923, marking a historical milestone.

Thanks to the painstaking research by the participants of the previous Seminar in Hong Kong⁹, we have concise illustrations of the episodes concerning the genesis and exodus of our missionaries in China in the first three decades, their endeavours and predicaments. There is a great temptation to plagiarism, except for that the events here are depicted in the light of our charism. Besides highlighting the various challenges faced by our FMA pioneers in the Far East (including China), Sr Loparco rightly pointed out in her paper that

⁸ Related readings: Domingos LEONG, *The Political Situation in China in 1920-30 and Its Effects on Salesians* in Nestor C. IMPELIDO (ed.), *The Beginning of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Vol. I. (= ACSSA - Varia, 2). Hong Kong, [no publisher] 2006, p.33-45; Carlo SOCOL, *The Birth of the China Province and the Expansion of the Salesian Work in East Asia (1926-1927* in N.C. IMPELIDO, *The Beginning of the Salesian Presence...*, I, p. 47-61; Grazia LOPARCO, *The Arrival of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the Far East* in N.C. IMPELIDO, *The Beginning of the Salesian Presence...*, II, pp. 15-34; Elena MIRAVALLE, *The Mission of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in China* in N.C. IMPELIDO, *The Beginning of the Salesian Presence...*, II, pp. 35-45.

⁹ N.C. IMPELIDO, *The Beginning of the Salesian Presence...*, I-II.

their arrival was “[...] characterized by the educative nature of the institute”¹⁰, and further reaffirmed, “The missionaries’ letters testify to their availability to serve as needed, according to the initial requests, and the effort to develop works that respond to the spirit of the Institute.”¹¹ Their fidelity was to such a point that “One could sense a certain tension between the availability of the FMA, faithfulness to the spirit of the Institute, and the requests for evangelization put forward by Msgr. Versiglia [...]”¹²

Though compromise was made later, tensions continued to grow between the Superior Sr Parri Palmira and Msgr. Versiglia, later succeeded by Fr Ignatius Canazei who then headed the newly born Salesian *Visitatoria*. Disputes ranged from decisions on designating an institute for young people as “orphanage” or “boarding”, setting up of oratory or school to matters regarding religious instruction, commitment to the association of the indigenous religious, etc. In fact, the struggles were related to the process of discerning what was better suited to translating the apostolic ideals into concrete action. Albeit all this dissent, there isn’t the faintest doubt that they were all good ‘Salesians’; just that they were too zealous in accomplishing the mission entrusted to them. Collaboration is a long process of learning through pains, patience, respect, tactics and time.

3.2.2 “*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*”

Art. 22 of the FMA Constitutions describes the features of ‘poverty’ characteristic of the sisters, which should be a perfect echo of St. John Bosco’s motto and a sign of their faithfulness to the spirit of their holy founder:

“Our poverty [...] a necessary requirement of ‘*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*’ for the (FMA). Let her also be ready to

¹⁰ G. LOPARCO, *The Arrival of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians...*, p.15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

suffer heat, cold, hunger, thirst, fatigue and contempt, willing to sacrifice everything as long as she can co-operate with Christ for the salvation of young people.”

The present Provincial Secretary of the FMA China Province Sr Elena Miravalle, who has been holding this job for over a decade, has already offered in her paper a systematic account of the FMA activities and their expansion in China from their arrival to their establishment in Macau and Hong Kong in 1950.¹³

Whether in Ho Sai, Shiu Chow, Lok Chong in the south or later in Shanghai, the big metropolitan city in the north, they were mainly engaged in schools of different levels and grades from nursery to high school, orphanage and boarding, vocational training centre, oratory, catechism and services for the church, clinic and shelter for the physically impaired, and even service in hospitals and military hospitals. Whether they were ‘*works proper to the institute*’ or ‘*response to the particular need of the local church and area*’, as indicated in the aforementioned art. 76 of the Constitutions, they were all expressions of the charism in action.

Besides difficulties of language and communication, adaptation and inculturation, our sisters also faced countless hardships and intimidations: wars and death threats, flights from bombardments, diseases, arrest, interrogations, anxiety, isolation, fear and loss. They often had to endure great poverty due to the lack of means of support, whether economic or medical. In fact, as the *Storia della Missione FMA in Cina* pointed out, already from the year 1925 when our sisters landed in China, other than the difficulties of the language, the disasters of poverty and the sacrifices of the apostolate, there was another factor that made life very difficult, and that not only for the missionaries – the wars.¹⁴ If we turn back to the chronological table reported above, one is overwhelmed by the extent and duration of

¹³ E. MIRAVALLE, *The Mission of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians...*, pp. 35-45.

¹⁴ *Storia della Missione FMA in Cina – Anni 1923-1945*, p. 8.

war. On the other hand, we can only admire the courage, constancy, faithfulness and creativity of our missionaries under such duress and physical constraints. Not only did they not react, they were proactive instead.

It is recorded that already in 1927 the ‘pirates’ and the soldiers were fighting in the backyard of the sisters in Ho Sai, and by the end of the same year, the house was invaded by hundreds of ‘revolutionary’ soldiers. Yet at the same time a group of young catechists received the medals of Mary Immaculate, turning to her for patronage; later this became an association in our oratories.¹⁵

The dramatic story continues and brings us to 1938, to Shanghai, where our house was completely destroyed in bombing. The sisters had to start again from the very beginning, right from the scratch. Down at Ho Sai, where the fighting and poverty was not less fierce a historical and memorable event took place – the profession of the first four indigenous FMA.¹⁶

Also in other sources, though on a smaller scale, we find episodes recounting the heroic deeds of our sisters in Shanghai, amid perilous and miserable life challenging conditions. Some episodes appear really adventurous.

One of the reports in the *‘Notiziario delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice’* stated that our sisters there, “other then looking after the wounded solders, helped the mass of refugees gathered in the refugee camps, tending to those suffering from cholera with great generosity”.¹⁷ To meet the innumerable demands of the multiple services especially during wartime, the utmost urgency was to find a station from where they could launch out. It was then that they found a small house, abandoned by the Japanese troops, which was actually in a dilapidated and messy state. Our courageous sisters just threw

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁷ Giuseppe CACCIA, *Dalla Cina - In Shanghai, mentre perdura in guerra...* in *Il Notiziario delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, N. 8-9, 1938.

themselves into action, picked up the pieces and restored it to a more or less habitable condition. Just a couple of days later it welcomed 24 young girls working in a nearby Japanese factory, sheltering them from immediate moral and social dangers and harassment.

The founding of the new school for the working-class children also the following year in Shanghai could make us wide-eyed¹⁸. In a rural area of the city, Chapei, where there never had been a school for girls, the missionaries were besieged by pleas to open a school for such purpose. Obviously the financial situation of our sisters was contrary to such a project. Since the social demand concerned the charism proper, they went ahead adapting to their needs whatever they found to be useful.

The sisters found an old pagoda that had been used for schooling and was deserted then. Though the surroundings were fully furnished with Buddhist statues and decorative objects, the central hall offered ample space to gather a relatively sizable group. Our sisters did not think twice but immediately seized the opportunity to occupy the place and did their best to convert it into classrooms. In fact, the side chambers still preserved many old coffins – as per the old Chinese custom of keeping the corpses for a later burial – but left abandoned during the wars, some remnants actually exposed. Well, let the dead bury their dead! The lively missionaries instead set to raising the living. Fortunately the old inhabitants neither complained nor interfered! Their presence was completely quiet and calm. At the beginning of the classes the dead tenants numbered more than the live. The student strength, however, increased day by day. Soon there were 200 students and many still in the waiting list.

There are very many such stunning incidences and accounts. Some have been recorded and maybe there are many still to be discovered.

¹⁸ Giuseppe CACCIA, “Dalla Cina - Una scuola... in pieno stile ‘900!...” in *Il Notiziario delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, N. 8-9, 1939.

On the other hand, events like the repatriation of missionaries and the loss of even young sisters should have been painful and confusing. Persecutions under communists were certainly ordeals. Yet, listening to the live testimonies of the sisters who survived that epoch seems like watching scenes from a movie; their usual comment is, 'How beautiful was the life of those days!'

Concluding Remarks

Looking back at the courage and fidelity of our sisters in China in the first three decades of the history of the Chinese Province amid the unending and mounting tumultuous conditions, we cannot but admire their determination and fidelity to their commitments. By the time they transferred to Hong Kong, there were already 18 Chinese sisters, all born in wartime. Their retreat to Hong Kong resulted in new apostolic vineyards in Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam and Australia. The fire in their hearts will go on. Don Bosco's dream of China should come true. "*Yes, we can!*"

THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN SIHM'S LIFE AND MISSION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

*Maliwan Paramathawirote - Paranat Phengpinit**

Introduction

The Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (SIHM) would like to acknowledge the invitation to contribute to the Seminar of EAO on "Implantation of the Salesian Charism in the Region: Ideals, Challenges, Answers and Results". Being a member of the Salesian Family, we too are eager to study and know more about this precious gift. This paper limits itself to the first 20 years of our foundation, i.e., from 1937 to 1957.

We can say that the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was born in a Salesian context and from the needs of the local Church in 1937, barely ten years after the opening of the Salesian mission in Thailand

When we look at our origins, we could easily realize that the Salesian Charism has permeated our life and mission right from our foundation. On the specific characteristic of our Congregation, art. 11 of our Constitutions says:

"In the service of the local Church, which is the specific role of the Society, the members will make the charism of Don Bosco appear in their religious life by their simple and moderate way of living [...]. The sisters practice family spirit in the community life, display a friendly relationship with others; they are joyful, tender, optimistic, and adapt

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themselves properly to the situation. They are ready to forgive in accordance with the teachings and examples of Jesus. They use the preventive system which is based on loving-kindness, reason and religion. An important part of the piety of the sisters is in the Holy Eucharist and Mother Mary. Aside from these, they will try to live a life 'contemplating God while fulfilling their mission of service'".¹

1. The Historical Context

The Salesians arrived in Thailand in 1925 led by the then Prefect General of the Society, Fr Pietro Ricaldone. Two years later Fr Gaetano Pasotti, who was assigned to China, was sent to Thailand. He was later elected to be the Superior of this mission in Ratchaburi.

The Holy See elevated the Mission to an Apostolic Prefecture in 1934, entrusting it to Fr Pasotti. The Center of the Mission was in Bang-Nok-Khuek. This new Mission included 15 provinces beginning from Ratchaburi down to the South. Two Salesian missionaries had been visiting the parishioners periodically from 1933.

As a zealous missionary, especially after he was ordained Bishop on 28 May 1934, Mgr Gaetano Pasotti began his mission with the pastoral visit. After being made the Prefect Apostolic of Ratchaburi in 1938 he visited the Catholics scattered in the provinces of Prachuap Khirikan, Chumphorn, NakornSriThammarat, (Hatyai) Songkhla, Pattani and (Betong) Yala, together with the missionaries.

In 1948 Bishop Pasotti sent two missionaries from Chumphorn to Narathiwat in the far South. They also visited the Catholic families scattered along the way – in NakornSriThammarat, Phuket, Ranong, Songkhla, Betong, Yala.

From these pastoral visits from Huahin to the southernmost part of Thailand, the Bishop realized that there were a lot of adults

¹ *Constitutions of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Suratthani, [SIHM Publication] 1985, art. 11.

and youth – catholics and non-catholics – who were waiting for spiritual help, like sheep without shepherds. He himself wrote:

“Filled with anxiety, I have seen with my own eyes that along the peninsula from Ratchaburi down to the border in the South, *there is not a single mission center*. The people are still in darkness [...]. When will God's time come? We hope that in this XIX Century of the world's redemption Christian love will make us bring salvation to this world by building mission centers in every place where Christ has not yet arrived.”²

2. The Implantation of the Salesian charism in SIHM's life

When Bishop Gaetano Pasotti received the Catholic Mission of Ratchaburi, he was confronted with the question of how to bring the Good News to the people, specially the young, and how to develop the Diocese – how to bring the Kingdom to all the people in his territory. He thought of preparing personnel for the mission. He planned to promote the diocesan clergy and also found a new congregation of sisters.

It is a gospel truth that one cannot give what one does not have. It can, therefore, be rightly said that in founding his spiritual daughters, Bishop Pasotti, himself a Salesian, could not relay any other spirit to this group except that of the Salesian charism. A reflection written by Bishop Michael Praphon Chaicharoen, the second successor to the Catholic Mission of Surat Thani, in the book celebrating “The Golden Jubilee of the Congregation”, he underlined:

“First of all, I think that the fact that the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have been related with the Salesians is part of the plan of God, who made a Salesian

² Gaetano PASOTTI, *Splendide giornate di entusiasmo e di bene*, BS LVII (maggio 1933) 152-153.

Bishop to be their founder [...]. It is no wonder at all that the SIHM have been related with the Salesians since their birth.”³

2.1. *Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Founder*

When Bishop Pasotti founded the Congregation of “Sisters-Servants” he wanted one that would “*be all to all*”, both for the Christians and non-Christians. He wanted to have one that would live and do some particular tasks in the Diocese which the priests could not do. This would enable the priests to do their pastoral work more effectively. He gave the SIHM the ‘*fourteen point rule*’ as their ‘*path of life*’, and he sent this to the Propaganda Fide for approval. The Rules reflected his vision of what this new Congregation would “BE” and what they would “DO” in the local Church. The “fourteen point rule”⁴ was:

What to “BE”:

- zealous missionaries
- Thai for the Thais
- filially obedient to the Superior of the Mission as to a most loving father
- adaptable to the culture so as to easily find an open way to souls
- all things to all... be shining examples of “gentleness of heart and humility”

What to “DO”:

- be engaged in works of charity on behalf of the female group... in religious promotion, education, etc.

³ Praphon CHAICHAROEN, *Return to the Past and Looking Forward to the Future in The Golden Jubilee of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Bangkok, Sarn Muanchon Printing Company 1987, p.155.

⁴ Gaetano PASOTTI, *The Path of Life: First Edition of the Society of Sisters Helpers* [a series of 14 two-page documents sent to Propaganda Fide], Bang Nok Khuek 1937.

- be available to help missionaries set up the mission stations especially in house-keeping – kitchen service and laundry – and the care of the Church
- select deserving individuals from among the members and give opportunity to acquire necessary qualifications
- be available to help in any other works of charity: visiting the sick, preparing people for the sacraments, baptizing children at the point of death, preparing candidates for baptism and first communion, caring for young orphan girls and those at risk
- make every effort to spread good books and literature; zealously promote the formation and development of Catholic Action Groups
- give praise to the Lord for having been made worthy to suffer a little for the sake of His name
- open one or more houses for girls who show some evidence of religious vocation, and prepare those who have the ability to acquire teacher's certification

2.2. *Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Missionary*

Being the 'one who was sent' in order to build the local Church where the light of Christ has not yet reached, Bishop Pasotti wanted that his spiritual daughters be authentic missionaries to propagate the Good News and cultivate the faith of the Christian community. He wanted them to do pastoral work to help maintain the faith of the Christian communities and to keep them strong.⁵

2.3. *Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Salesian*

As a son of Don Bosco, Bishop Pasotti taught the Salesian method and spirit to his spiritual daughters by his words and example so that they could see this in real practice, assimilate them and live

⁵ Cf. P. CHAICHAROEN, *Return to the Past ...*, p.155.

them in their mission. He wanted the new Congregation he founded to be missionaries in the Diocese with the Salesian charism.⁶

3. The Role of the Salesians of Don Bosco

In the initial stage of the Congregation, Bishop Gaetano Pasotti asked the Salesian priests to teach his spiritual daughters catechism and religious life, preach monthly recollections and annual retreats, and also be their confessors. Among the Salesians who were associated with the SIHM's life and mission were Fr Job Carnini, who came to teach catechism everyday; Fr Silvio de Munari, the first confessor; Fr Mario Barbero, Fr Peter Jellici and Fr Silvio Provera, confessors; Fr Carlo Casetta, Fr Mario Ruzeddu and Fr Joseph Forlazzini, preachers of recollections and annual retreats; Fr Egidio Bottain, teacher of religious life; Fr John Casetta, the first Salesian Provincial who visited the sisters; Fr Giorgio Bainotti, teacher of the Constitutions to the novices. All the Salesians were very patient in forming the new candidates to be good religious. They helped Bishop Gaetano Pasotti make his plan come true.⁷

4. The Role of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

In a letter to the Propaganda Fide, dated 29 March 1939, Bishop Gaetano Pasotti wrote, "The spirit of the Congregation follows the model of the FMA's, especially with regard to the education of young women." He wanted his new Congregation to follow the model of the FMA's because he was convinced that they were faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. With God's inspiration there was close collaboration between the Salesian Sisters and the Bishop. He always expressed his gratitude to the FMA's when he wrote to their Mother General:

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.153-164.

⁷ Cf. Sompong THABPING, *The story of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary 1937-1997* in *Yon Roy PhuRapChai* [Tracing the Steps of the Servants]. Vol.II, Ratchaburi, SIHM Publication 1996, pp., 24-25, *Ibid.* Vol. III, pp.8,16, 33.

“I do not know how to describe to you my profound feelings in appreciation for the dedication of Sr Antonietta Morellato who helped in the foundation of this new Congregation of the ‘Sisters-Servants’. Please relay my gratitude also to your Councillors.”⁸

Since the FMA Sisters did not accept to work in the small centers of the mission as they had to work directly for the children and the young women according to their Constitutions, it was indeed providential that Bishop Gaetano Pasotti and the diocesan councillors of Ratchaburi agreed to found a new congregation to work with the priests in various parishes and centers. The Bishop, however, requested the Mother General of the FMA's to send two sisters to help in the foundation of this new congregation. The superiors of the FMAs accepted the plan wholeheartedly. The sisters selected for this purpose of assisting and forming the candidates of this new congregation were Sr Antonietta Morellato and Sr Luigina di Giorgio.

Sr Antonietta Morellato was appointed the first novice mistress even though she was only 26 years old and just 5 years in the country. Her Superiors wanted her to stay for only three years. However, the Bishop asked for a special consideration. In a letter to the FMA Superior General, the Bishop expressed three points:

- his gratitude for the help of the FMA congregation through the presence of Sr Antonietta Morellato
- the exemption obtained from Propaganda Fide from the age impediment of the novice mistress who was only 26 years old
- his important request, “don't leave me too quickly because this kind of work is very delicate”

Eventually, she served as novice mistress for 15 years (1937-1952). She was both the novice mistress and the superior of the

⁸ Sompong THABPING, *FMA: Phu wang raak tan chivit Phakhinee Phu Rap Chai* [FMA: Who helped to lay the foundation of Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary], Bangkok, Star Boom Interprint 2003, p.25.

community until 1941 since the Superiors could not find any other sister to help her. Her presence, however, brought joy to the first group of candidates.⁹

Sr Luigina Di Giorgio was the first superior. Being a nurse, she took care of the sick and looked after the health of the candidates. Being also a dress-maker she taught needlework to the candidates. She did not learn formally the Thai language since she had to plunge herself immediately into work. She stitched the cassocks of the Salesian seminarians and priests. While teaching needlework in Nariwattana School, she also took care of the sick in the small health center near the Nativity of Mary Church, Bang Nok Khuek, and helped in the activities of the Catholic groups, especially the young women and women's group.

In 1941 Bishop Pasotti asked her to be assistant of the professed sisters. Finally, in 1944, she was officially appointed the first Superior of the Congregation of the Sisters-Servants. She held this position until 1964. After 20 years she continued to live at Narivitaya School, Ratchaburi, even though she was no longer the Superior of the SIHM and took on the role of special councillor until she died on 14 September 1987. She had been with the SIHM Sisters for 46 years and dedicated her missionary life to give life to the SIHM Congregation. She was always the model of a faithful religious until her death.¹⁰

Sr Esterina Brando was the second novice mistress. She got involved closely with the SIHM when Sr Antonietta Morellato was made Provincial of the FMA in Thailand in February 1952. On 11 May 1953 Sr Esterina Brando began her mission as the novice mistress with one second-year novice and ten postulants. On 2 May 1956, after the first profession of the 7 novices she had formed, she was appointed novice mistress and superior of the FMA community in Banpong, Ratchaburi. She left the SIHM Sisters on 19 May 1956.

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.6-13.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.16-18.

Even now the SIHM Sisters still feel very close to her and she continues to treat us as her daughters.¹¹

5. Absorbing the Salesian Charism from Life Experience

We learn more easily from our experience. Living with another person for some time would enable us to absorb some of the other's values and make them our own. Living and working together with the Salesians and the FMA Sisters presented the SIHM Sisters the opportunity to absorb the values of the Salesian Charism. From them and with them the SIHM imbibed the mission 'to be and to do' in the same spirit.

5.1. Cooperation in the Foundation and Formation of the SIHM

The presence of the FMA Sisters helped the SIHM actualize the '14 point rule' envisioned for them by Bishop Gaetano Pasotti as 'the path of life'. They cooperated in the activities of the parishes – teaching catechism, housekeeping, laundry and cooking. The Salesian Sisters in-charge encouraged the candidates to take the teachers' certification exams and trained them to be certified nurses to help in the pastoral care of the parishioners. It was through these daily interactions that the FMA sisters were able to transmit what one should "BE" and what one should "DO".

Through the Salesians and the FMAs, the SIHM Sisters learned more about Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. Many important Salesian events also occurred during this period, among them the canonization of Don Bosco in 1934, the golden jubilee of his death in 1938, the beatification of Dominic Savio in 1950, and the beatification Mother Maria Mazzarello in 1951. These celebrations aroused the interest and devotion of the sisters for these holy figures and increased their desire to imitate them and put into practice their 'spirit'.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.* pp.19-22.

5.2. *Devotion to the Eucharist and Solemn Liturgy*

Both the SIHM founder (Bishop Gaetano Pasotti) and their first formators (the FMA sisters) were truly devoted to the Holy Eucharist. Through their teachings and example they encouraged the candidates to prepare well the Sunday liturgy, especially the singing and the services. For the celebration of solemnities and feast days, the Salesian Sisters would play the organ and teach us the songs, and we helped to decorate the church.

Some of the unforgettable teachings of Bishop Pasotti along this line were:

- “Our heart has to cling to God, i.e., our heart should be inflamed everyday for love of Him as the lamp near the tabernacle”¹²
- “I know that you love to be with Jesus in the Eucharist. There is nothing more joyful than to be in front of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. We can express our minds when we come to see Him in the Eucharist.”¹³
- “Let’s be intimate with Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. If we are separated from Him, we will lack happiness and peace.”¹⁴
- “Let’s be close to Him by receiving Him often; don’t leave it without any suitable reason.”¹⁵

On the anniversary of the consecration of Bishop Gaetano Pasotti on 24 June 1942, everyone took turns to be with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to pray for his intentions.¹⁶

¹² Gaetano PASOTTI, *Kam Sangson* [Teaching for Sisters Servants]. *The small collection and translation in English*, Hua-Hin, SIHM Publication 2002 [excerpts from the chronicles of Bank-nok khuek], 9 October 1938.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20 October 1946.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1950.

¹⁵ S. THABPING, *FMA: Phu wang raak ...*, p.49.

¹⁶ Archives of SIHM, Hua-Hin (ASIHM), *Chronicles of the First House in Bang-nok khuek*, 24 June 1942.

5.3. *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Bishop Pasotti reminded us often that Jesus loves the Sisters-Servants very much because He wanted us to replace Him in this world. The Sacred Heart of Jesus looked at us and felt happy because of our good will; He blessed our Congregation. "Our love, if it does not belong totally to Jesus Christ, would become a dead love."¹⁷

5.4. *Filial Love to the Blessed Virgin Mary*

Bishop Gaetano Pasotti considered the Blessed Virgin Mary as the support of his vocation. He contemplated her as the Lord's disciple who answered 'Yes' to God's plan of the Incarnation. He dedicated himself to her and placed his entire mission under her protection. He taught his spiritual daughters: "Let's love the Holy Eucharist and the Blessed Mother very much."¹⁸

In another place he said, "I placed you under Mary's protection. I have done this because all the virtues and asceticism to be good and holy religious come from her. Do you understand that the future of the Congregation, the holiness of the members and all the virtues that we acquire must come from her?"¹⁹

As true daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Sr Antonietta Morellato and Sr Luigina di Giorgio showed profound devotion to the Virgin Mary, and they transmitted this to the SIHM Sisters. From January 1938 every 24th of the month the sisters would celebrate a special liturgy to pay homage and promote love and devotion to Mary Help of Christians. They also prayed the Holy Rosary together everyday. The chronicles of 1944 record an event that showed the special intervention of the Blessed Mother:

"On 24 January 1944, the monthly memorial of Mary Help of Christians, Sr Luigina di Giorgio brought the abnormal

¹⁷ G. PASOTTI, *Kam Sangson*, 5 April 1946.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, December 1939.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1949.

16 year old Magdalena to attend Mass at the Church. Bishop Gaetano Pasotti blessed her after invoking the Blessed Mother. Miraculously, she recovered and was back to normal. There was no need to shackle her with chains anymore. Everybody was surprised and happy for her to obtain the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. This was an authentic miracle attested by the two Salesian Sisters who took care of her.”²⁰

From the teachings of their founder and the devotion shown by their first formators, the SIHM Sisters slowly developed this filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

5.5. *Contemplation in Action*

Through the examples and teachings of Sr Antonietta Morellato and Sr Luigina di Giorgio, the SIHM Sisters were encouraged to pray even while they were sewing, gardening or doing other duties. There was a provision in the time-table to pray together every half-an-hour in the sewing room. This enabled us to establish intimate relationship with God. Bishop Gaetano Pasotti also wrote: “Try to make your work holy especially by saying often some ejaculatory prayers of petition.”

5.6. *Family Spirit*

One predominant characteristic of the new community was the ‘family spirit’. From the Salesians, from their formators and the FMA community the SIHM Sisters learned to live like a family. The solidarity of the FMA Sisters and the communion with Sr Antonietta and Sr Luigina touched the lives and impressed the hearts of the SIHM Sisters. When the Superiors of the Salesians or the FMAs came to visit Thailand, they also came to visit our community, which gave us the feeling of being in the same family. Many times, feasts were celebrated together and meals were shared. The annual retreat was also done together. An SIHM sister wrote: “We feel deeply grateful to the FMA Superior, Sr Maria Esterina Brando. We don’t know

²⁰ ASIHM, *Chronicles of the First House in Bang-nok khuek*, 24 May 1944.

how to thank her enough. Love and gratitude will always be deep in our hearts because she loved and helped us a lot.”

6. The SIHM in the Local Church

Bishop Gaetano Pasotti wrote in the book *The Path of Life* of the Congregation of Sisters-Servants some guidelines on ‘how TO BE’ and ‘what TO DO’ in the Church:

- The institute of Sisters-Servants, helpers of the Catholic Mission of Ratchaburi, is a Congregation of Thai women by birth who profess the simple vows and live an intense missionary spirit. They are Thais to serve the Thais.²¹
- It is the purpose of the Institute to engage in works of charity on behalf of the female population. Within this field and within the boundaries of their mandates, the members shall engage in every aspect of the missionary apostolate – religious promotion, education, charity.²²
- The sisters shall also be available to help the missionary at established mission stations with housekeeping – food service, laundry and linen care. They shall attend also to the care of the Church.²³
- Clinics, minor surgeries and maternity care are important means of promoting the faith, as well as works of charity. Hence, the Institute shall take pains to select good individuals from among its members and give them the opportunity to acquire the necessary certifications for these professions.²⁴
- The Sisters-Servants shall also be available to help in any other work of charity, whether material or spiritual, such as visiting the sick, preparing them for the sacraments, baptizing

²¹ G. PASOTTI, *The Path of life* ..., No.1.

²² *Ibid.* No. 2.

²³ *Ibid.* No. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.* No. 4.

children at the point of death, preparing candidates for Baptism and for first Communion, caring for the young orphan girls and girls at risk.²⁵

- The sisters shall make every effort to spread good books and literature. Likewise, within the guidelines set by the Superiors, they shall zealously promote the formation and development of Catholic Action Groups.²⁶
- With trust in the help of Divine Providence, the sisters shall open one or more houses for girls who give evidence of a religious vocation. In such houses, the course of studies shall conform to the current government programs. Furthermore, the Institute shall take pains to acquire the legal certification as teachers for those sisters who exhibit the ability.²⁷

Studying these guidelines attentively, it could be concluded that the SIHM Sisters were called “to be all to all”. A solid formation was required to make them ready for various skills. It was on 30 June 1941 that the first group of sisters began to teach in Nareewatana School, *and they had to do everything*.

The presence of the SIHM Sisters in the local Church can be divided into three phases:

6.1. *Preparation for the Mission (1937-1938)*

The first group of SIHM Sisters spent one year of novitiate in Bang Nok Khuek. Sr Antonietta Morellato assisted them with loving-kindness and patience. Bishop Gaetano Pasotti also followed up their growth.

After their first profession in 1940, the two sisters were assigned to the Salesian seminary in Bang Nok Khuek. They worked with the

²⁵ *Ibid.* No. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.* No. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.* No. 10.

children, the young and married catholic women. With their FMA Sisters-formators they carried out their activities in the Salesian spirit.

In order to arouse their missionary spirit Bishop Pasotti would share with them his experiences during his pastoral visits to the South of Thailand. He advised them, 'Prepare your soul to be strong and holy in order to be good examples to others'. On 20 January 1941, having returned from the pastoral visit to a new small parish, Bishop Pasotti addressed the sisters:

"In the various parishes, they are asking the Sisters to be there. However, it is necessary to be responsible to your duties first and to love one another. I asked all the formators to help you avoid bad habits. You have to be like a good painter who knows the defective part and makes corrections with it. To live and work in the parish, you must know your duties well and love one another as well."²⁸

6.2. *Presence in the Local Church*

In 1941 one of the sisters began to teach at Nariwattana School and SIHM opened a new mission at Don Kra Bueang. Two sisters were assigned to work there. This was the first time that the professed sisters of this new Institute left the convent to work in a parish. They helped the parish priest with the housekeeping and assisted in activities for the catholic women.²⁹ In 1943 two other sisters were sent to the parish of Kok-mod-tanoi, in Damnoen-saduak. They did the same work as in Don Kra Bueang.³⁰ In 1944 one professed sister was made principal of Nareewatana School.³¹

It is significant to note that during this period Mother Maria Esterina Brando appointed Sr Luigina di Giorgio to be the Head

²⁸ S. THABPING, *The story of the Sisters Servants ...*, II, p.44.

²⁹ Cf. Sompong THABPING, *The story of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, in *The Golden Jubilee of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Bangkok, Sarn Muanchon Printing Company 1987, p. 97.

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.98.

³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

Superior in charge of the Sisters-Servants. She could be considered their first Superior. Her role among the SIHM Sisters was also significant because she trained the first group of sisters to organize activities for the catholic women – the children, the young and the married.

6.3. *The First Perpetual Professions*

The year 1948 was a special one for the SIHM Congregation. The first group of sisters were preparing themselves for their final vows. This group left behind their respective assignments, returned to the mother house and dedicated themselves to the final preparation for perpetual profession, the total offering of oneself to God. The formators for this final stage were Sr Antonietta Morellato, the novice mistress, and Fr Constantine Cavalla SDB.³²

3 May 1949 marked a historical day for the SIHM Congregation. On this day six sisters made their final vows. This group of sisters was always considered the ‘pillars’ of the Institute.³³

Another important event during this year was the distribution of the book of the Constitutions for the first time. This was a tangible proof of the labour of love of Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, Sr Antonietta Morellato and Sr Luigina di Giorgio. Aside from this, the little book of prayers and devotions were also given to all the professed sisters. This served as instrument and guidelines to lead the SIHM Sisters to a close relationship with God.³⁴

7. **The Mission after Bishop Gaetano Pasotti (1951-1957)**

The death of Bishop Gaetano Pasotti on 3 September 1950 left the SIHM Sisters without their spiritual father when they were still very young. It did not take long however, to have a new shepherd in the person of Bishop Peter Caretto. He was ordained Bishop and successor to Bishop Pasotti in 1951.

³² Cf. *Ibid.*, p.99.

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.100.

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

In 1952 Sr Antonietta Morellato was appointed Provincial of the FMA in Thailand. She stayed with the SIHM Sisters for another year and in 1953 she finally left to assume fully her new post as Provincial. Sr Esterina Brando substituted her during her absence and it was not until 1956 that she was given the task of novice mistress.

In 1954 the SIHM Sisters opened a new mission in the parish of Thamuang, Kanchanaburi. In 1955 with the help of Msgr. Peter Carretto, Fr Peter Iellici and Sr Luigina di Giorgio, the SIHM constructed a new school of their own – Narivittaya School, Ratchaburi. This became the new mother house. On 22 January 1956 an oratory was opened here where the children could play and educative activities were organized for them.³⁵

All these events presented opportunities for the SIHM Sisters to grow and mature in the Salesian spirit that they had absorbed through the years of formation under the tutelage of a Salesian Bishop, the Salesian confreres, and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Conclusion

The SIHM Sisters believe that their belonging to the Salesian Family was not by chance but was really the design of Divine Providence. Though there was a period of uncertainty and confusion, yet through the firm guidance of Bishop Pasotti and the FMA formators the SIHM Sisters were able to know, absorb and live the spirit of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. They understood and strove to be 'signs and bearers of God's love for the young' in their parish missions and pastoral tasks for the children and the young in schools. They lived according to the asceticism of the Salesian Charism which included work, temperance, loving-kindness, fraternal charity and educational expertise. The SIHM Sisters are very grateful to the Salesians and the FMA Sisters who worked hard in order to teach this 'precious gift' to them through their lives and examples. We are now faced with the challenge of sowing this charism in the hearts of

³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.101-103.

the new generation of members, so that in their turn they may become 'signs and bearers of God's love for the young', and become 'all to all'. The motto proposed by Bishop Gaetano Pasotti and adopted as such continues to inspire us: "*Caritas Urget Nos!*".

NURTURING OF VOCATIONS ON THE JOURNEY OF IMPLANTATING THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN THE FIRST 30 YEARS OF THE FMA IN VIETNAM

*Maria Hoang ngoc Yen - Maddalena Ngo thi Minh Chau**

Introduction

This contribution to the Salesian History Seminar on the implantation of the Salesian charism in the EAO region has great significance for the Vice-Province “Mary Help of Christians” of Vietnam, which will celebrate 50 years of the presence of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in 2011.

This paper focuses on the first thirty years (1960-1990) of the FMA presence in Vietnam. Reflecting on the life and struggles of the Institute in our land during this period, we can see mirrored in the great concern of the pioneers for the care of vocations and the formation of its (future) members the ideals that guided them, the challenges faced and their response to them as well as the results obtained on the journey of implantation and growth of the Salesian charism.

The sources that aided this research include house chronicles from 1961 to 1976, particularly of the house ‘Maria Ausiliatrice’ of Chuk Yuen, Hong Kong; reports, minutes, letters and interviews. These documents are found in the central archives of the FMA in Rome and in the archives of the FMA Chinese Province of Hong Kong. In Vietnam, most of the documents were burnt or lost on account of the tragic political situation during and after the wars. Besides the written documents, there are also the “living documents”, the Daughters of

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Mary Help of Christians from the early period who are still alive, and who have contributed with their personal testimonies regarding the past.

We can say that Mary preceded the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to Vietnam. Fr Mario Acquistapace, Rector of the Salesian orphanage of Go Vap, had been inviting the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from 1959 to meet a group of young ladies being formed by him and by the diocesan parish priest Fr Vu Khiem Cung. The two Provincials – Mother Caterina Moore of the Chinese province, Hong Kong, and Mother Teresa Merlo of the Thai Province – made a visit to Vietnam on 8 March 1960. On 28 October 1960 the first six young ladies went to the Mary Help of Christians Chinese province, Hong Kong, to begin their formation. Hong Kong was the choice of the Apostolic Nuncio, Msgr. Gordon, in view of the state of diplomatic relations in the Asian countries.¹

“The Bishop of Saigon, Msgr. Hien, urged us to come soon to study and to guide the girls before sending them to Hong Kong [...] in this way the sisters could study the language before starting the work [...] Knowing that the sisters and aspirants needed some means to maintain themselves, he offered us a small elementary school in a place called Cho Lon.”²

We shall consider the history of these 30 years in two periods – up to 1975 and after.

1. FMA in Vietnam: the First Period (1961-1975)

The first missionary sisters arrived in Vietnam on 28 May 1961 and lived in a narrow, rented house at Binh Tay, Cho Lon, Saigon. They taught the poor students at the parish school, held classes for

¹ FMA Provincial Archives, Hongkong, *Minutes of the provincial council meeting 18 May 1960.*

² Archivio Generalizia Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, Roma (AGFMA), *Letter Catarina Moore to General Council, Hong Kong, 2 Dec. 1960.*

Chinese children, taught at the Sunday oratory, and accepted aspirants. With all these activities on hand, their income was insufficient. Despite the poverty, however, many parents asked the sisters to accept their daughters as aspirants. The house chronicle states: "Not one day passed without someone coming and asking for their daughter to be accepted as an aspirant."³

On May 13th 1963 the sisters moved into a large building which was the seminary of Vinh Diocese located at Tam Ha, Thu Duc. The community consisted of four sisters: Sr Rosa Zoller (German), Sr Olivia Sadaya (Philippino), Sr Anna Persico and Sr Elena Miravalle (Italians). Sr Maria del Socorro Machuy (Chinese) worked for 3 years in Vietnam and some other missionaries stayed only for some months or a year. Here the sisters opened an aspirantate and a lower secondary school for boarders and external students, grades 6-9. They also taught catechism at the Sunday oratory and at the parish.

The two-year period 1961-1963 marked the first impact of the Salesian charism on the culture and society of Vietnam. It was also the time in which the foundations of the Institute were laid and it began to expand. During this time attention was focused on the preparation of young ladies to be sent to Hong Kong and Italy for formation. The new Archbishop of Saigon, Msgr. Paul Nguyen van Binh recommended the sisters to go and visit the families of these young ladies to know them better. He told the sisters: "Don't hasten to let them (the aspirants) go, because the formation of the first sisters is very important."⁴

In 1966 the Italian government helped build the kindergarten Lina for the children of the area. Besides the 96 aspirants who attended the lower secondary school in the house, there were also external students in the school. The sisters continued to run the Sunday oratory, take Catechism classes, and form catechists.⁵

³ AGFMA, *Chronicles of St. John Bosco community, Cho Lon, 28 May 1961.*

⁴ AGFMA, *Chronicles of St. John Bosco community, Cho Lon, 1967, 1971.*

⁵ AGFMA, *Chronicles of St. John Bosco community, Cho Lon, 29 Dec 1961.*

On 20 May 1967 the first two Vietnamese vocations returned from Hong Kong: Sr Maddalena Ngo thi Minh Chau and Sr Anna Tran thi Chung. On 31 August 1967 two other sisters returned from Italy. As time went on, all the sisters from overseas returned. Those who returned immersed themselves with enthusiasm in the apostolate at Tam Ha as kindergarten teachers, elementary and lower secondary school teachers, as catechists for the boarders, for the Sunday oratory and for the parish, preparing catechumens, and as animators of youth groups and Associations.

1.1. *The Challenges*

1.1.1 Language, the Principal Difficulty

Italian was the language used for communication in this international community of the first missionaries. The relationship with the aspirants and the outsiders was made difficult as not all the aspirants could express themselves in English or French; with the outsiders it was even worse. In a letter to Mother Nilde Maule, Provincial, Sr Caterina Moore explained: "The difficulty of language is the main tripping stone and although the sisters study everyday, they don't seem to master it. It will take some time [...]"⁶ Later on she added: "It's difficult to initiate the aspirants into the spirit of the Oratory because we have not been able to explain to them this marvelous Salesian treasure due to the lack of mastery of the language. We have turned to our good Salesian priests."⁷

1.1.2 Cultural Differences

It was not easy for the Salesian charism to enter a culture founded on hierarchy and marked by an inborn severity of the people. As a matter of fact, the loving kindness of the Preventive System seemed to contradict the common understanding of the Vietnamese

⁶ AGFMA 13.92 01-1, *Letter Catarina Moore to Mother Nilde, 13 Feb.1962 from Philippines*

⁷ *Ibid.*

who still go by the principle “spare the rod and spoil the child”; for them, “to love is to use the rod and to be sweet is to hate.”

In a letter to Mother Nilde Maule, the Provincial, Sr Caterina Moore wrote in 1962, “I am surprised at the respect the people have for the house of God; everyone prays and if occasionally a child is forgetful and begins to speak or is distracted, a resounding slap from the father or mother or some other adult reminds him of his duty [...]”⁸ In a letter written to Mother General in 1965, Sr Elena Miravalle wrote: “Here they still use the cane to obtain discipline. It shows they don’t know the pedagogy of Father Negri.”⁹

1.1.3 War, Uncertainty and Poverty

War is one of the most tragic events that challenged the projects and influenced the course of the government’s actions. An excerpt from the Chronicles:

“Using the usual tactic, that is lie, the Viet Congs attacked, thus betraying their agreement of ceasefire established and accepted by both parties. From our house one can see columns of smoke rising up from Saigon. The military radio announced the destruction of palaces and offices, launched anguished appeals to the soldiers on leave to report immediately to the barracks [...]. On the night of February 1st there was a fierce battle in Thu Duc and Tam Ha, where our house is located. We find ourselves in the middle of the battle, unable to go out from our dormitory.”¹⁰

“For some time we have not gone for walks; the woods which offer us possible relaxation has become dangerous with even land mines in some places.”¹¹

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ AGFMA 15(96) 08, *Letter Elena Miravalle to Mother General, Tam Ha 24 July 1965.*

¹⁰ AGFMA, *Chronicles of St. Joseph community, Tam Ha, 31 Jan. 1968.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22 Sept. 1968.

Despite the difficult situation they gave priority to the formation of local vocations. They were aware that in preparing the personnel they were laying the foundations for the future development of the Institute in Vietnam. They tried to infuse the Salesian qualities in the aspirants during the period of discernment and of decision-making.

1.2. *Transmission of the Charism*

1.2.1. Spiritual Foundations

The sisters tried, with the help of our Salesian brothers, to lay solid foundations of religious life in the aspirants by caring for their spiritual life: Eucharistic adoration every Sunday, monthly and yearly retreats, weekly catechism lessons, study program for the formation period according to the directives of the Institute, weekly conferences, private talks and readings.¹² The community library had sufficient books on Salesian spirituality in Italian and in Vietnamese, translated by the Salesians who worked in close collaboration.

The sisters took great care to give Mary a prominent place in the formation of the aspirants and young sisters. The chronicles highlight the Marian feasts organized in the community or in the parish church with the various expressions of devotion: novena, catechism, celebrations at the oratory and parish, procession, ritual flower offering, daily sacrifices, letters to Mary and many other ways of showing filial love.¹³

1.2.2 Life in the Aspirantate and Family Spirit

Sr Rosa Zoller, who was an assistant in Hong Kong was a person of rich experience. The house of Tam Ha could hold 96 aspirants, from the 6th grade upward. They were divided into 4 groups; but the girls from the 10th grade up were called older aspirants. In

¹² AGFMA 15(96)08, *Sr Elena Miravalle's letters to Mother General, Tam Ha 24 July 1965.*

¹³ AGFMA, *From the Chronicles of St. Joseph community, Tam Ha 31 May 1964, 13 May 1967.*

group activities, the older aspirants guided the younger ones and were a real help to the sisters.

The sisters took great care to promote the family spirit – a great value in the Vietnamese culture – during the period of formation through friendly, simple and cheerful relationships. The spirit of sacrifice, love and obedience was nurtured through the example of the sisters, who were real models. In fact when their command of the spoken language was limited, it was substituted by a more efficacious language – the language of good example. The chronicles report that the superior's conferences were a program of life for the sisters. They emphasized good example and the study of the language: "Mother Provincial recommended us to speak through good example [...]. She insisted especially on the study of the language, saying that we have to give it the greatest importance and left it to us as one of our main duties."¹⁴

2. The second Period (1975-1990)

2.1. Situation of the Institute after 1975

This was a time of serious challenges and had a direct impact on religious life on account of the socialist regime brought to the South by the Communists in the North. Foreseeing future changes, from the feast of the Sacred Heart of 1975, Sr Anna Persico and Sr Elena Miravalle passed on the leadership of the two communities to the Vietnamese sisters Maddalena Minh Chau (Tam Ha) and Anna Thi (Thanh Da). Sr Maddalena (32 years old) assumed the responsibility of leading the Institute in Vietnam from 1975. On 17 July 1976 Sr Anna Persico and Sr Elena Miravalle were expelled as were all the foreigners from Vietnam. There were 17 Vietnamese sisters who remained. All the religious houses were subjected to search and abrupt closure. There was an atmosphere of terror; no one knew when they might be put in prison or who might accuse them.

¹⁴ AGFMA, *Chronicles of St. John Bosco community, Cho Lon, 18 Jan.1963.*

2.2. *The Challenges*

There were thousands of restrictions and prohibitions enforced by the government, which were a real challenge to the acceptance and formation of candidates. Some of the challenges typical of this period were:

- Political closure: no one was allowed to go out of Vietnam, or to have contacts with people outside the country.
- Economy: people were forbidden to transport foodstuffs outside their own zone; foodstuffs were rationed out on the basis of a ration card.
- Restrictions on religion: gatherings were forbidden, religious activities were limited to the parish church compound and to one hour per week.
- Restrictions on movement: staying in a place was prohibited without registering oneself and without permission for temporary stay.

For a number of years no one dared to accept young girls who were not previously known. Only the girls who were aspirants with us earlier and were ready to pay a heavy price – hard work, hunger, poverty, prison, uncertain future, preparedness to flee any time – requested to join us after 1976. Only three aspirants out of ten were admitted as postulants in 1976. The number increased in the following years.

2.3. *Formation and the Passing on of Charism*

2.3.1 Through Everyday Life

As the school was confiscated the sisters could no longer teach there. They had to look out for other means to sustain themselves. To earn their living the sisters worked on the land. They cultivated rice and vegetables, sold goods, worked in factories and tried many other jobs. They reduced the number of persons in the two houses. Silently and discreetly, they opened a house in Doc Mo, a rural place in 1976. The aspirants lived and worked with the sisters in the two houses of

Tam Ha and Doc Mo. Much family spirit, fraternity and loving kindness reigned among them. Reminiscing this period, the sisters recall the great spirit of sacrifice, love for God and for one another, mutual trust and help, and promptness in obedience that characterized this period. Despite this hard and sacrificing life joy was not lacking even if they had to sleep with a hoe in hand and hold their meetings by the light of a petrol lamp. After a day's hard work the sisters would have a private talk with Jesus, uniting themselves with the spirit of the Founders. During this time the community lived the atmosphere of Mornese.

2.3.2 Formative program for the Aspirants, Postulants, Novices

Since it was not possible any more to send the young girls to Hong Kong or Italy, it was decided in 1977 to open a Novitiate and Sr Maria Nguyeãn thò Dung was appointed novice mistress. Although she had not participated in any course of preparation for this responsibility, Sr Maria carried out this task ably until 1997.

The contents of the formation program of this period were all derived from memory. The sisters-in-charge recalled what they had learned during their own formation and tried to pass it on faithfully to their charges.

Program for Conferences

Material for the spiritual and Salesian formation of the members was scarce, for it was dangerous to keep books in foreign language in the house. Communication with Rome and the Province in Hong Kong took an eternity. The correspondence took four to five months. Newspapers and magazines were undelivered. On account of all this the sisters had only few books at their disposal: *The Imitation of Christ*, *Vade Mecum* of Don Barberis, *The Life of St. Mary D. Mazzarello*, *The Life of St. John Bosco*, *The Bible*, and *The Constitutions*. The Bible and the Constitutions served constantly and efficaciously as meditation books for the novices.

They had regular spiritual exercises and retreats, and were faithful to the practices of piety even when they had to flee.

Practical Lessons and Apostolic Activities

Although the situation was tense, the sisters and the persons in formation were zealous in apostolic work, constant in the Sunday activities. At Christmas and Easter, the oratory was rich in initiatives with games and distribution of prizes, especially to the poor boys.

The sisters were aware of the difficult situation; but still they conducted classes to train catechists because they knew how efficacious their contribution would be in the spread of the Gospel. Even though the formation of these youths encountered many obstacles and interruptions, the work continued under God's Providence. Catechism and other activities prospered and the main energy came from the sisters and the youths in formation. The Salesian spirit and charism were learnt and assimilated at the school of life, through daily formation and shared responsibility with the young collaborators.

In 1978 there were many difficulties in organizing activities as there was the danger of losing the house. In 1980, however, the government withdrew its project, and no one knows the reason why. In 1979 there was the joy of the first profession of the first three sisters formed after the unification of the country. In 1981 six sisters made their perpetual profession after waiting for 11 years, three sisters renewed their vows and three youngsters entered the novitiate. The visit of the Provincial, Sr Franca Dardanella from Hong Kong, after 12 years of separation was a highlight of the year 1987.

From 1990 the political situation was more favourable and relations with other countries became more open. It was possible to follow closely the formative program proposed by the Center; the schedules and curriculum were better organized. Looking back at the journey of growth of the Institute in Vietnam in these 30 years, and particularly recalling the inconsolable cries of the Vietnamese sisters when the missionaries were expelled in 1976 and their preoccupation that the young Institute in Vietnam would not be able to resist the adversities, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians can clearly see God's provident hand upon them. If the Institute in Vietnam

continues to grow vigorously, it owes its vitality to the healthy roots of the Salesian charism implanted in the soil of good vocations. It is not through language or science learnt at school, but through the love and example of the missionaries imbued with the Salesian spirit that the Salesian Charism penetrated and spread in the fertile soil of Vietnam.

Now the Institute in Vietnam has 80 perpetually professed sisters, 55 sisters with temporary vows, 25 novices, 10 postulants, 25 aspirants, approximately 70 pre-aspirants and 6 sisters working in the missions. They are the fruits of a constant and patient process of nurturing the charism.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted that various ways were adopted during the formation process. There were challenges at various times; but they helped in sowing our charism rather than hindering it. What made the charism grow greatly was the ‘Salesian heart’.

Our daily spirituality – serving God with Salesian spirit of joy – can transform our life into a school in which the sisters live and transmit the spirit and the charism to those being formed in a creative, lively way, without being imprisoned by anything whatever. It was our first sisters’ lives and their intentional sowing that strengthened the roots of our charism, from which has burst forth a powerful life.

These thirty years of the Institute in Vietnam were full of events, challenges and explorations. This paper, however, is limited by the lack of documentation; all the same it will hopefully serve as stimulus for further researches in the future so that the aspects presented in this paper can be developed further. Moreover, it would be interesting to study more deeply the Marian dimension in our formation vis-à-vis the rich traditional devotion among the Vietnamese people. There is yet another interesting aspect to be looked into – inculturation and the translation of the love of the Preventive System to the local context. The Vietnamese culture is heavily influenced by Confucianism; for them “to love is to use the rod and to be sweet is to hate”.

ESTABLISHING THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN JAPAN IN THE PROCESS OF FOUNDING THE CARITAS SISTERS OF MIYAZAKI

*Maria Mukai Yumiko**

Introduction

On 3 February 1939, Fr Vincent Cimatti sent to the Rector Major, Fr Philip Rinaldi some news on the missionary activities of the Salesians in Japan. In it he referred to the first religious professions made in the newly-founded local Congregation of the *Japanese Sisters of Charity*¹. He said,

“On the day of the feast of our saintly father, Don Bosco, we have celebrated the much awaited religious profession of the first novices of the new local Congregation for women, the ‘Japanese Sisters of Charity’. We chose that date for obvious reasons: the originator and formator is a Salesian, Fr Antonio Cavoli; the place of origin of the Congregation is under the care of the Salesians; and the spirit animating its apostolic works is Salesian.”²

With this report, Fr Cimatti made it clear that the Caritas Sisters had truly imbibed the Salesian charismatic identity. In fact, since the Caritas Sisters were born in a Salesian ambient, they had the Salesian

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¹ At the beginning of the juridical process of founding the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki Fr Cimatti presented the group as “Sisters of Charity”; but following the suggestion of the Propagation of the Faith, in order to distinguish them from other similar institutes, the word “Japanese” was first added, then later the word “Miyazaki”. Cf. Suore della Carità Archivio Storico di Tokyo (SCAST) *Letter Card. Fumasoni Biondi – Vincenzo Cimatti, Rome, 12 aprile 1937.*

² *Letter Cimatti - Ricaldone, Miyazaki, 3 Feb. 1939 in BS LXIII (aprile 1938) p. 115.*

inspiration from the beginning. However, this ideal of Fr Cimatti came to be considered only lately.

The 12th General Chapter of the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki (SCM) held in September 2004, had for its scope the clarification of the charismatic and spiritual identity of the Institute and the renewal of its life and form of government.³ In studying the historical documents of the institute in preparation for the General Chapter, the sisters discovered the eminently Salesian character of their charism. This realization came about particularly when revising the Constitutions and Regulations. In fact, by analyzing the different articles with the help of experts in theology and in Salesianity⁴ they identified a number of elements common to both the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB) and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) alike.

With this research paper, I intend to go briefly through the work of evangelization carried out by the SDB, especially in the field of welfare services, and through the process of writing the first Constitutions of the SCM. I wish to demonstrate how the Salesian charism, lived by Fr Cimatti, Fr Cavoli, and the first sisters of the SCM, had greatly influenced the formation of the charism and the spirit of the Caritas Sisters.

1. The Missionary Work of the Salesians in the Field of Welfare Services

At the time when the Caritas Congregation was born, Japan was experiencing a very serious socio-economic crisis nationwide, as a consequence of the global crisis. Those regions of the country dependent on agriculture and on wood and textile industry, like Miyazaki,

³ Cf. Arippina Fumie KASHIRAJIMA, *Dai 12kai soukaini mukete [Convocation Letter of General Chapter XII]*, Tokyo, SCM Generalate 2003, pp.2-3.

⁴ For example, Mario MIDALI, *Aspetti teologici costitutivi dell'identità carismatica di un istituto religioso e delle Suore Caritas. Fondazione delle Suore della Carità di Miyazaki, Ruolo di don Cimatti, di don Cavoli, di suor Maria Osafune e delle prime suore* (Paper presented at the Seminar on the Charism of SCM, Beppu, Japan 2006. Unpublished).

suffered a considerable set-back. Many malnourished children and mothers were dying of famine, especially in the villages. In response to this crisis, the government passed a law in 1929 which took effect only later in 1932. This law directed all institutions to organize welfare services, like homes for old people and infants, hospitals, etc.⁵ Welfare services in Japan at that time were just beginning; so they were poorly organized. In those places where the SDB operated, the work of evangelization was bearing very meager results. The Christian families had very little influence in society, because being poor themselves, they were somewhat despised by the people.⁶

This then was the historical context of the apostolic work of the SDB guided only by the spirit of the “*Da mihi animas*” (Give me souls). Don Bosco was little known in Japan until the Salesians arrived. They encountered a number of difficulties: the scarcity of missionaries, material poverty, religious indifference, prejudice against the Christians, very strong attachment of the people to their traditions and race, difficulties of language, relations with other religions, etc.⁷ This notwithstanding, the Salesians went ahead with their apostolic undertakings unperturbed.

[...] we are ready to suffer any trial, even the lack of basic necessities; but we will neither give up nor diminish our apostolic enthusiasm on behalf of souls [...] there are material sufferings, but the Lord gives us ineffable spiritual consolations too – baptisms, increase of catechumens, greater sympathy and closeness to the mission and to our activities, the need to start new works of charity (orphanages, homes for the old

⁵ Cf. The Social Organization of the Council for Welfare Services in the Prefecture of Miyazaki (ed.), *Commemorative Book on the 50th Anniversary of the Welfare Services in the Prefecture of Miyazaki*, Miyazaki, Miyazaki Minami Press 2003, pp. 91-92.

⁶ Historical Archive of the Propagation of the Faith, *Annual Report of Fr Cimatti to the Propagation of the Faith in 1927*. Prot. 632/1928.

⁷ Cf. Vincenzo CIMATTI, *Un altro anno di missione in Giappone*, BS LVI (novembre 1932) p. 342.

people) and to expand those already started (seminary, Don Bosco school of printing) [...]”⁸

The means used for evangelization were family visits, letter-writing, spreading of good books and newspapers, distribution of religious articles, upgrading of religious instruction, propagation of devotion to Jesus and Mary, organization of different groups, fraternal rapport with other religious institutes.⁹ Faithful to the directives of the Holy Father, the Salesians applied the method of adaptation in evangelizing the people. They tried to understand and assimilate the culture and customs of the Japanese. Their manner of living a simple and joyful life, as well as their Salesian way of carrying out the apostolate gained the sympathy of the people, especially the youth and children.

Many activities were conducted at Miyazaki. But what obtained the best results was the instruction given at family visits, through the efforts of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul. These visits offered material help and spiritual comfort to people. It served as a first introduction of the Christian faith. Funds came in from the generosity of the poor Christians of Miyazaki.¹⁰ Fr Cimatti tells us of the wonderful effects of this work of charity:

“The good Fr Cavoli knows the effects these family visits have produced in the souls of the pagans, under the auspices of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul. The Japanese pagan will not be convinced by any beautiful talk or by a series of arguments to present the truth. But he will be touched by a show of affection, by any help to alleviate his sufferings in this life, by the kindness shown to his children. Only then will he begin to approach us, ready to listen, bringing along

⁸ VINCENZO CIMATTI, *Le difficoltà per l'azione missionaria in Giappone*, BS LVI (luglio 1932) p. 213.

⁹ Cf. VINCENZO CIMATTI, *Nel compiersi del II anniversario dei Salesiani in Giappone*, BS LII (giugno 1928) pp. 173-175.

¹⁰ Cf. *Letter Cimatti - Rinaldi, Miyazaki 20.04.1930*, in BS LIV (settembre 1930) 277-278.

also his children.... The work begins by assisting the poor and abandoned children. For the time being we entrust these children to the care of good Christian families (since we do not as yet have orphanages and homes in the locality). With the support of generous friends in the Japanese missions, all this will surely bear fruits. In the same way, the care for the old people will fill your hearts with hope for the future.”¹¹

In Japan, the work of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul was begun in 1915, first at Yokohama and then at Nagasaki and Tokyo. The Conference at Miyazaki, however, was different from many others, as it was distinctly missionary in nature. Fr Cavoli emphasizes this:

“I believe that there are only a few Conferences of St. Vincent like ours which offer great and wonderful opportunities for doing good. Our presence is distinctly missionary. We evangelize, baptize, present religion in terms of charitable services, despite the scarcity of material resources.”¹²

The Hospice of Miyazaki, born of the activity of the Conference of St. Vincent, was the first institution to house the poor and sick elderly people in the Prefecture of Miyazaki. It was inaugurated on 19 December 1932 and recognized by the Prefect on 26 April 1934. A new building for the orphanage was added on 29 September 1934. Since the beginning, the work (including the construction of the building and the maintenance of the personnel) depended on foreign aid, particularly from Italy. At that time, activities such as welfare services were little appreciated in the Prefecture. The Hospice was a pioneering work that contributed much to the development of welfare services in the Prefecture of Miyazaki. The Hospice also served as the place where the Salesian spirit was practiced in a Japanese manner.

¹¹ *Letter Cimatti - Rinaldi, Miyazaki, 16 July 1930*, in BS LIV (ottobre 1930) 307.

¹² Antonio CAVOLI, *La Conferenza missionaria femminile della B. Imelda Lambertini a Miyazaki*, Bologna, Tipografia Luigi Parma 1934, p.132.

By affirming “Charity as the way to faith”, article 2 of the Constitutions of the SCM re-echoes the convictions of both Fr Cavoli and Fr Cimatti. It came from their apostolic experiences in Japan and from the directives Don Bosco and Fr Rinaldi gave to the first missionaries.

“The program of charity that we intend to carry out the Salesian way is varied, yet always according to the guidelines that Don Bosco gave to his missionaries: ‘Take care especially of the sick, the children, the old people and the poor, and you will merit the blessings of God and the goodwill of the people’”¹³.

“Dearest sons, you go to Japan. Do not expect to receive a warm welcome nor an immediate success similar to missionaries in other mission lands where people easily respond. You are going to a very different country, having a more advanced civilization. If you have studied its history, you would have realized that Japan has nothing to learn from the West either in the literary or in the scientific field. Does that mean that you have nothing new to offer to Japan? You possess something that Japan does not have and is waiting to receive from you: charity. Japan does not have charity because it has not known the true God yet. Therefore, let your apostolate be proportionate to the charity of Christ so that it may radiate from you to the Japanese people”¹⁴.

Furthermore, Fr Cavoli spells out the reason for choosing the name “*Caritas*” for the new Congregation: that the name may always recall the teaching of Fr Rinaldi to the first Salesian missionaries to Japan. Also, the institution itself of the Caritas Sisters serves as a lasting memorial to the dimension of “charity” envisioned by the Salesian charism.

¹³ Vincenzo CIMATTI, *Giappone. Nel programma di Don Bosco*, BS LXII (giugno 1938) 132.

¹⁴ Marco BUONGIOVANNI - Giorgio COLAJACOMO (a cura di), *Don Bosco nel mondo*, Vol. II, Torino, Industrie Grafiche Mariogros 1988, pp. 386-387.

2. The Process of Writing the First Constitutions of the SCM

The ideals of Fr Cimatti and of Fr Cavoli with regard to the Caritas Sisters were expressed in the Constitutions of the SCM. Hence it is important to see how this document was formulated and which elements of the Salesian spirit were highlighted therein.

Fr Cavoli formed this group of young ladies, called the "Daughters of Charity" (the future Caritas Sisters), in order to run the Hospice of Miyazaki. He drew up some simple Regulations¹⁵ to guide them. With the help of Fr Cimatti and the Salesians, he gave these young Japanese ladies a Salesian formation. At that time what he had in mind for them was quite different from what Fr Cimatti wanted them to be in the future.¹⁶

Therefore, when Fr Cavoli started to write the Constitutions, he had in mind these ladies living the experience of Christian charity according to the Regulations he had given them. He defined exactly the scope of this new group: the practice of charity towards one's neighbor.

The process of writing the first Constitutions of the SCM actually began in 1937 when Fr Cavoli accepted the suggestion of Fr Cimatti to found a new Congregation of local women at Miyazaki. This task meant for him much study and hard work. At that time every religious institute, faithful to the teachings of the Church, had to

¹⁵ Unfortunately these Regulations got lost, but we have some hints of them in the Chronicles of the Hospice of Miyazaki, where on 18 March 1933, Fr Cavoli gave some rules to the Daughters of Charity. Cf. SCAST, *Kyugoin Nisshi* [*Chronicles of the Hospice of Miyazaki from 1933 to 1937*], p. 7.

¹⁶ Fr Cimatti was dreaming of this group as a religious institute in the future; on the other hand, Fr Cavoli preferred the group to remain as a Conference of St. Vincent only. Cf. Cimatti Museum of Tokyo (CMT) S.39-A, *La Cronaca 1925-1940* (Memoirs of Vincenzo Cimatti compiled by Alfonso Crevaore) 16-17 luglio 1933, p. 33. On this matter, Fr Cimatti says, "At the Hospice I preach the triduum to prepare the aspirants for religious life; there will be a testing period of one year and then they will have to decide." Cf. also A. CAVOLI, *La Conferenza missionaria femminile*, pp. 11-29.

find a way of adapting itself to the missions. To start such a journey was indeed very difficult. In fact, Msgr. Marella, the Apostolic Delegate to Japan, pointed this out by saying:

“[...] Though having a good number of local members the well-deserving institutes for women already existing, will never be capable of adapting their customs and their rules to the demands of Japan, particularly with regard to welfare services. Hence it is opportune to encourage the founding of new institutes of active life exclusively for the Japanese. In fact, two local Congregations already exist: the ‘Sisters of the Visitation’ (*Homon-Doteikai*) founded by Msgr. Breton, and the ‘Daughters of the Sacred Heart’ (*Seish aishkai*) founded by Mother Teresa who herself is a Sister of the Holy Spirit of Steyl. These two institutes are visibly increasing in number and in activity”¹⁷.

The manuscripts of Fr Cavoli, preserved in the historical archive of the SCM, reveal his attempt to adapt the Constitutions to the situation of the country and to the requirements of religious life. In working out the Constitutions, Fr Cavoli consulted the Constitutions of some other institutes already present in Japan¹⁸, namely, the “Sisters of St. Maur” (Institute of the Sisters of the Child Jesus)¹⁹, the “Institute of the

¹⁷ SCAST, *Letter (copy) Msgr. Paolo Marella – Card. Fumasoni Biondi, Tokyo, 22 febbraio 1937.*

¹⁸ Cf. SCAST, Antonio CAVOLI, *Quaderno 5*, s.d. [Miyazaki]. This copybook cites some notes and reflections which Fr Cavoli used in writing the first Constitutions.

¹⁹ The “Sisters of St. Maur” arrived in Japan already in 1972. They worked to educate abandoned children and young girls, made great progress and were invited to the Diocese of Fukuoka by Msgr. Breton in 1935. However, their foundations were destroyed during the World War. Cf. Tuneko SHIMADA, *Sisters of St. Maur in Encyclopedia of the History of Christianity in Japan*, Tokyo, Kyobunkan 1987, p. 599.

Sisters of St. Anne”²⁰, the “Franciscan Missionaries of Mary”²¹, and of course, the SDB and the FMA. These texts helped him to learn more about religious life for women.

Offering him support was Msgr. Alberto Breton, MEP, Bishop of Fukuoka and founder of the “Sisters of the Visitation of Mary”, the first local congregation of women religious in Japan; it was founded some years before the SCM.²² Close to this Institute was the first novitiate of the SCM. Fr Cavoli and Fr Cimatti often received useful suggestions from this Congregation. And so, after much hard work, study and prayer on 31 January 1938 (the 50th anniversary of the death of Don Bosco),²³ Fr Cavoli finally presented to Msgr. Cimatti (his Superior and the Prefect of the Independent Missions of Miyazaki) the first draft of the Constitutions²⁴, entitled “The Constitutions of the

²⁰ The “Institute of the Sisters of St. Anne” started its apostolate in 1934 by giving welfare services through education and medical care at Fukuoka upon the request of Msgr. Breton. But the strong movement to send away foreigners during the World War forced the Institute to transfer to Canada. Cf. [Anonimo] *Institute of St. Anne* in ID, p. 737.

²¹ The first five members of the “Franciscan Missionaries of Mary” came to Kumamoto, Japan, in 1898 upon the request of Fr Corre Jean-Marie, MEP, in order to take care of lepers. In 1934 some children of these lepers were entrusted to the Hospice of Miyazaki. Cf. Syukuko OGAKI, *Franciscan Missionaries of Mary* in ID, p. 1339.

²² The “Institute of the Sisters of the Visitation” was founded by Fr Albert Breton, MEP, with four Japanese women members in 1925. They worked mainly in the field of education and medical services. Cf. Wakako SEKI, *The Sisters of the Visitation* in ID, p. 796.

²³ [According to the testimony of some of the Sisters], “Invoking the help of the Holy Spirit, Fr Antonio began to note down in his copybooks ideas that came to him little by little. He applied himself to work during the day and even at night, while going to and coming from the sacristy and the church. He prayed, took down notes, put these notes in order. He studied Canon Law for almost two years, consulted the SDB Constitutions, and completed the final draft”: Misae TANIGUCHI, *Come girasoli: Don Antonio Cavoli e la congregazione Caritas di Miyazaki*, Torino, LDC 1998, p. 82.

²⁴ “Announces as reason for common joy the fact that on that morning, Fr Cavoli wanted to present to him the new and completed rules of the newly-born

Japanese Caritas Sisters”. Fr Cimatti examined them carefully and then gave them back to him on 8 February, the date commemorating the arrival of the first missionaries to Japan. Fr Cimatti made some inclusions and proposals for modification²⁵ from the point of view of universal law.

There were also two other type-written drafts of the Constitutions without any date or place of composition (most probably at Miyazaki), and a complete text in Latin. The said Constitutions obtained the official approval of the Propagation of Faith on 1 April 1949.

In his autobiography, Fr Cavoli records how he succeeded in composing the first part of the Constitutions.

“I began this undertaking by wondering what I must do to found and guide a congregation of sisters. Practically I know nothing about it and do not even dare to think about it. To begin with, I know that any religious congregation must have its own scope, its own Constitutions and Regulations that will spell out its religious spirit and specific field of work. With regard to religious spirit – more or less, this is common to all congregations, that is, to strive after spiritual perfection by observing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then with regard to the specific scope of the congregation, it is after all no other than the happy experience of the work already begun ten years ago, which started very modestly but now has grown big and still continues to develop ever more: charity as the way to faith. Here, therefore, is Article 2 of the Constitutions: ‘The special goal of the Congregation is to help spread the Catholic faith among the pagans, in and outside the country, through works of charity.’ Article 3: ‘The works of charity,

local Congregation. The Holy See and the Holy Father had asked for such a foundation, and we rejoice at being at the vanguard to welcome such wish of the Holy Father. From heaven Don Bosco will certainly rejoice too and bless it”: CMT, *Chronicles of the House of Miyazaki*, 31 Jan. 1938, p. 38/1.

²⁵ SCAST, *Letter V. Cimatti – A. Cavoli*, Miyazaki, 2 Feb. 1938.

characteristic of this Society, are the visits to the homes of the poor and the sick.' Article 4: 'Furthermore, the Society promotes all kinds of works of mercy' Basing on these fundamental elements, the Constitutions are expanded into a total of 335 articles. I worked hard for almost two years in order to organize the contents so that everything moves toward one and the same end, eliminating any contradiction, deficiency or superficiality, and always in agreement with the mandatory prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law"²⁶.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Salesian charism was lived and inculcated by the Caritas Sisters. The founders communicated the Salesian charism and spirit with their own life, putting emphasis above all on the mission of charity as described in the Constitutions. In fact, we can find there so many familiar elements of the Salesian spirit, namely:

- method motivated by pastoral charity and by the preventive system (art. 7, 11, 12, 14)
- family spirit (art. 29, 30)
- work and temperance (art. 67)
- Eucharistic and Marian piety (art. 74).

But there are also distinct elements that characterize the specific mission of the Caritas Sisters. These are:

- lively missionary drive to reach out to other nations (art. 2)
- concern for family apostolate (art. 3, 8, 10)
- and in a special way, the contemplation of the mystery of the Heart of Christ as the living fountain of his merciful and saving love (art. 16, 18, 72, 73, 197²⁷).

²⁶ ANTONIO CAVOLI, *Dall'Italia al Giappone. Autobiografia di un missionario*, Rimini, Tipografia Grattoni 1954, p. 97-98.

²⁷ Regarding article 197, Fr Cimatti says, "One article of the Constitutions of the Society of Japanese Caritas Sisters – the best fruit given by the 'Sacred Heart

Fr Egidio Vigano, in the official document recognizing the Institute as a member of the Salesian Family, confirmed this distinct spirit of the SCM.²⁸ He affirmed, "This will help all to deepen the Salesian pastoral charity."²⁹

The religious institutes founded by Salesians in various parts of the world, which propagate the spirit of Don Bosco are a continual witness to the vitality of the Salesian Congregation. The Caritas Sisters too, as one of these, continue to establish the Salesian charism wherever the Lord would send them to work.

Hospice' at Miyazaki, which is destined to multiply itself in many similar works of mercy wherever Providence deigns to make it expand – does prescribe that on the feast of the Sacred Heart, every House of the Society will read publicly the annual report of the work done by the whole Society. This will serve as a solemn act of public worship to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. In this holy Name and for the coming of his Kingdom does every Sister fulfill her tasks. This homage to the most Sacred Heart is an act of humility by which every Sister declares, "*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam*" ("Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your Name give glory" Ps. 113:1). It is to acknowledge devoutly the desire of the Sacred Heart to help and save all mankind. It is an act of fraternal charity that unites all the sisters of the Society with gentle bonds in the Divine Heart of Jesus, and it is a holy invitation to increase the zeal and effort in order to bring salvation to as many souls as possible. It is my pleasure to cite here the statistics from the first report on the Congregation's achievements at the Hospice from the feast of the Sacred Heart last year up to the present." Vincenzo CIMATTI, *Giappone. Frutti preziosi*, BS LXIII (novembre 1939) 326-327.

²⁸ Antonio CAVOLI, *From Italy to Japan*, pp. 119-120.

²⁹ Fr Egidio Vigano's official letter recognizing the Caritas Sisters as members of the Salesian Family, addressed to Sr Teresia Iwanaga Matyuo, Superior General of the SCM, Rome, 31 Jan. 1986.

UNITY OF LIFE IN FR VINCENT CIMATTI, FOUNDER OF THE CARITAS SISTERS OF MIYAZAKI

*Fiace Park**

Introduction

In recent years our Congregation of the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki, especially the Province of Korea, experiences a fresh interest in the origins of our charism. The sisters talk about the primary importance of prayer and the secondary value of daily work. Even the ordinary Christians of today want to see the religious sisters pray more. People seem to appreciate more the work of the religious who dedicate time to prayer. On account of this we tend to give in to this expectation and to withdraw ourselves in order to pray.

In reality this is not our charism. What do we do about it? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to go back to the origins of our charism. Having read the letters written from Japan by Fr Vincent Cimatti, our co-founder¹, I'm of the opinion that in these letters we can find a satisfactory answer to the questions about our original charism.

1. The Ideals of Fr Cimatti

This paper has been prepared in the context of the theme of the EAO history seminar, the implantation of the Salesian charism in East Asia. We shall look at the personality of Fr Cimatti, considered an icon with reference to the Salesian charism and its establishment

* Caritas Sister of Miyazaki, currently engaged in learning Japanese to equip herself for research on the history of the Congregation.

¹ According to our Constitutions Fr Cimatti is our co-founder. Further studies on the founder are being done.

in this part of Asia. We will draw light from his ideals and life lived with consistency and holiness. The question we have at hand finds convincing responses in him by way of teachings and concrete examples.

Fr Cimatti was a true Salesian. He wanted to attain holiness through the accomplishment of the mission assigned to him, namely, bringing the love of God to the young, especially the poorest.² This ideal is authentically Salesian. He naturally communicated to us, the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki, this ideal by his example. For him work is prayer, as Don Bosco used to say. During his lifetime in Japan, Fr Cimatti gradually fulfilled this ideal.

2. The Challenges of Work

Fr Cimatti had much work since the start of his religious life. His life in Japan, except for his first assignment³, was an experience of ever-increasing amounts of work. This is very much evident in the period from 1928 to 1949⁴. Having much to do was for him a challenge that made him enthusiastic. We shall have a brief overview of his career in order to understand his dynamic activity.

From 1 February 1927 till 1929 he served as parish priest at Miyazaki. At the same time, from 1 January 1928⁵ to 1937, he was the Superior of the Salesians in Japan. From 1930 to 1932 he was appointed superior of the Independent Missions, the Superior of the Salesian Vice-Province, the rector and professor of the studentate. Over and above all these, he was also in charge of the religious services at Tano. In 1932 Fr Cimatti opened the hospice for orphans and old

² Cf. *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco. A Guide to the Salesian Constitutions*, Madras, Salesian Institute of Graphic Arts 1987, p. 90.

³ Fr Cimatti arrived in Japan on 8 February 1926.

⁴ In this year he was 70 years old.

⁵ In the early years all the 9 Salesians belonged to the Province of China; on 1 January 1928 the houses of Japan became independent and Fr Cimatti was appointed Superior.

people. In 1933-1934 he opened a presence at Tokyo, as well as the Little Seminary of Miyazaki.

From 1935 to 1940, he was the Prefect Apostolic of Miyazaki. In 1937, together with Fr Cavoli, he founded the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki. From 1938 to 1949 he served as the Salesian Provincial. From 1942 to 1947 there was the war and the work of reconstruction.

As it is evident, he shouldered a tremendous amount of work. That was not all. All through those years he assumed further responsibilities. First of all, he followed up with fatherly care the confreres of all the communities. He sent them letters frequently, he visited them even travelling two consecutive nights by train. He travelled to Manchuria and Korea. He gathered them every month for spiritual recollection.

Secondly, every month he unfailingly sent a personal report to the Rector Major and an account of the situation in the missions. His letters are a masterpiece of sincerity, affection and obedience to the Superiors, of concern for the good of the confreres and the mission work. He also sent letters to friends, benefactors, past pupils, etc. Given below is a table showing a year-wise distribution of his letters. Of a total of 6,107 letters written by him 62.7% (3,829) were written during the period 1926-1949.

Year	Letters	Year	Letters	Year	Letters	Year	Letters
1888-1925	135	1936	210	1947	127	1958	223
1926	109	1937	198	1948	143	1959	199
1927	88	1938	224	1949	225	1960	227
1928	108	1939	232	1950	72	1961	196
1929	105	1940	256	1951	75	1962	152
1930	164	1941	186	1952	102	1963	139
1931	193	1942	85	1953	116	1964	69
1932	160	1943	103	1954	130	1965	10
1933	157	1944	110	1955	93	Total: 6107 1926-1949: 3829 62.7%	
1934	161	1945	129	1956	167		
1935	235	1946	121	1957	173		

Thirdly, he also organized musical concerts. He himself composed the music. We have a documentation of about 950 musical compositions by him. How was he able to do all these things?

3. The Response: Industriousness

One word stands out in Fr Cimatti's correspondence. This very important and significant word is "industriousness", which appears very often in his letters and as such calls for further reflection.

3.1. *Originating from Don Bosco*

First of all, the thoughts of Fr Cimatti on industriousness were derived from the teachings of Don Bosco. He conveyed this idea to a cleric by saying, "If for St. Benedict it was '*ora et labora*' (work and prayer), for Don Bosco it was 'work is prayer'."⁶ Thus also for Salesians work is prayer.

Without attempting to elaborate the ideas of Don Bosco on this matter, it suffices to recall some of the short reminders Fr Cimatti used to give to confreres. Once he explained it this way:

"Keep this idea in mind. Stop having fantasies. Life is practical. Here are three words to remember and practice:

"Prayer (Jesus prays for us).

"Action (Salesian work done with Jesus, for Jesus and in Jesus is prayer. The more you work in this way, the more you pray. Duty! Duty! Duty! Do it to save souls).

"Sacrifice (Sacrifice in working, in living community life, in the concerns of daily life, in carrying our daily crosses)."⁷

According to Fr Cimatti, when a Salesian has done his work with, for, in Jesus, he has already prayed. In reality, this expression

⁶ No. 2020, 4 March 1938, to the cleric *Luigi Dal Fior*, a Salesian missionary in Japan. The source of Cimatti's letters cited here is the Collection published on the internet by the "Salesian Digital Library" (<http://sdl.sdb.org/gsd/cgi-bin/library>). The collection contains a transcription of the letters of Cimatti. The letters are identified by the serial no. and date.

⁷ No. 4639, 17 Sept. 1956 ca., to *Sr Angiolina Barone*, FMA Directress in Japan.

had already appeared in his letters from 1925⁸ up until 1953. From 1954 onwards he often used this expression, "Always work with Him, for Him and in Him".⁹ He also would say, "Always work hard with the Lord and for the Lord".¹⁰

As he worked industriously without limit, he always prayed. His explanations will make us understand better the close relationship between work and prayer. We shall cite some examples. Speaking about industriousness and prayer, he says,

"For you: as usual, cheerfulness, industriousness combined with simplicity; drive away useless worry and always be grounded in prayer."¹¹

"Be industrious in charity and in prayer."¹²

"Be cheerful. Let us always work, dear Fr Francis, in charity and in prayer. I don't have anything new to say."¹³

"Work hard for souls! Do it with prayer, sacrifice, example, words, with Him alone, for Him alone and in Him alone."¹⁴

"Hard work united to prayer and vice-versa."¹⁵

⁸ No. 93, 1 Nov. 1925, to the cleric Antonio Giordano, past-pupil of Valsalice: "Do what you can and cheerfully, and do it in a way that your work be done for the Lord (forget a little about glory), for the young and to make reparation."; No. 107, 15 Dec. 1925, to the clerics, past-pupils of Valsalice, "Let us love one another in Him and for Him, and with Him let us work."

⁹ No. 4304, 24 June 1954, to Fr Giulio Manganelli, Salesian missionary to Japan; Cf. No. 5259, 18 Dec. 1959, to Fr Pietro Zerbino, editor of the Salesian Bulletin: "Courage, my dear good Pietro. Let us work for Him and in Him and for Him [sic.], with Mary the Immaculate Help, our teacher".

¹⁰ No. 4375, 12 Jan. 1955, to Sr Giuseppina Gazzada, FMA Directress.

¹¹ No. 4910, 8 April 1958, to Fr Attilio Klinger, Salesian missionary to Japan.

¹² No. 4988, 9 Aug. 1958, to Fr Felice Bovio, Salesian missionary to Japan.

¹³ No. 5206, 22 Aug. 1959, to Fr Francesco Rastello, past-pupil of Valsalice and benefactor.

¹⁴ No. 4411. 17 March 1955, to Fr Giulio Manganelli, Salesian missionary to Japan.

¹⁵ No. 4872, 30 Jan. 1958, to F. Franco Acerbi, Salesian missionary to Japan.

“Be cheerful. Work (souls! souls! always united to God and to the souls [in purgatory] in prayer and in charity).”¹⁶

“Always work with charity for the good of souls, and be always sustained by prayer.”¹⁷

“Work, and union with God and with the souls (as many as the Lord entrusts to you) in charity and in prayer.”¹⁸

At other times, he pauses to dwell on the intense relationship between work and prayer:

“By increasing work, you increase the intensity of prayer.”¹⁹

“The intense drive for improving the practices of piety continues; now I insist on praying before and after work, and on the meditation.”²⁰

“Try to keep calm, work in an orderly fashion and more so with prayer and faith.”²¹

“Work with calmness, faith, prayer and good example; the results will be guaranteed.”²²

Finally, we find a synthesis that is very useful for formation:

“When Misao comes treat him as a brother; teach and motivate him to work and piety with word and example (for instance, before beginning work say a prayer; if he helps you

¹⁶ No. 5762, 8 June 1962, to *Fr Giuseppe Grigoletto*, past-pupil of Valsalice.

¹⁷ No. 5837, 24 Dec. 1962, to *Sr Elisabetta Hirate*, studying in Italy.

¹⁸ No. 5917, 11 April 1963, to *Fr Antonio Colussi*, already a Salesian missionary to Japan.

¹⁹ No. 329, 13 Feb. 1928, to *the Salesians and Missionaries in Japan*.

²⁰ No. 894, 9 Feb. 1932, to *Fr Pietro Ricaldone*, Vicar of the Rector Major of the Salesians.

²¹ No. 3740, 11 April 1949, to *Fr Giuseppe Figura*, Salesian missionary to Japan.

²² No. 5128, 5 April 1959, to *Fr Giulio Manganelli*, Salesian missionary to Japan.

in the kitchen say with him a few decades of the rosary during the work).”²³

3.2. *In the Spirit of St. Francis de Sales and Don Bosco*

Secondly, he encouraged the confreres to work in the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and of St. John Bosco:

“Especially during this month, let us try to work intensely in the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and of Don Bosco.”²⁴

“Let us work with one accord in order to realize in ourselves and in the souls entrusted to our care the educative system of Don Bosco and his traditions.”²⁵

“Let us work with faith in the name of Don Bosco without worrying about the results.”²⁶

“I wish you could work like Don Bosco, and like him attract good vocations.”²⁷

3.3. *Correspondence to the Fulfilment of One’s Duties*

Thirdly, industriousness corresponds to the fulfilment of one’s daily duties. For him this topic was very important. For this reason one often finds in his letters the verb: “work, work, work”, or the adjective “industrious” used with insistence.

²³ No. 291, 26 Oct. 1927, to *Alfonso Merlino*, Salesian layman, resident of Nakatsu.

²⁴ No. 2668, 7 Jan. 1941, to the *Salesian missionaries of the Province of St. Francis Xavier*.

²⁵ No. 758, 11 June 1931, at the conclusion of the visit to the *Salesian work at Nakatsu*.

²⁶ No. 1135, 11 July 1933, to *Fr Giorgio Serie*, Councillor General for the Oratories.

²⁷ No. 3085, 5 April 1944, to the cleric *Stefano Dell’Angela*, Salesian missionary to Japan.

3.4. *Characteristics*

Fourthly, when speaking of industriousness, he specifies some of its characteristics:

“Work with faith, self-sacrificing love and cheerfulness.”²⁸

“Always work, work, work, with right intention.”²⁹

“Work with calmness, without worrying, with perseverance.”³⁰

“Allow me to repeat it (it is the mind of Don Bosco): ‘Will they allow us to work for 10? Then it is our duty to work for 10. Will they allow us to work for only one? Then let us do the little they allow us; but let us carry out the various tasks entrusted to us.’”³¹

“Always work: 1. in obedience, 2. as per schedule, 3. never at night [...]”³²

“To be industrious is to do one’s duty seasoned with sacrifice.”³³

²⁸ No. 61, ? Nov. 1924, to the cleric *Abele Joyeusaz*, past-pupil of Valsalice.

²⁹ No. 105, 24 Dec. 1925, to the cleric *Giovanni Alberti*, past-pupil of Valsalice.

³⁰ No. 449, 18 March 1929, visit to the Salesians at *Nakatsu*, 15-18 March 1929.

³¹ No. 3014, 16 Aug. 1943, to the confreres of the Salesian Province of *St. Francis Xavier*.

³² No. 299, 16 Nov. 1927, to the cleric *Giuseppe Grigoletto*, past-pupil of Valsalice; Cf. No. 329, 13 Feb. 1928, to the Salesians and missionaries of Japan: “‘Work, but only according to your capacity – take care of your health’ (Don Bosco). Therefore, a) Do not work at night. b) Work in obedience and methodically”; Cf. No. 217, 23 Dec. 1926, to the cleric *Lorenzo Chiabotto*, past-pupil of Valsalice: “If you want a fraternal advice to become a good Salesian priest, a) Live in union with God. b) Work as required by obedience”.

³³ No. 4872, 30 Jan. 1958, to *Fr Franco Acerbi*, Salesian missionary to Japan; Cf. No. 5721, 15 March 1962, to *Fr Alfonso Crevacore*, new Rector of the studentate of *Chofu*: “Industriousness means heartily doing your daily duties, with God, for God and in God.”

The advice of Fr Cimatti on work is very concrete and systematic. He not only insisted on working, but also on doing it methodically. We can indeed affirm that he was industrious and that he worked in a way that made him a saint.

3.5. *Spiritual Dimension*

Finally, he spoke not only of physical or material work, but also of spiritual work:

“Work in order to become holier.”³⁴

“Courage, therefore! Work with joy, with goodwill to become truly holy.”³⁵

“Let us not forget to work spiritually for the good of souls and for all those entrusted to our care.”³⁶

“Industriousness means doing your daily duties, and ‘*nulla dies sine linea*’ (not a day without a line) in your spiritual endeavors.”³⁷

“Continue with your spiritual undertakings, a little step daily. ‘Walk under the watchful eyes of God and look ahead to where you are going. God is pleased to see you move forward in little steps. He will keep pace with you and will not leave you behind’ (St. Francis of Sales).”³⁸

For Fr Cimatti in this way work became prayer.

³⁴ No. 3260, 12 Nov. 1945, to cleric Mario Antolini, Salesian missionary to Japan.

³⁵ No. 5134, 7 April 1959 ca., to Sr Angiolina Barone, FMA Directress in Japan.

³⁶ No. 3023, 16 Aug. 1943, to the confreres of the Salesian Province of St. Francis Xavier.

³⁷ No. 4678, 23 Dec. 1956, to the Cleric Amedeo Illera, student of theology at Crocetta.

³⁸ No. 5416, 24 July 1960, to Fr Carmelo Simoncelli, Salesian missionary to Japan.

Conclusion

It may be drawn from the above discussion that Fr Cimatti did succeed in imbibing the intuitions of St. John Bosco and living them in his own life faithfully and consistently. He was able besides to give it expression in the particular context of Asia and make a singular contribution to expanding the Salesian charism in Japan through the life and mission of the Congregation of the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki, co-founded by him. It may be affirmed that his spiritual maturity undoubtedly found fulfilment in the Asian context of which our congregation is but an expression.

Taking a close look at the life and teachings of Fr Cimatti we are able to spell out how he incarnated the Salesian ideal in himself and passed it on to the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki. For him the fount of the unity of life and the essence of the Salesian charism, the “*Da mihi animas, coetera tolle*” of Don Bosco – apostolic zeal and pursuit of holiness – found expression in work, sanctified work, work that is prayer, work combined with prayer. Moreover, the shining example of this great Salesian invites us to a deeper reflection and understanding of the charism he enthusiastically lived, and hopefully for all of us, a more profitable and convinced life-application will follow with the help of our own spiritual guides.

THE SEEDS OF MORNESE IN TIMOR. FMA CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPLANTATION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM

*Marivic Sombero**

Introduction

The present paper, a textual elaboration of the power-point presented at the Batulao Seminar, tries to re-capture the salient moments in the history of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) in Timor (and Indonesia) from their arrival up to the present day. Our presence in this land is rather recent considering that we arrived in Timor only in 1988. The development of the Salesian presence and charism through the dedicated and sacrificing service of the sisters, despite the severe challenges they faced, is delineated in this paper. The gradual expansion of the FMA presence through the opening of new foundations along with the vicissitudes that accompanied them and the attention the sisters paid to the Salesian values, in particular the education of the young, constitute the central theme of the paper. In the step by step development of the Salesian activities, starting from the first years under the auspices of the Philippine Province, the establishment later of the Vice-Province of “Mary, our Help” consisting of Timor, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar (Burma) in 1997, and following further growth the erection of the Vice-Province of St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello comprising only of East Timor and Indonesia in 2003 are landmarks.

The narrative is based on the oral testimonies of sisters who pioneered Salesian missionary work in Timor, on the chronicles of the houses and on the “Elenco”¹ of the Institute.

* FMA, Filipina missionary in Timor, currently Superior of the new presence at Kailaku.

¹ ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Elenco generale 2008*, vol. I, Roma, Istituto FMA 2007.

A general picture of Timor with particular reference to the religious values of the Timorese sets the background to the educative and pastoral action of the FMA in this land.

1. Brief Historical Background of East Timor

The East Timorese, living in the eastern half of the island of Timor, which lies between Indonesia and Australia, occupy a territory whose area is 14,874 square km. Timor is a small crocodile-shaped island situated north-west of Australia. For historical reasons East Timor, a Portuguese colony from 1516 to 1975, shares a common boundary with West Timor which is part of Indonesia, the former Dutch East Indies. The population of East Timor in 1975 when the Portuguese left was 680,000, consisting of 97% Timorese (including *mestizos*), 2% Chinese and less than 1% Portuguese.

For centuries the East Timorese had been farmers, living in scattered hamlets, eating what they grew. Only a few coastal East Timorese were fishermen. Trading and shop-keeping had for generations been in the hands of the Chinese.

East Timor is extremely mountainous; hence the majority of East Timorese had always lived in isolation, far from towns and foreign influences, tied to their fields and animistic practices. In spite of centuries of Catholic missionary work by the Portuguese, in 1975 animists still numbered as much as 72 % of the population. The local Timorese kings still played an important role in their lives and allegiances, whilst interference from Portuguese administrators and military was almost non-existent.

Timor spent more than four centuries under Portuguese rule before Indonesia annexed it in 1975. Following a long period of political and social unrest, the United Nations, Indonesia and Portugal agreed to hold a referendum on 30 August 1999 on the future status of East Timor. The referendum produced an overwhelming mandate for independence and triggered widespread violence which resulted in the displacement of about two-thirds of the population, the loss of

many lives, damage and destruction of property and a serious disruption of economic activity.

Major damages were sustained by the educational infrastructure in East Timor. Community and social infrastructure where education and schooling were imparted was severely disrupted. Buildings, furniture, teaching materials and above all human resources were lost.²

On 20 May 2002 it became the smallest and youngest country of the new millennium.

2. Religious Values of the Timorese

The Timorese have a great sense of the Transcendent as a fundamental need of moral life. In the past every tribe had a temple called '*uma lulik*' (sacred temple) which is found even today in certain zones. It used to be in the center of the village, the symbol of strength, power and protection for all. It was elevated from the ground and supported by various pilasters to indicate that there is no fusion between the earthly and the sacred. The roof is rather high and large, symbolizing the height and omnipotence of the Divine. It was the place where all the people of the village gathered for the religious ceremonies to express their devotion through rites, songs, offerings and prayers.

Deep in the souls of these people is one certainty: the faithfulness of the Divinity. He who is sacred, *lulik*, is faithful to himself, to his promises and his will. The trust in such faithfulness not only offers a sense of security in daily life but also arouses as a response, the faithfulness of man to the Divine.

² In September 1999 the zone of Lospalaos where the FMA community of Blessed Maddalena Morano is situated, was particularly affected by the destruction carried out by the militias. The boarding school and the rooms for vocational training activities were bombed and the community residence ransacked. The school of Blessed Eusebia community in Comoro too was burned and destroyed.

The deep faith in the Divinity arouses in the consciousness of the Timorese people a lively sense of good and evil. The Divinity is considered the seat of goodness and justice and as such it directs human behavior.

The sense of solidarity is deeply rooted in the souls of the people of Timor and is not limited to the need of mutual cooperation only. Solidarity is lived for truly deep and transcendent reasons: most of all since it is pleasing to the Divinity. Hence gestures of mutual solidarity are numerous and frequent in every tribe, be it for moral support or material help. Hospitality is the privileged expression of this solidarity. For this reason the homes remain always open.

The Timorese have a special veneration for the dead. The belief in the life hereafter places the dead in proximity with the living. They are felt as present and active in interpersonal and family relationships as well as in the significant moments of life. The dead are entrusted above all with the task of mediation with the Divinity.

The population of the Eastern zone has known Christianity through Portuguese colonization 400 years ago. The proclamation of the Good news in all the villages and the spontaneous response of conversion are developments of later years. Perhaps it has been prompted by the sufferings caused by the war, when the people of Timor experienced the difficulties of wandering from place to place, without the stability of a home or the securities of life.

However, the vital integration between faith and culture is not easy because the deep cultural values of this population were ignored by Christianity since its beginnings, that is from the time of colonization under the cultural influx of diverse nationalities – first Portuguese and after 1975 Indonesian. There is the need to heal the Timorese wounded by pressures of various kinds and help them be themselves, purify even their quest and acceptance of God and their way of responding to Him.

3. The FMA in East Timor-Indonesia

“Main³, we are waiting for you”. This was the significant word of welcome to Sr Lina Chiantotto, Visitor to the Missions and Sr Florita Dimayuga, her secretary, who came to visit Timor for the first time in 1987. After the visit it was decided to send FMA missionaries to Timor to open a presence in Venilale - Baucau, and for the first time the “seed of Mornese” was sown in Timorese soil. This visit was in response to the letter sent by a group of young Timorese girls who asked Mother General, Mother Marinella Castagno, to send sisters to Timor. These were the group of young girls being followed up by Fr Joao de Deus, a Portuguese Salesian, missionary in Timor for many years. He suggested to this group of young girls to write a letter to the Mother General. Some of these young girls became the first Timorese FMA.

On 2 October 1988 the first three FMA arrived in Venilale thus completing the Salesian Family in Timor. The three pioneer FMA missionaries who started the presence in this breathtaking island of the great archipelago in the Pacific were Sr Paola Battagliola (Italian), Sr Maria Fe Silva (Filipina) and Sr Marlene Bautista (a Filipina-American citizen). The mission in Timor was entrusted to the care of the Philippine Province under Sr Anna Maria Mattiussi, the Provincial superior until 1991, followed by Sr Felicidad Boado, her successor from 1991 to 1997.

The sisters assumed the care of 150 orphan boys and girls from 1 to 16 years of age. The arrival of the sisters brought hope also to the hearts of many young girls who had been expressing the desire to answer God’s call to work for young people.

The sisters didn’t have a house of their own yet. They first stayed with a family – that of Aleixo and Maria Ximenes. The first months were an experience of sharing apostolic concerns and the difficulties of adaptation. The first young pre-aspirants⁴ who lived

³ “Main”, a term used to refer to Mother Mazzarello.

⁴ They were Floriana Guterres, Jacinta Maria Gusmão, Alexandrina Pinto, Olga da Conceição Belo, Justina Lopes, Ermelinda Gomes and Simoa.

with the sisters as they arrived, learned quickly that our trademark is the family spirit, the deep joy that warms up even the most difficult situations. All of them became FMA except Simoa who left during the novitiate.

The first house dedicated to Mary Help of Christians opened its doors for the first time to the girls who came for vocation encounter on 8 December 1988.

An oratory was started, and with the help of the pre-aspirants also the teaching of religion in village schools. Thanks to new activities and initiatives, often carried out in collaboration with the Salesians, the seeds gradually sprouted and grew. The local people could read our spirituality in what we were doing:

- Our preferential love for the young and the effort to work with them, making them assume the central role
- The way we shared our life as in a family, especially with the orphans and the young people in formation
- The emphasis and care given to the educational aspect and the joy of serving God in our brothers and sisters
- Solidarity with the poorest
- Care for the sick who continually came to our doors
- Work seen and done as a participation in the building of the Kingdom.

With the coming of the new missionary sisters our Salesian family was able to widen its horizons! A house in Dili was opened on 6 August 1990. The sisters were asked to teach in Kristal school. Soon the house was filled with young people looking for a family-like environment where they could express the richness of their inner resources. The oratory was thus born. The new house of "Don Bosco" was also characterized by simplicity and joy, openness and solidarity with the poorest.

In this small Southeast Asian island, we have received a lot of gifts from God and from our Mother, Mary Help of Christians,

especially the frequent visits of our Superiors. These have helped strengthen our unity in the charism and the sense of belonging to our Institute. One big gift was the first visit of Mother General Marinella Castagno in August 1993. She came to share our joy for the grace of the first profession of the first five Timorese FMAs on 15 August 1993 in Venilale. The Institute by this time had taken root in Timorese soil! The first five Timorese FMA are Sr Floriana Gutteres, Sr Jacinta Maria Gusmão, Sr Alexandrina Pinto, Sr Olga da Conceição Belo and Sr Justina Lopes.

4. Opening of New Missionary Presences

The seed has borne fruit and thanks to our new missionary presences, our service for the Kingdom has acquired quality and depth. We could thus respond better to the needs of young people. A rapid glance at the succession of new presences started bears witness to the marvelous growth of the seed that was planted in Timor.

A new vocational school was opened in Venilale in August 1994. It aimed to equip young women with skills with which they could find work and thus become active and empowered women, and responsible mothers in society.

In August 1995 another branch sprouted giving life to the new community of Maddalena Morano in the far Eastern side of the island, in the district of Fuiloro, Lospalos-Lautem. The sisters were asked to open a boarding house for the girls who were attending the agricultural school of the Salesians.

In April 1996 a house was opened in Laga to coincide with the Feast of Gratitude to Mother Marinella.⁵ She was present when this house was blessed and inaugurated. The sisters opened a home for the many orphaned children of this land and also engaged in youth ministry.

⁵ In 1996 Mother Marinella Castagno chose East Timor for the 'Feast of Gratitude', occasion for the entire congregation to thank Mother General, who selects alternately a province in Italy and one outside for this yearly celebration.

January 1997 saw the birth of the new Vice-Province of “Mary, our Help” consisting of Timor, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. Sr Lina Chiandotto was appointed Superior of the Vice-Province. Guided until then (1988-1996) by the Philippine Province in our educative pastoral work, we began thereafter to share the joys and labour of the apostolate with these nations.

In the same year (1997), the seed which had by then grown into a young tree, began to draw life-giving sap from its own soil. A novitiate was opened in Dili in August. The decision to open a novitiate was with a view to imparting a more inculturated formation.⁶

The tree continued to give life to new shoots. In 1998 we were asked to run the Catholic elementary school in Comoro, Dili. The challenge was made even greater by the war which destroyed part of the school but also saw an increase in the number of children we ministered to.

The new community of “Regina Pacis” in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, was opened in August 1999 prior to the tragic events that followed the referendum in East Timor. This community was opened to facilitate the studies of the sisters and to provide accommodation to sisters in transit. The first steps were quickly taken to respond to requests of the local church for the animation of activities for the children and young people.

The General Chapter XXI of the FMA marked a new phase in our journey, an important stage for the FMA in East Timor. Thanks to the growth of the presences and increase in the number of sisters, in June 2003 the Vice-Province of “St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello” consisting only of *Timor Leste* (East Timor) and Indonesia was canonically erected with the Provincial House in Comoro, Dili, and Sr Maria Lourdes Pino Capote its first Superior.

The growth of this tree continues to amaze us. Two new foundations were established within a year in Comoro, Dili. First,

⁶ In the period 1989-1995 the pre-aspirants were sent to the Philippines for their formation up to the novitiate.

“St. Joseph”, the Provincial House of the new Vice-Province and novitiate, was opened in August 2003, and secondly, the community of “Blessed Eusebia Palomino” was finally set up in September. The latter was previously attached to the “St. John Bosco” community in Balide, when the elementary school was initially opened.

In September 2004 another shoot grew up in Baucau: the “St. Teresa of Avila” community for student sisters and for prison ministry and other pastoral activities.

The tree strikes its roots more deeply. In August 2006 a new presence was established in the island of Sumba, Indonesia – the “St. Mary Mazzarello” community – at the request of the Bishop for pastoral activities and teaching in the parochial school of Palla, Sumba.

With the help of “Misereor”, “Manos Unidas”, “IMRS” and “CEI” the John Paul II Center was inaugurated on 27 December 2006 to conduct formation programmes, seminars and workshops at all levels. This center is directly dependent on the Provincial Council and Sr Paola Battagliola, the Provincial Vicar, is directly in charge.

The tree keeps growing with the blessing of Divine Providence. “St. Mary Mazzarello” Vice-Province of Timor-Indonesia opened the first presence of the FMA in the Western part of East Timor on 9 August 2008 in Kailaku, Maliana-Bobonaro. The “Blessed Maria Romero” community was opened in response to the request of Bishop Alberto Ricardo da Silva, who wanted to have the FMA in this area where there are no religious congregations, in order to collaborate in the work of evangelization through the teaching of religion in the pre-secondary and secondary schools and the formation of catechists. There is no Salesian (SDB) presence yet in this area.

5. FMA Communities in East Timor-Indonesia Today

The extent of the growth and fructification of the seed planted in Timor may be measured by the communities dedicated to pastoral and educational services today. An analysis of the various activities they are engaged in on behalf of the youth and the poor reveals the fidelity of the first generation of FMA in this land to their mission,

with regard to the choice of the services offered and the beneficiaries, as well as their commitment to implanting the genuine Salesian charism on Timorese soil. The highest priority given to the education of youth in the Don Bosco way is obvious.

2.1. *“Maria Ausiliatrice”, VENILALE, Baucau*

Diocese of Baucau, East Timor

Founded in 1988 as requested by the Salesians for the administration and care of the orphanage

Activities:

- orphanage
- pre-aspirantate
- oratories in villages
- teaching religion in public schools
- vocational animation
- evangelization

2.2. *“St. John Bosco”, DILI Balide*

Diocese of Dili, East Timor

Founded in 1990 for teaching and pastoral activities in the city

Activities:

- formation house for aspirants and postulants
- oratory
- typing and computer course
- teaching in elementary and high school
- collaboration in the diocesan youth ministry
- pastoral work in the parish
- hospital ministry

2.3. *“St. Mary Mazzarello”, VENILALE, Baucau*

Diocese of Baucau, East Timor

Founded in 1995 to offer vocational training to girls

(The school was started in 1994, but the community was established in 1995)

Activities:

- technical professional school
- boarding
- oratory and pastoral services
- evangelization and human promotion
- health services / 'Mary Help of Christians Clinic'
- collaboration with the Marist Brothers in the College of Baucau

2.4. *"Blessed Maddalena Morano", FUILOORO, Lospalos*

Diocese of Baucau, East Timor

Founded in 1995 at the request of the Salesians for the care of the boarding for girls studying in the agricultural school

Activities:

- boarding
- professional courses (one year course in computer and sewing)
- direction of and teaching in the Salesian elementary and high schools
- oratories in villages
- pastoral activities
- teaching in the pre-novitiate of the Salesians (SDB)

2.5. *"Blessed Laura Vicuna", LAGA, Baucau*

Diocese of Baucau, East Timor

Founded in 1996 as requested by the Salesians for the care of the orphanage

Activities:

- orphanage
- oratories
- formation of catechists

- parish activities
- teaching in the school
- pastoral activities

2.6. *“Regina della Pace”, JAKARTA, Indonesia*

Diocese of Jakarta, Indonesia

Founded in 1999 to welcome student sisters and sisters in transit

Activities:

- community for student sisters
- accommodation for sisters in transit
- collaboration in the parish
- teaching religion in the school

2.7. *“Blessed Eusebia Palomino”, DILI, Comoro*

Diocese of Dili, East Timor

Founded in 1999 to open a kindergarten and elementary school (initially part of “St. John Bosco” community; established as a separate community in 2003)

Activities:

- kindergarten and elementary school
- oratory
- pastoral work in the parish
- collaboration with the diocese in the education sector

2.8. *“St. Joseph”, DILI, Comoro*

Diocese of Dili, East Timor

Founded in 2003 as the new Provincial House and new novitiate

Activities:

- provincial house
- novitiate
- oratory
- coordination of formation programmes at the “John Paul II Center”

- teaching in elementary and high schools
- catechesis in the parish
- inter-congregational formation course for novices
- past pupils

2.9. *“St. Teresa of Avila”, BAUCAU*

Diocese of Baucau, East Timor

Founded in 2004 for student sisters and to respond to some pastoral requests of the Diocese

Activities:

- community for student sisters
- animation of groups of the Salesian family
(Association of Mary Help of Christians - ADMA)
- oratory
- prison apostolate

2.10. *“St. Mary Mazzarello”, PALLA, Sumba (Indonesia)*

Diocese of Weetebula, Indonesia

Founded in 2006

Activities:

- teaching in the elementary and high schools
- parish activities (catechesis, evangelization, liturgical animation)
- boarding

2.11. *“Blessed Maria Romero”, MALIANA, Kailaku*

Diocese of Dili, East Timor

Founded in 2008

Activities:

- teaching religion in pre-secondary and secondary schools
- youth ministry
- formation of catechists
- oratory

- parish activities (liturgical animation, catechesis, celebration of the Word)
- village visits
- promotion of young women

Conclusion

At present the Vice-Province has 71 sisters (56 Timorese, 4 Indonesian and 11 missionaries from Italy, Philippines, Spain, Poland and Colombia), trying to live in reciprocity and openness, giving love and hope to the people through our presence and offering as relevant a response as possible to the needs of the territory. There are 10 novices and around 15 young women in the aspirantate and postulancy. The communities number 11: in East Timor 9 and in Indonesia 2 (Jakarta and Sumba). The FMA continue to play an important role in the development of the country with the conviction that the real key to development is education. The sisters continue to give hope to the future generation. The FMA are strongly present in the field of education, both primary, secondary and vocational. They are also involved in the inter-congregational formation courses for novices and sisters. They run hostels, orphanages and a rural medical centre. One of their priorities is youth ministry which has the goal of forming oratory-animators, teachers, catechists and sisters in our charism, as well as of helping them to be familiar with and draw closer to the Word of God.

The challenges posed by the new situations and current reality of Timor, where the majority of our young people live in a situation of insecurity, disillusion, vulnerability, uncertainty and violence urge us to respond in creative ways. There is need to offer the young quality education, giving them the basic foundations and professional competence necessary to live responsibly, face their future with dignity and insert themselves in the social fabric with a sense of belonging to their own country. In order the better to orient and accompany the lives of our young people, help them become critical in a positive way and enable them to make courageous and proactive choices, as FMA

we feel the urgency of investing resources and energies in the education to peace and in the education to faith.

Looking at reality with the eyes of Mary our Help, we the Salesian family, courageously forge ahead together, educating the young in communion and to communion, taking practical steps to express visibly in this beloved land of Timor the greatness of the *love* we profess. We continue to spread our roots in Timorese and Indonesian soil, giving hope to the future generations, in the expectation that our endeavours may redound to the glory and praise of God.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1.	Andrew Wong sdb	RMG
2.	Anna Grassi fma	THA
3.	Anna Tran Thi Sang fma	VIE
4.	Anthony Pun sdb	CIN
5.	Bernadette Sangma fma	RCG
6.	Carlo Socol sdb	CIN
7.	Eligio Cruz sdb	FIN
8.	Enrico Danieli sdb	THA
9.	Eva Aguilar	STAFF
10.	Filipina Cayabyab	STAFF
11.	Francesco Motto sdb	RMG
12.	Gregorio Bicomong sdb	FIN
13.	Jessica Silvana fma	FIL
14.	John Baptist Lou sdb	CIN
15.	John Ty sdb	VIE
16.	Joseph Phung sdb	CIN
17.	Joseph Vu sdb	CIN
18.	Julio Palmieri sdb	FIS
19.	Karl David Valmonte	STAFF
20.	Laura Chau fma	CIN
21.	Maddalena Ngo Thi Minh Chau fma	VIE
22.	Maliwan Paramathawirote sihm	THA
23.	Maria Mukai Yumiko csm	GIA
24.	Marivic Sombero fma	TIM

478 List of Participants

25.	Mathew Kapplikunnel sdb	RMG
26.	Melanie Pilar fma	FIL
27.	Nestor Impelido sdb	FIN
28.	Orlando Borres sdb	FIS
29.	Paranat Phengpinit sihm	THA
30.	Park Min Sook csm	KOR
31.	Philip Huang sdb	CIN
32.	Rachel Melissa Flor fma	FIL
33.	Remo Bati sdb	FIN
34.	Roberto Roxas sdb	FIN
35.	Teresa Kashirajima Mieko fma	GIA
36.	Teresa Pharksuwan fma	THA

SEMINAR TIMETABLE

November 24, Monday

Arrival of Delegates and Departure
for Batulao

Evening Prayers

Dinner

Rosary

Good Night Talk

November 25, Tuesday

1st day of conference

Morning Session

07.00

Holy Mass

08.00

Breakfast

09.00-09.15

Inauguration: FIN Provincial, EAO
Regional

Messages: Rector Major, Sr. Grazia
Loparco fma

09.15-09.30

Presentation of Seminar
proceedings: Fr Carlo Socol

09.30-10.10

Keynote Address I: Fr Francesco
Motto sdb

*The Catholic Church and the
Missions in the Twenty Year Period
between the Two World Wars. The
Missionary Strategy of the
Salesians*

10.15-10.30

Break

10.30-11.10	Keynote Address II: Fr Nestor Impelido sdb <i>The Salesian Charism in East Asia. New Foundations by Salesians</i>
11.10-11.50	Keynote Address III: Fr Gregorio Bicomong <i>The General Background and the Expansion of Salesian Work in the 1950s</i>
11.50	Departure for Taal Vista Lodge
12.00	Lunch
<i>Afternoon Session</i>	
15.00-15.40	Paper I: Fr Carlo Socol sdb <i>The Implantation of the Salesian Charism in China. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results</i>
15.40-16.30	Paper II: Fr Mathew Kapplikunnel sdb <i>The Implantation of the Salesian Charism in India. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results</i>
16.30-16.50	Break
16.50-17.30	Communication I: Fr Gaetano Compri sdb <i>Reflections of Fr Cimatti on the Formation of Personnel in loco</i>
17.30-18.30	Discussion
19.00	Dinner
19.45	Rosary, Good Night Talk

November 26, Wednesday

2nd day of conference

Morning Session

07.00	Breakfast
09.00-09.20	Resume of previous day's talks
09.20-10.00	Paper III: Fr Enrico Danieli sdb <i>The Implantation of the Salesian Charism in Thailand. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results</i>
10.00-10.40	Paper IV: Sr Anna Grassi fma & Sr Teresa Pharksuwan fma <i>Witness of Fidelity, Rich in Hope. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results of the First 30 Years of FMA in Thailand</i>
10.40-11.00	Break
11.00-11.40	Paper V: Fr John Ty sdb <i>Sowing and Growth of the Salesian Charism in the Stormy History of Vietnam</i>
11.40-12.20	Paper VI: Sr Bernadette Sangma fma <i>The Implantation of the FMA in India. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results</i>
12.30	Lunch

Afternoon Session

13.00	Visit to Taal Heritage Town
17.00	Holy Mass (Shrine of Our Lady of Caysasay) Dinner

November 27, Thursday
3rd day of conference

Morning Session

07.00	Holy Mass: Bishop Patricio Buzon
08.00	Breakfast
09.00-09.20	Resume of previous day's talks
09.20-09.35	Communication II: Fr Remo Bati sdb <i>The Implantation of the Salesian Charism in the Philippines</i>
09.35-09.55	Communication III: Sr Maliwan Paramathawirote sihm & Sr Paranat Phengpinit sihm <i>The Salesian Charism in SIHM's Life and Mission in the Local Church</i>
09.55-10.10	Communication IV: Sr Park Min Sook csm <i>The Unity of Life in the Founder Fr Vincenzo Cimatti</i>
10.10-10.25	Communication V: Sr Yumiko Mukai csm <i>The Salesian Charism in the Formation of the First Constitutions of the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki</i>
10.25-10.45	Break
10.45-11.00	Communication VI: Sr Maddalena Ngo Thi Minh fma <i>The Founding of the Charism on the Journey of Formation of Vocations in Vietnam in the First 30 Years (1960-1990)</i>

11.15-11.30	Communication VII: Sr Laura Chau fma <i>Winding Road, Steady Steps. Salesian Charism in the First 30 Years of FMA in China</i>
11.30-11.45	Communication VIII: Sr Marivic Sombero fma <i>Seeds of Mornese in Timor. FMA Contribution to the Implantation of the Salesian Charism</i>
11.45-12.15	Discussion
12.15	Lunch
<i>Afternoon Session</i>	
15.00-17.00	Evaluation of Seminar Methodological and programmatic issues Concluding Dinner

November 28, Friday

06.00	Breakfast
07.00	Departure from Batulao

Optional visits:

<i>Part I - Morning</i>	Ayala Museum
12.15	Holy Mass at St John Bosco Parish Lunch
<i>Part II - Afternoon</i>	Intramuros

EVALUATION OF THE SEMINAR

27.11.2008

1. Organization of the Seminar

This evaluation focuses more on the content than on the methodology.

The seminar helped to improve knowledge of the situation as far as content is concerned, which was very interesting. The papers dealt with the implantation of the Salesian charism in difficult contexts and difficult periods. As such the material is of much value for the future.

The papers presented a wide vision of the Salesian reality. The seminar was a good occasion to share and to update knowledge of the various countries of the region. The papers are very valuable in content, a real eye-opener on the nature and richness of the Salesian charism as it branched out, took roots and keeps growing in different socio-political and religious contexts of Asia.

The seminar provided a platform to share with others the fruits of one's personal study. These seminars should not remain merely an academic exercise, but should also serve as a formative factor. The talks should touch the heart, inspire and encourage; should provide the reason for our being here, for our being Salesians. It should, however, be kept in mind that it is not a seminar on spirituality, but history.

The challenges were not sufficiently stressed in the papers and the time was too short. Very few speakers explained how the Salesians reached or failed to reach the goals.

The material presented was of different standards: some raw, some half-baked, some cooked. Nevertheless even this raw material is a contribution to historians for whom it would prove useful. We should, on the other hand, be also realistic: the papers were the product of beginners, who are making the first steps at entering an archive, collecting and reading the documents, reflecting and organizing the material found in order to find out what history teaches us. Hence we should not be discouraged if no major findings are arrived at – these are just the initial efforts!

During these seminars on future occasions ACSSA could also provide guidelines on how to do this job better. There could be some input of a methodological nature or on historiography.

The contributions should not be limited to experts. Limiting the number of papers will also reduce the richness of the seminar. More people should be given chance to produce something, even if the results are of varying levels. The seminar should be an occasion to encourage more people to do research.

The only negative point is that the papers had to be rushed through while being presented, offering no time for assimilation. A solution would be to limit strictly the number of pages of each paper in the future. The seminar was also deficient in the 'question-answer' or discussion part, which should be emphasized more. Hence, when organizing future seminars, also moments of reflection/discussion should be ensured. The presentation of papers should be interspersed with periods of reflection. The papers offer much information; but time is needed also to reflect on the inputs. The talks could be distributed on the previous day.

2. Publication of the Acts

Should the Acts of the Seminar be published? If so, as a separate book or as part of a collection?

The Acts of the previous seminar in Hong Kong were published in two volumes, the first volume containing articles pertaining to the

Salesians, and the second volume those pertaining to other institutes belonging to the Salesian Family.

It was opined that it's worth publishing the Acts, which will also serve to communicate to others the fruits of the seminar. In this way justice can be done also to those who have taken the trouble to prepare the papers. Also for the sake of continuity, it is better to publish the papers, as was done the previous time. Since all the papers are not of the same standard, it is better to publish the Acts as part of the ACSSA collection (Varia) instead of a separate book by a known publishing house.

It will be good to include an appropriate introduction to the volume by someone from ACSSA.

The upshot of the discussion was to publish the Acts in one volume, possibly including all the papers. The norms to be followed for revising the papers for publication will be communicated to the authors by the editor/s. The presidency of ACSSA will select someone for the job.

The assembly was informed that there would be no publication of the Acts of the regional seminar conducted in South America; but some of the papers might be presented in the congress on Don Rua to be held in Turin.

How to transmit to others/the provinces the outcome of the seminar?

It was proposed and accepted to prepare a report/write-up of the seminar to be sent to the various Salesian Bulletins and Provincial Newsletters, which could publish the same with due modifications and/or after translation. Fr Motto was requested to prepare this basic text and reach it by email to the participants, who would pass it on to the Salesian Bulletins and Provincial Newsletters.

3. Next Seminar

Since Salesian works in the region started rather late, we cannot follow the same themes adopted by the main ACSSA.

It was unanimously agreed to organize a follow-up seminar.

ACSSA is organizing an international congress on Don Rua in 2009. In 2010 there will be another Congress on Don Rua at the level of the Congregation. For Don Bosco's bicentenary in 2015 nothing has been planned yet. (ACSSA of) EAO region can plan something in view of 2015 – something of a historical nature.

Can we propose some topic to ACSSA Presidency for 2015?

In the discussion that followed the following topics were suggested for the next seminar:

- The first thirty years of Salesian presence in each country in the wider ecclesial context
- Significance of our schools in the work of evangelization
- The Salesian charism: its understanding, assimilation, transmission, continuity
- Impact of Salesian works, different missionary approaches
- Transfer of leadership from European missionaries to indigenous personnel
- The two seminars organized in Europe studied the history of implantation and the educational impact of Salesian works during the difficult periods. There has not been a reflection on our pedagogical experience in the region. We have been practically only 'doing what Don Bosco did'.

We could study the history of the application of the preventive system in the different countries of the region, with particular attention to the kind of schools and colleges started, the educational methods employed etc.

Venue

Many showed interest in having it in Thailand, but were discouraged by the fact that too many meetings of the region are already being organized there.

A vote was taken by show of hands to know the preferences for the venue. The results were as follows: Thailand – 12, Seoul – 12, Jakarta – 10, Vietnam – 9, Tokyo – 6.

Participants

Invitation to participate in the seminar is to be made through the Provincials. ACSSA can write to the Provincials to send participants and also to ask for particular individuals.

The topic to be finalized before Easter, and before Christmas 2009 inform the Provincials and ask them to choose the people who will prepare the papers.

Since the seminar has also a formative value, it will be good to get the participation of the confreres in formation of the Province where the seminar will be held.

Organization

During the seminar half a day to be dedicated to offering guidelines on method of writing history.

Help those who have to prepare the papers by providing them with available material online or otherwise, such as articles in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*.

Some training could be provided to Provincial Secretaries; guidelines could be given for writing and maintaining the chronicles. But there are concrete difficulties: the Provincial Secretaries keep changing constantly; it has to be done in coordination with the Secretary General who is responsible for the training of Provincial Secretaries.

4. ACSSA unit for EAO

Ideas were exchanged on the advisability of starting a unit of the ACSSA for South Asia - Oceania region. All regions are represented in the Presidency of the main ACSSA, which is in communication with the other regional units.

What are the functions of the regional ACSSA?

Coordinate the activities of the members, organize seminars, circulate information, remind Provincials of their responsibilities with regard to the promotion of Salesian history. ACSSA, while admitting members, should take into consideration persons with 'interest' along with those with 'qualification' in history.

A straw vote taken among those present showed that 16 were in favour of starting a unit of the ACSSA for EAO. The proposal will be presented to the Provincials, whose competence it is to constitute ACSSA.

INDEX OF NAMES OF PERSONS

A

- Acquistapace Mario, SDB 226,
374,428
Albera Paolo, Rector Major SDB
152,242,243
Alessi Anthony, SDB 245,251
Alessi Antonio M, SDB 279,281,
288,303,306
Amati, FMA 301
Anantha Mahidon, King 179
Anderson Austin, SDB 252
Aupiais Francis, Priest 43

B

- B. Ngo Dinh Diem John 219
Bainotti Giorgio, SDB 414
Baldo Maria, FMA 307,308, 312
Balestra Mario, SDB 247
Barbero Mario, SDB 414
Bati Remo, SDB 18,367
Battagliola Paola, FMA 465, 469
Bautista Marlene, FMA 465
Bellido Ernest, SDB 170
Bellido Modesto, SDB 117
Belo Olga da Conceição, FMA
467
Benedict XV, Pope 38,39,83
Benna John, SDB 372,373

- Bernardini Vincenzo, SDB 148
Berruti Pietro, SDB 53,54,56,
57,58,144,145,149,150,152,
167,257,259,266, 267,378,
387,392
Bicomong Gregorio, SDB 17,65,
368
Biebuyck Richard, SDB 260
Boado Felicidad, FMA 465
Bogo Generoso, SDB 214
Boniface VIII, Pope 74
Bonmassar Stefania, FMA 301,
308
Boonkert Kitabamrung Nicholas,
Blessed 171,306
Bordin Ubaldo, SDB 75
Bosch Jose, SDB 371-373
Bosso Felix, SDB 173
Bottain Egidio, SDB 414
Braga Carlo, SDB 30,48,75,78,
87,126,129,130,132,143,
144,145,148,149, 150, 371-
374
Bragion Andrew, SDB 209,370
Brando Esterina, FMA 416,420,
423,425
Breton Albert Charles, MEP
Bishop 102,446,447
Buzon Patricio, SDB Bishop 18

C

Canazei Ignazio, SDB Bishop
48,82,87,89,90,126,128,129,
130,133-136,138-143,148-
153,161,404

Candela Antonio, SDB 53,102,
167,251,257,259,262,267,378

Candusso Maurillo, SDB 371-
373

Caravario Callisto, Saint 21,30,
44,88,140,143

Carbonell Jose, SDB 375

Carnini Job, SDB 166,414

Carpené Francesco, SDB 243

Carreño Jose Luis, SDB 238,
239,243,250-255,258,259,
266-268,271,274,375

Carretto Pietro, SDB Bishop
30,117,168,170,173,175,178,
309,312,425,

Casetta Carlo, SDB 414

Casetta Giovanni, SDB 116,312

Castagno Marinella, Mother
General FMA 465,467

Castellino Cesare, SDB 281

Castro John, SDB 261

Caulfield Genoveffa 312,313

Cavalla Constantine, SDB 424

Cavoli Antonio, SDB 24,82,91-
104,439,440,442-448,453

Chambon Jean-Baptist, Archbishop
382,386

Chang kai-shek 44,73

ChauPui Har Laura, FMA 397

Chávez Villeneuve Pascual,
Rector Major SDB 21,188,
228

Chiandotto Lina, FMA 465,468

Chorin Louis August, MEP
Bishop 118,300,316

Cimatti Vincent, SDB Venerable
18,21,24,27,30,49,80,82,91,
92,94-96,98,99,103,139,144,
377-379,383,387,391,396,
439,440,442,444,445,447,
448,451,452,454,459,460

Cinato Eligio, SDB 236,253,
256,267,270,271

Clifford John, SDB 371

Cogliandro Alfred, SDB 374,375

Cogliolo Clotilde, FMA 105,
281,311

Cogliolo Pietro, SDB 246

Compri Gaetano, SDB 18,377

Costantini Celso, Archbishop
39,40,41,55,59,136

Cruz Eligio, SDB 17

D

D'Amore Guido, SDB 78

Da Silva Alberto Ricardo, Bishop
469

Dabove Emilio, SDB 273

Daglio Angela, FMA 348

Danieli Enrico, SDB 18,155

Dardanello Franca, FMA 436

De Deus Joao, SDB 465

De Guebriant Jean B., MEP
Archbishop 123

De Lubac Henri, SJ 43
De Munari Silvio, SDB 414
De Reggi John, SDB 370,371
De Rhodes Alexandre, SJ 79
De Souza Barroso Antonio,
Bishop 232
Della Torre Carlo, SDB 82,112
Di Falco Anthony, SDB 78
Di Fiore Luigi, SDB 267
Di Giorgio Luigina, FMA 105,
288,297,303,311,318,415,416,
419,420,423,424,425
Dimayuga Florita, FMA 465
Dindinger Johannes, OMI 42
Dinh Xuan Hien Joseph, SDB
193
Donders Johan, SDB 196
Dooley John, Bishop 223
Drapier Anthony, Bishop 179
Duhart James, Bishop 317
Dupont Francisque, SDB 72,214

F

Faroni Adolf, SDB 372
Fedrigotti Alvin, SDB 265,266,
268
Ferrando Stephen, SDB Bishop
236,248,263,265,274,275,277,
321,328,357
Ferrari Luigi, SDB 145, 371
Forlazzini Joseph, SDB 414
Fouquet Antonio, MEP Bishop
90
Fumasoni-Biondi Pietro, Cardinal
41,104

G

Gallina Cesira, FMA 325
Gamba Romildo, SDB 370
Gaod Josephine, FMA 325
Garbero Peter, SDB 372
Garelli Sante, SDB 48,139
Gatti Leonidas, SDB 260
Gatti Pietro, SDB 241
Ghidoni Alma, FMA 348
Giacomino Antonio, SDB 72,190
Giovanni Guarona, SDB 87
Giuliana, CSM 101
Gordon John, Bishop 428
Goyau Georges 43
Grassi Anna, FMA 18,279
Guarino Joseph, SDB 373
Gusmão Jacinta Maria, FMA 467
Gutteres Floriana, FMA 467

H

Hien Simon, Bishop 428
Hoang Van Hinh Joseph, SDB
195

I

Iellici Peter, SDB 414,425
Impelido Nestor, SDB 17,33,
81,368

J

John XXIII, Pope 19,73,74

K

Kapplikunnel Mathew, SDB 18,
25,231

Kirchner Josef, SDB 89

Kurita 99,101

L

Larghi Teresina, FMA 317,318

Lauton, FMA 301

Le Quang Anh John, SDB 201

Le Van Hao Fabian, SDB 196

Le Van Thanh Joseph, SDB 201

Lebbe Vincent, Priest 42

Linda Lucotti, Mother General

FMA 283,284,308,312

Liviabella Leone, SDB 99,100

Lonfernini Luigi, Priest 91

Loparco Grazia, FMA 33,34,403

Lopes Justina, FMA 467

Lou Celestino 44

Lumley, Lady 258

M

Machuy Maria del Socorro,
FMA 429

Majcen Andrej, SDB 72,188,
190,193,211,225

Mantovani Orfeo, SDB 265

Marella Paolo, Cardinal 446

Marengo Orestes, SDB Bishop
253

Margherita, orphan 352

Marian Mielczarek, SDB 145

Martelli Archimede, SDB 72

Maschio Aurelio, SDB 237,
264,268

Massi Salvatore, SDB 370

Massimino Aloysius, SDB 192

Mathias Louis, SDB Bishop
30,48,234,236,237,239,240,
243,247,248,249,253,254,
255,257,258,264,265,268,
273,275

Matsuo 99,100,101

Mattiussi Anna Maria, FMA 465

Maule Nilde, FMA 286,430,431

McGlinchey Hugh, SDB 266

Mederlet Eugene, SDB Arch-
bishop 235, 236,238,247,253

Meliga Pietro, SDB 264

Merlo Teresa, FMA 281,285,
300,314,315,428

Middleton 348

Minh Chau Maddalena, FMA
427,430, 433

Miravalle Elena, FMA 405,429,
431,433

Moja Joseph, SDB 264

Monchanin Jules, Priest 43

Monchiero John, SDB 373

Moore Caterina, FMA 428,
430,431

Moore Rose, FMA 306,307,312

Mora John, SDB 273

Morel Elie Joseph, Archbishop
235

Morellato Antonia, FMA 105,
106,284,285,299,301,318,
415,416,419, 420,422,424,425

Morrow Louis, SDB Bishop 245,
265,274,277

Motto Francesco, SDB 17,37, 152

Mrzel Rafael, SDB 370,371

Mukai Yumiko Maria, CSM 18,
439

N

Nardin Lorenzo, SDB 370

Ngo Thi Minh Chau Maddalena,
FMA 18,427,430

Nguyeãn thò Dung Maria, FMA
435

Nguyen Duc Huynh Marc, SDB
216

Nguyen Son Lam Bartholomew,
Bishop 195

Nguyen Van Binh Paul,
Archbishop 202,224,429

Nguyen Van Ty John, SDB 187,
193,200

Novasconi Carolina, FMA
284,314

O

Ohm Thomas, OSB 42,

Orsolin Thomas, SDB 370

Osafune 99,100,101,103

P

Pallegoix Jean B., Bishop 181

Pang Lucia 88

Paramathawirote Maliwan,
SIHM 18,409

Park Fiace, CSM 451

Parri Palmira, FMA 89,90,404

Pasotti Gaetano, SDB Bishop
24,30,48,82,104-115,165,166,
168,281,284,293,304,306,309,
311,314,315,319,410-426

Pasteur Louis 79

Perier Ferdinand, Archbishop
234

Perros R.M. Joseph, MEP
Bishop 117,293,312

Persico Anna, FMA 429,433

Phalavasú Cecilia, FMA 306,312

Pham Van Nam Aloysius, Bishop
210

Pham Viet Van Joseph, SDB 201

Pharsuwan Teresa, FMA 18

Phengpinit Paranat, SIHM 18,
409

Phiboon Songkhram 157,158,
159,169

Pianazzi Archimede, SDB
244,248,251,256,259,267,268

Piani Guglielmo, SDB Bishop
71,72

Piasecki Leon, SDB 265

Pierre Charles, SJ 42

Piesiur George, SDB 261

Pinaffo Joseph, SDB 165,183

Pino Capote Maria Lourdes,
FMA 468

Pinto Alexandrina, FMA 467

Pisano Lawrence, SDB 261

Pius XI, Pope 39,40,69,83,
89,92,93,249,300

Pius XII, Pope 73,83

Poli Angelo, Bishop 276

Prachum Gabriel, SDB 178,179

Prando Paul, SDB 260

Praphon Michael, SDB Bishop
119,411

Predee Panomyong 157,158

Provera Silvio, SDB 414

Q

Quaranta Pierangelo, SDB 373

R

Raineri Giovanni, SDB 85

Rama IV 156,160

Rama V 156,160,181

Rama VI 156,157,160,177

Rama VII 157,174

Rama IX 159

Rassiga Mario, SDB 85

Raymundo Garcia, SDB120

Ribeiro Vieira de Castro Teotonio,
Bishop 232

Ricaldone Igino, SDB 261,269

Ricaldone Pietro, Rector Major
SDB 75,94,95,141,152,308,
378,379,383,410

Ricceri Luigi, Rector Major
SDB 217

Righetti John, SDB 371

Rinaldi Philip, Rector Major
SDB 161,439

Rizzato John, SDB 372,373

Roberts Thomas, Archbishop
237

Roozen Godfrey, SDB 373

Rossi Giovanna, FMA 402

Rossi Mario, SDB 370

Rua Michele, Rector Major SDB
152

Russo Maria, FMA 402

Ruthkowski John, SDB 78

Ruzzeddu Mario, SDB 165,166,
168,172,317

S

S Natarajan 273

Sadaya Olivia, FMA 429

Saletta Luigina, FMA 336

Sangma Bernadette, FMA 18,
321

Sarit Thanarat 159

Sasaki Nui 103

Schiapparelli Severina, FMA 344

Schmidlin Joseph, Priest 42

Schwarz George, SDB 372

Scuderi Vincent, SDB 58,264,
266,268,270,272,274,351

Seitz Paul, MEP Bishop 190,
218,223

Silva Maria Fe, FMA 465

Sivori Anna Rosa 280

Socol Carlo, SDB 18,33,123

Sombero Marivic, FMA 18,461

Streit Robert, OMI 42

Sun Yat-sen 398,400,401

T

Tambascia Nicholas, SDB 371

Tch'an Maria, FMA 402

Than Van Hoan Joseph, SDB 209

Thani Nivat 183

Thekkedath Joseph, SDB
231,246,276

Then Kala 88

Thi Chung Anna, FMA 430

Tohill Bernard, SDB 197,201
Tomasetti Francesco, SDB 58
Tong Rosa, FMA 402
Tornquist Adolf, SDB 150
Tozzi Enea, SDB 274
Trinh Nhu Khue Joseph, Bishop
223

Tuena Ugo, SDB 268

U

Uguet Mariano, SDB 270-274
Ulliana John, SDB 178-180

V

Vagnozzi Egidio, Cardinal 71
Vallino Innocenza, FMA 336,
337,345
Van Looy Luc, SDB Bishop 201
Van Rossum Willem, Cardinal 38
Vaschetti Luisa, Mother General
FMA 283
Vendrame Constantine, SDB 261
Versiglia Luigi, Saint 21,30,44,49,
82-88,123-126,128,134,138,
143,153,403,404

Vespa Angela, Mother General
FMA 284

Viganò Egidio, Rector Major
SDB 200,450

Vignerón Ernest, SDB 260

Vu Khiem Cung, Priest 428

W

Wong Andrew, SDB 17

X

Ximenes Aleixo & Maria 465

Y

Yamaguchi Mitsue 103

Yamashita Kikue 103

Yuen Shik-kai 400

Z

Zaetta John, SDB 260

Ziggiotti Renato, Rector Major
SDB 71,251

Zola Florence, SDB 255

Zoller Rosa, FMA 429,432

INDEX OF NAMES OF PLACES

A

Aberdeen 145,147,148
Ahmadnagar 271
Assam 234,237,239,240,243-245,
248,255,260,262,263,265,269,271,
273-276,323,325,357,360,363
Astudillo 47
Ayuthaya 155,156,160

B

Ba Thon 194,199,202,206,207,
209,216
Bac Hoi 198
Bagnolo Piemonte 47
Balide 469,470
Ban Saeng Arun 170,185
Bandel 235,327
Bang Nok Khuek/Bangnokkhuek
76,105,106,109,110,111,113,
162,171,174,176,179,182,184,
283,297,298,300,301,308,
310,311,416,422
Bangkok 27,75,76,77,112,115,
117,118,119,136,156,159,160,
161,162,167-171,173,174,
177-182,185,186,284,285,
290,295,296,298,300,305-
308,312,313,316

Bangtan 164,177,183,184
Banpong 76,164,165,167,176,
177,183,184,185,186,281,283,
289,290,291,298,299,302,306,307,
308,311,312,316,416

Bao Loc 192,212
Basin Bridge 254,258,259
Batulao 17,29,461
Baucau 77,465,469,470,473
Becchi 47

Belem 51
Ben Cat 194,206,207,209
Bengal 245,261,269
Beppu 381,385
Betong 77,166,169,410
Bhoi 357,361
Binh Tay 192,428
Bivio di Cumiana 47
Bombay (Mumbai) 232,235,
237,240,241,242,256,257,258
Bui Chu 190,208
Buon Me Thuot 191,218

C

Cagayan 70
Calcutta 45,57,234,235,242,255,
257,271
Cam Duong 198
Canlubang 77,374,375

Canton 90,135,400
Caracas 52
Castelnuovo Don Bosco 47
Cau Bong 196,199,206,217
Caysasay 18
Cebu 76,77,369,373,374
Chapei 407
Cho Lon 428
Chofu 76,379
Chotanagpur 245
Chuk Yuen 427
Chumphorn 410
Comoro 468,472
Congo 39,51
Cu Chi 196,224

D

Da Lat 192-196,198,199,201,
206,207,209,211,219,222
Da Nang 192,205,212
Dahomey (Benin) 43
Damnoen-saduak 423
Dehra Dun 266
Delhi 273
Deolali 271
Deoli 271,272,276
Dibrugarh 236,248,253,327
Dili 76,466,468,470,472,473
Doc Mo 206,434,435
Don Kra Bueang/Don Krabueang
183,184,423
Dong Nai 198
Duc Huy 194,199,206,209

E

East Timor 18,22,66,74,136,139,
461,462,463,465,468,469-474

F

Foglizzo Canavese 46
France 43,66,79,158,169,181,
191,209,225,268,269,305
Fuiloro 76,467,471
Fukuoka 100,102,103,380,384,
447

G

Gaeta 47
Gauhati 323,325,327,334,336,
339,342,347-350
Go Vap 77,187,191,194,196,
205,206,209,211,214,218,219,
428
Goa 244,252,255,264,266
Guangdong 123

H

Haad-yai 290,295,299,314,315
Hanoi/Ha Noi 72,76,77,208,223
Hat Yai/Hatyai 166,168,172,185,
410
Heungshan 123,124,139
Hien Duc 196,206,217
Hiroshima 44
Ho Sai/Hosai 86,87,88,124,126,
129,135,139,401,402,405,406,
Hoc Mon 196,206,207,217
Hong Kong 17,27,29,33,52,65,
66,77,78,82,135,142,143,144,

- 145,147,187,190,191,192,
209,217,223,280,369,375,
378,389,390,391,393-396,
402,403,405,408,427,428,429,
430,432, 435,436
- Hoshi 132
- Hua Hin/Huahin 27,76,117,165,
167,168,170,171,185,314,410
- I
- Indochina 66,72,76,156,158,169,
214,223,305
- Ivrea 46
- J
- Jakarta 468,472,474
- Jessore 251
- Jowai 325,327,343,352,357,362
- K
- Kailaku 469,473
- Kambikila 51
- Kampuchea 196
- Kanchanaburi 162,425
- Kerala 249,253
- Khasi Hills 357,358,360
- Khok Mottanoi 183,184
- Kok-mod-tanoi 423
- Kontum 223
- Kotagiri 264,265
- Krishnagar 235,236,245,251,256,
261,263,265,274
- Kunming 144,147,149
- Kwangju 72
- Kyushu 98
- L
- Laga 467,471
- Lawaan 374
- Lien Khuong 194,206
- Lien-Kong-Heu 88
- Lille 43
- Liluah 242
- Lin Chow/Linchow 83,88,132
- Lok Chong/Lok-chong 52,401,
405
- Lospalos 467,471
- Louvain 42
- Lu Ville 254
- Lyons 39,43,83
- M
- Macao/Macau 65,66,76,123-
126,132,135,139,142,144,
145,147,161,402,405
- Madras 51,105,232,234,235,236,
240,247,249,253,254,258,264,
271,273,308,324
- Makati 77,369,374
- Malaysia 68,155,156
- Maliana 469,473
- Mandaluyong 77,369,374
- Mangalore 232
- Manila 17,18,29,70,144
- Marseille 43
- Mato Grosso 53
- Matunga 237,258
- Mawlai 265,271,325,342,343
- Mikawashima 378,382,386
- Miyazaki 18,24,27,83,91-95,98,
100,102,103,377,378,380,381,

382,384,385,386,387,392,
396,439,440,442,443,445,447,
448,451,452,453,460

Mongolia 187

Muntinlupa 77,374

Myanmar (Burma) 65,68,69,
75,77,461,468

Mylapore 232,234,235,244,246,
253

N

Nagasaki 44,380,384,443

Nagercoil 241

Nakatsu 76,77,377,380,381,384,
385,387,392

NakornSriThammarat 410

Narathiwat 410

Nariwattana 416,423

Nigeria 39

Nong Truong 196,217

North Arcot 235,244,247,256,
260,262

O

Oita 377,380,381,384,385,396

Oyodo 378

P

Palla 149,469,473

Pampanga 374

Pampas 52

Panjim 264

Paraguay 53

Paranaque 374

Paris 27,43,104,160,161,181,323,
377,379

Patagonia 52,53

Pattani 410

Peking 39,73,76,232,401

Penango Monferrato 46

Perambur 51

Petchaburi 162

Phat Diêm 208

Phu Son 194,206,215

Phuket 170,410

Phuoc Loc 198

Pondicherry 235

Poonamallee 241,253

Prachuap Khirikan 410

Pune 257

R

Rajaburi/Ratchaburi 51,83,104,
105,107-110,162,164,165,
167-177,180,182,183,185,
410,411,415,416,421,425

Ranchi 45

Rangoon 75,77

Ranong 410

Ratburi 298,307,308,311

Rebaudengo 47,252

Rome 27,29,33,34,38-42,56,69,
70,71,73,93,170,174,187,200,
217,279,300,323,427,435

Russia 66,67,70

Rwanda 39

S

Sadao 166

Sagayathottam 258,259

Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City 79,191-

- 194,196,197,198,202,203,210,
 214,216,428,429,431
 Samut Songkhram 162
 Santa Cruz 374
 Shanghai 52,63,85,124,135,136,
 139,140,144,147,149,401,402,403,
 405,406,407
 Shantung 400
 Shaukiwan 77,143-146
 Shillong 54,234,236,239,242,243,
 253,255,257,262,265,269,270,
 271,273,275,276,277,323,
 324,327,357
 Shiu Chow/Shiuchow 83,84,87-
 90,124,126,128,131,135,139,
 140,143,144,149,150,152,
 401,402,403,405
 Shrigley 47
 Singapore 66,68,269
 Sonada 256,271,274,276
 Songkhla 410
 Sriracha 164
 Sumba 469,473,474
 Suoi Quit 198
 Suratthani/Surat Thani 166,170-
 173,185,411
 Surigao 70
 Sydney 76
- T**
- Tahine 222
 Taiwan 65,73,77,408
 Takanabe 378,382,386
 Tam Ha 192,429,430,431,432,
 433,435
 Tam Hai 192,196,205
 Tan Cang 196,206
 Tanjore 232-235,239,242,246,
 260,264,277,243,244
 Tano 381,385,452
 Tardeo 235,241
 Tarlac 77,78,374
 Tierra del Fuego 53
 Tezpur 236,245,248,251,253,
 256,325,327,334,338,342,348,
 363
 Tha Muang 116
 Thai Ha 211
 Thailand 18,20,21,22,24,27,
 51,53,65,69,75,76,77,81,82,
 83,104,108,109,112,114,139,
 141,142,144,155,156,158,169,
 170,173, 175,179,181,182,
 186,279-286,288,298,300,
 301,306-312,314-317,319,
 320,409,410,416,420,423,425
 Thamuang 117,183,184,425
 Thanh Binh 194,206
 Thanh Da 192,433
 Thava 173,183,184
 Thidanukhro 315,316
 Thu Duc 77,191,192,194,195,
 196,209,211,214,215,218,
 219,429,431
 Tientsin 39
 Tondo 77,374,375
 Tram Hanh 77,192,193,194,
 209,214,219
 Travancore 250

Tura 245,236
Turin 29,46,53,60,63,82,95,
96,102,112,115,117,120,121,
126,133,135-139,141-145,
150,152,163,165,167,168,
170,174,242,243,248,308,374

U

Udonthani 77,185,292,317
Uriurkuppam 258,260

V

Vat Nai 173
Vat Phleng 174,182,184
Vellore 235,241,249,267,272
Venilale 465,467,470

Versailles 39,43
Victorias 77,78,369,373,374
Villa Moglia 47,
Vinh Long 192,212

W

West Bengal 321,327

X

Xuan Hiep 196,206,207
Xuan Loc 194

Y

Yala 77,410
Yokohama 443
Yunnanfu 144



PUBLICATIONS BY ISS-ACSSA

ACTS OF INTERNATIONAL SEMINARS AND CONGRESSES

1. Francesco MOTTO (Ed.), *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo don Bosco*. Atti del 2° Convegno-Seminario di storia dell'Opera salesiana. Roma, 1-5 novembre 1995. LAS, Roma 1996.
2. Francesco MOTTO (Ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale*. Vol. I: *Contesti, quadri generali, interpretazioni*. Vol. II: *Esperienze particolari in Europa, Africa, Asia*. Vol. III: *Esperienze particolari in America Latina*. Atti del 3° Convegno Internazionale Storia dell'Opera salesiana. Roma, 31 ottobre - 5 novembre 2000. LAS, Roma 2001.
3. *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*, 44 (2004) 23-312: Atti del 4° Seminario Europeo dell'ISS-ACSSA. Vienna, 30 ottobre - 2 novembre 2003.
4. Jesús Graciliano GONZÁLEZ, Grazia LOPARCO, Francesco MOTTO, Stanislaw ZIMNIAK (Eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Istanze ed attuazioni in diversi contesti*. Vol. I: *Relazioni generali. Relazioni regionali: Europa - Africa*. Vol. II: *Relazioni regionali: America*. Atti del 4° Convegno Internazionale di Storia dell'Opera salesiana. Ciudad de México, 12-18 febbraio 2006. (Associazione Cultori Storia Salesian - Roma. Studi - 1-2). LAS, Roma 2007.
5. Grazia LOPARCO, Stanislaw ZIMNIAK (Eds.), *L'educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili del XX secolo*. Atti del seminario Europeo di Storia dell'Opera salesiana. Cracovia,

31 ottobre – 4 novembre 2007. (Associazione Cultori Storia Salesian – Roma. Studi – 3). LAS, Roma 2008.

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1. FRANCISCO CASTELLANOS HURTADO, *El Colegio Salesiano del Espíritu Santo en Guadalajara (México)*. Roma 2005.
2. Nestor IMPELIDO (Ed.), *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia. Acts of the Seminar on Salesian History, Hong Kong, 4-6 December 2004*. Part I: *The Salesians of Don Bosco*. Hong Kong 2006.
3. Nestor IMPELIDO (Ed.), *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia. Acts of the Seminar on Salesian History, Hong Kong, 4-6 December 2004*. Part II: *The Salesian Family (FMA, CSM, SIHM, DQUM, DBV)*. Hong Kong 2006.
4. Francesco MOTTO, *Start Afresh from Don Bosco. Meditations for a Spiritual Retreat*. Roma, 2006.
5. Ernest MACÁK, *De la otra parte de las rejas. Diario del campo de concentración de Podolínec (Eslovaquia)*. Edición de Jesús-Graciliano González. Roma 2007.
6. Vilma PARRA PÉREZ, *Desde un gran pasado, un presente actual en mejoramiento de calidad. Colegio María Auxiliadora Chía 1909-2009*. Bogotá Colombia 2009.

Making available to a wider public the fruits of the History Seminar organized by the EAO Region under the auspices of ACSSA at Batulao (Manila) is the scope of this volume. It recounts the saga of the Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and members of the Salesian Family, represented at the Seminar by the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki, in the missions of Asia. The ideals that led them, their struggles to realize these ideals not rarely in adverse and hostile conditions, the responses they found to the concrete problems faced on the mission fronts, the outcome of their endeavours formed the object of the studies that constitute this work. From the time the Salesians landed in Asia (China and India) in 1906, there has been no let up to the zeal and industriousness of the sons and daughters of Don Bosco with regard to the *plantatio ecclesiae* and *plantatio Familiae salesianae*. The pioneering missionaries used every resource at their disposal to respond to the needs of evangelization and education, especially of the youth and the poor in the ancient, rich and varied cultures of Asia. While implanting the Salesian charism they also enriched it at the same time, in dialogue with the peoples and their cultures encountered on their mission. One of the novelties in Asia is the foundation of several indigenous congregations of women religious, in an act of transplantation, implantation and transmission of the Salesian charism to the Asian context.

The growth of the Salesian charism in certain countries has been smooth and progressive, in others travailed and truncated, yet in others badly tried yet still flourishing. The development of the Salesian charism in the Asian nations manifests similarities and contrasts. But the bottom line is the staunch faith, ardent charity, grit, determination and absolute fidelity of the missionary fathers, brothers and sisters to the Salesian ideals, despite the inevitable weaknesses and failures deriving from human nature. The movement launched in Asia more than a century ago continues to our day. The present volume is a little sign of the deep conviction that the onward advancement must be accompanied by a serious reflection and stocktaking of the path so far traversed.

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