
NOTE

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE TEACHER: THE SALESIANS - 100 YEARS IN SLOVENIA (1901-2001)

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The Salesian Family in Slovenia celebrated the jubilee of 100 years of Salesian presence in the local Church in the year 2001. Many liturgical, cultural, and social festivities were organized for the occasion. At the Ljubljana-Rakovnik castle, where on the 23rd of November 1901, the first group of Salesians started their activity, confiscated after World War II and recently returned to its owner, an extensive exhibition was prepared on the history and the present day of the Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. It has been, at the same time, an opportunity to trace the main features of the Salesian presence in Slovenia and to find out the priorities of their pastoral activities¹.

Agitated political circumstances in the geographical region where Slovenia is situated strongly influenced the Church and its institutions in the 20th century. Significant political events which marked the history of Europe profoundly affected the organization of Christian communities, including the Salesians. The spread of Don Bosco institutions was the answer to the needs of Christian communities in this part of Europe and, at the same time, the fruit of the efforts of the leaders of local Churches who saw in the Salesians help regarding a solution for difficult social questions, above all those relating to youth, and a more effective evangelization in special circumstances. If during the first two decades of the Salesian presence in Slovenia (until the end of World War I) the Catholic Church and its multifarious institutions were an integral part of society, favored also by the public authorities, in the following two decades (until the beginning of World War II) the Catholic community was considered an inferior religious community, being the State an Orthodox one and the royal family belonged to that same Church. Salesians of Slovene origin, were at the very beginning not sufficient in number, and

¹ See B. KOLAR, *Salezijanci sto let na Slovenskem* (Salesians – 100 Years in Slovenia) 1901-2002, Ljubljana 2001; B. KOLAR, *Njih spomin ostaja. In memoriam III*, Ljubljana 2002.

not adequately prepared to realize and carry out all the expectations matured before the arrival of the first group; they were, therefore, helped by the confreres from other provinces and from different cultural backgrounds. Inevitably, tensions of various origins (predominantly that of ethnic background) brought impediments to a more efficient presence and a stronger influence in that society. Those kinds of setbacks were eliminated only after the break down of the multi ethnic Hapsburg Monarchy. Fortunately, a group of Salesian Cooperators, among them many influential priests of the dioceses of Ljubljana and Maribor, were able to mitigate the tensions between Salesians and local bishops and between local authorities and Salesians². The expectations of the local Church and public authorities regarding the Salesians were too high and sometimes completely unrealistic. The Salesian Cooperators encouraged the first Salesians to accept the conditions put forth by local authorities in order to give a stable beginning to their educational project and in order to support their work after the Salesians envisaged the needs of the local population. The most important means of communication with the public was the religious press and various publications, which became an integral part of the Salesian image in Slovenian society. In relation to the overall political circumstances, an examination of the history of the Salesian presence in this region can be divided into four periods.

1. The Time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

This is the period from 1868, when a report about Don Bosco's work first appeared in Slovenia, to 1918, when the Hapsburg monarchy fell. The first group of Salesians arrived in Rakovnik on November 23, 1901. However, preceeding this, an authentic picture of what Don Bosco and his institutions were, were already set up in the Slovenian territory; Salesian cooperators did a great deal of work in this regard, among whom were some distinguished priests, such as canon Luka Jeran (1818-1896), catechist Janez Smrekar (1853-1920), and the theology professor Dr. Ivan Janežič (1855-1922). Newspapers in Slovenia often reported on Salesian institutions, especially on the missions and on their apostolic work through print; in 1888, Don Bosco's biography was published in feuilleton. Even before this, his biographies of Dominic Savio and Michael Magone were published in Slovene. The Slovenian Cooperators kept in written and personal contact with Don Bosco himself. Through donations they supported the Salesian press and the mis-

² See *Don Bosco nel mondo II*, Torino 1988, p. 132.

sions as well as the building of the Basilica of the Heart of Jesus in Rome, the Salesian College in London, and a variety of other institutions. In order to open the first institution in the Slovenian area, many plans were prepared, many houses bought, and over 50 students sent to Italy, where they attended school in Turin, Lombriasco, Valsalice and other places with Salesian colleges³. In the eyes of the Salesian Cooperators, at that time organized as a self standing group under the direction of an appointed leader from Turin that was the best way to provide Salesian vocations and to assure priests that would be able to take over the places of leaders in that German considered Province of Carniola. In 1895, catechist Janez Smrekar took part in the 1st International Congress of the Salesian Cooperators in Bologna⁴.

The work the Salesians would assume was in accord with the program of the first Slovenian Catholic Congress of Ljubljana (1892). One of the congress' resolutions demanded establishment of a private Catholic college with the school founded on Christian principles and able to provide for boys who were in conflict with society. This was because there was lack of an institution for juveniles who were excluded from the usual type of schooling and education in Ljubljana. The leadership of such an institution was to be taken over by the Salesians. For the erection of the building, the Society for the building of a shelter and educational home (Društvo za zgradbo zavetišča in vzgojevališča) was established, with catechist Janez Smrekar leading the way. School authorities in Ljubljana and in Carniola then logically demanded that the college in Rakovnik become a reformatory for juvenile delinquents⁵. For this reason they were not able to accept candidates for Salesian life there, but rather sent them to other colleges in Italy or Poland. The turning point in this regard was the conclusion taken at the end of the canonical visitation, performed by the Provincial of the Austrian Province Emanuel Manassero (Provincial from 1905 to 1911) in 1906. The college at Rakovnik was changed to a reformatory for boys between 7 and 14 with elementary school as the main focus. In spite of regular control by the provincial school superior Anton Mayer and his (at times) authoritarian ways, the Salesians and their lay teachers could follow the principles of Don Bosco's educational system in keeping pace with the colleges in the Italian territory. The college at

³ See S. ZIMNIAK, *Motivazioni delle fondazioni salesiane nell'impero asburgico*, in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* (= RSS) 14 (1995) 155-171; K. SZCZERBA, *Don Bosco e i polacchi*, in RSS 7(1988) 171-195.

⁴ See *Atti del Primo Congresso Salesiano in Bologna*, Torino 1895.

⁵ See B. KOLAR, *Le attività a carattere rieducativo e correzionale dei Salesiani tra gli Sloveni (1901-1945)*, in: F. MOTTO, *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo Don Bosco. Saggi di storiografia*, Atti del 2° Convegno-Seminario di storia dell'opera salesiana, (= Istituto Storico Salesiano, Studi 9), Roma 1996, pp. 395-408.

Rakovnik had conserved the same feature until 1922, even though from 1911 on, boys from regular families predominated. After the beginning of World War I, there were no more Provincial school authorities to send the alumni to the college at Rakovnik, but singular school councils and individual families and parishes could have even done this. Salesians were free in accepting the boys and it was only up to them to provide the necessary means for their board and lodging, because the public authorities, preoccupied with military activities, were no longer in charge of educational and social services. A valuable job was done for the war refugees who were forced to leave their homes after the Isonzo Front opened on May 1915 and took refuge in various parts of the inner Austrian Provinces. Boys from the families were accepted to the colleges at Rakovnik and Veržej⁶. The house of Radna became a philosophical and theological studentate for the Austrian Province.

Another source of tension was the unsettled legal situation of Salesians in Austria in general; not until 1912 did Emperor Franz Joseph sign a document officially recognizing the Salesian Congregation in the Austrian Empire. The Bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Bonaventura Jeglič, played an important role in promoting the case; he was the first of the Austrian bishops to present his demand for a prompt recognition of the Salesian Congregation in the Empire. He pointed out the importance of the social work among youth and the Salesian professional formation in that field⁷. At the Rakovnik college, a festive oratory also operated for a short time as well as a strong group of cooperators. The lack of good teachers and skilled workmen prevented an expansion of professional schools in spite of the well prepared plan by superior Angel Festa, the second director of the college at Rakovnik. By 1909, a new college and the Church of Mary Help of Christians were built next to the castle. The building of that church, however, was not finished until 1924, when there was a solemn consecration at the Marian Congress in Ljubljana with the presence of Cardinal Giovanni Cagliero. The college in Radna (from 1907) served Polish novices and students of philosophy until 1917. It was at the Marian college in Veržej that the German Sons of Mary, who until that time had been educated at Penango, were temporarily housed in 1912. A number of Slovenes and Hungarians were educated with them⁸. However, during World

⁶ See P. SVOLJŠAK, *Slovenski begunci v Italiji med prvo svetovno vojno (I profughi Sloveni in Italia durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale)*, Ljubljana 1991.

⁷ See S. ZIMNIAK, *Annotazioni sul problema del riconoscimento giuridico della Pia Società Salesiana nell'impero degli Asburgo*, in RSS 11 (1992) 73-96; S. ZIMNIAK, *Salesiani e politica alla luce dei documenti concernenti il loro riconoscimento giuridico nell'impero asburgico*, in RSS 12 (1993) 263-373.

⁸ See B. KOLAR, *Mednarodni značaj in naloge zavoda v Veržeju (1912-1919)* (The international feature and role of the college at Veržej), in *Ėasopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 69 = 34 (1998) 41-54.

War I, the majority of colleges were used by the army, so Salesian activities were limited to a minimum. Because of their links with their superiors in Italy, which was listed among the enemies of the Hapsburg Monarchy, they were accused of anti-Austrian activities and a spy process was organized in 1916 in Ljubljana. After a few hearings, Fr. Pietro Tirone was pronounced innocent.

Besides their educational work in colleges, the Salesians gave new beginning to a list of other activities. Among them were: help to the traditional pastoral work in the parishes, work for the spreading of religious practices directed toward Mary (triduums, novenas, memory of the 24th of every month, rosary), gatherings of the Salesian Cooperators for their usual meetings, missionary animation, and others. Their allegiance to their founder commanded Salesians to be active in the field of the Catholic press. They started publishing the monthly *Don Bosko* (1904-1906) as the bulletin of the friends of the Salesian college at Rakovnik. It was published in Ljubljana, and then continued as *Salezijanska poročila* (*Salesian Bulletin*, 1907-1915) that was printed in Turin. It was interrupted by the war between Austria and Italy, that also caused a complete interruption of the relations between the leaders of the Salesian society in Turin and the communities on the Austrian side of the front. The official bulletin of the Salesian community among the Slovenes *Salezijanski vestnik* (*Salesian Bulletin*) reappeared in 1916. This time, it was bi-monthly, published in Ljubljana and with its own editing office. Many other publications, either translated or originally written by the Salesians themselves, were published during the Austrian period. Some titles, printed without ecclesiastical approbation and with a questionable theological approach of the themes, but inspired by the genuine popular religiosity, caused an outraged reaction by the bishop of Ljubljana Anton B. Jeglič. In 1910, Don Bosco's prayer book *Preskrbljeni mladenič* (*Il giovane provveduto*) adapted for the needs of the alumni of the Salesian college was published in Slovenian⁹.

The Slovenian area was under the jurisdiction of the Provincial of Venice until 1905, when the Austrian Province of "Guardian Angels" was established, embracing all the colleges in the territory of the monarchy except Trento, Gorizia, and Trieste. In 1911, Pietro Tirone was named the superior of this Province; before then, he was the headmaster of the college at Rakovnik. He could be regarded as the founder of Salesian work in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Because of the many political changes after the end of World

⁹ The famous Don Bosco's prayer book was published two years after the translation had been prepared and after a few corrections had been introduced requested by bishop A. B. Jeglič. The book was translated and adapted by Josip Valjavec.

War I, when the centuries-old Hapsburg Empire fell and several new states came into existence, with religious communities adjusting to the new conditions¹⁰. Strong national tensions, diversity of language, the distance between colleges, and an aggravated relationship with the head administration in Turin motivated the Provincial Pietro Tirone (Provincial since 1911) to propose a division of the Austrian Province. Hence in 1919, two Provinces were established: the German-Hungarian with its seat in Vienna and the Polish, which included Yugoslavia and had its seat in Oœwiêcim. Pietro Tirone remained the Provincial for the latter. In spite of the diversity of languages and ethnic backgrounds of the members of the three colleges (Rakovnik, Radna, Veržej) there were no remarkable tensions when World War I came to an end and new boarders were established¹¹. Also, the inhabitants of the places where the colleges were set up, admitted they had good relations with the Salesians even though they were rather mistrustful in the beginning. That was particularly the case at Veržej and its superior Aurelio Guadagnini who was contrary to the moving of the aspirantate for the German's sons of Mary from Penango to Ver ej.

2. The Period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (from 1929, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) was established on December 1, 1918. Because the Royal family Karadjordjeviæ was Orthodox, the Orthodox Church had ascendancy in the country. Relations between the royalty and the Holy See were in the process of being arranged from 1922 to 1935, when a concordat was signed; however, it was not ratified by the parliament. During this time the Salesians developed a variety of successful activities and became the largest religious community in the Slovenian part of the monarchy. They opened new colleges in Slovenia, namely: Ljubljana-Kodeljevo (1919), Murska Sobota (1924), Razkri je (1928), Kapela (1932), Ljubljana-Selo (1936), and Celje (1938). They also began to work in Croatia: the Zagreb archdiocesan seminary (1922), Zagreb-Kne ija (1928), and Split (1936). Work began among Catholics in diaspora: Uroševac (1938). In 1921, they accepted the administration of the parish Veržej, which was the first parish under the administra-

¹⁰ See S. ZIMNIAK, *Don Pietro Tirone Superiore dell'ispettoria austro-ungarica (1911-1919)*, in RSS 9 (1990) 295-346.

¹¹ See S. ZIMNIAK, *Salesiani nella Mitteleuropa. Preistoria e storia della provincia Austro-Ungarica della Società di S. Francesco di Sales (1868ca.-1919)*, (= Istituto Storico Salesiano, Studi 10), Roma 1997.

tion of Salesians in this part of Europe. In 1922, the Yugoslav Vice-Province was established, and three years later it became an independent Province. Pietro Tirone was the first visitor and then the first Provincial; he was followed in 1926 by the Pole Stanislaw Pływaczyk. The Yugoslav Provincial Dr. Francis Walland (Provincial from 1929 to 1936)¹² was also the delegate for Czechoslovakia until 1935, when a new Salesian province was founded which included the colleges and parishes in that nation.

The Salesian presence and their activities were still deeply influenced by the institutions, the ways of reacting and even of the models of behaviour that were characteristic of the Italian cultural milieu. The system of religious formation and that of schools, of daily prayers and of theological literature, sometimes even ways of thinking and writing texts strongly echoed the attitudes received during their presence in Italy. Youth organizations that were introduced in the colleges were copied from the same cultural and religious background. Actually, the Salesians were considered an Italian community until the late 1930s, when with the Provincial Ivan Špan (Provincial from 1936 to 1954) started a process of accommodation. It was hardly carried out, however, because of the beginning of World War II which changed the subsequent political situation in Slovenia.

All of the characteristic activities of Salesian institutions came to life. A lower grammar school opened at Veržej for Salesian candidates only, then, beginning in 1934, opened to others. A novitiate and upper grammar school (philosophy) were opened in Radna. The college of Radna became a kind of cradle for young Salesians from Slovenia, Croatia, and for a certain period also from Czechoslovakia. The students of Radna had their own literary review called *Naše delo* (Our Work). In both places, the schools were private educational institutions, without public recognized certificates. Students, therefore, had the duty to pass public school examinations at the end of each school year. In 1929, a higher theological school was established at Rakovnik. In spite of the lack of adequately prepared teachers, a rather poor theological library, and the intense involvement of the students in the activities of the Oratory, the Provincial Dr. Franc Walland was successful in carrying out the main purposes of the theological formation of young Salesians. For some subjects, the Salesians attended lectures at the Faculty of Theology at the State University in Ljubljana¹³. Some professors prepared school texts that gained a more wide spread acceptance in the ecclesiastical circles.

¹² Dr. Francis Walland (1887-1975) completed the building of the church of Mary Help of Christians at Rakovnik and gave a fresh impetus to the salesian press. He resigned in 1936. See B. KOLAR, *In memoriam III...*, pp. 422-423.

¹³ See *75 let Univerze v Ljubljani. 75 let neprekinjenega delovanja Univerze v Ljubljani 1919-1994* (75 Years of the University of Ljubljana), Ljubljana 1994, pp. 96-100.

Besides their primary work, every school had a Festive Oratory. The Daily Oratory was the main mission of the Youth House at Kodeljevo, where the Church of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, patroness of missions, was built in 1936 (but it was completed only after the 2nd Vatican Council). The Oratory and youth center at Kodeljevo were founded with the support of the charitable organizations in Ljubljana immediately after World War I. This was in order to offer to the families of war victims various kinds of welfare, and to give the children a chance to finish their schooling and a place to spend their leisure time. In the first post-war years, more than 500 orphans daily received a warm meal. The official bulletin of the Kodeljevo Oratory was *Naš oratorij* (*Our Oratory*) and *Šah* (*Chess*) of the sport section. A daily oratory was also successfully operated at Rakovnik. With its sports, cultural, and social activities, it had become a model for all the other colleges in that time. The Oratory at Rakovnik had a very strong impact on a large part of Ljubljana. Thanks to a group of very enthusiastic Salesians who were in charge of hundreds of young Christians in the Oratory, which was seen by many as their second home, successfully developed their ecclesiastical consciousness and established an adequate scale of values. From the Oratory at Rakovnik emerged a few bulletins, with the longest running *Rakovniški zvon* (*The Bell of Rakovnik*). Each Oratory had at least one musical band, a couple of football teams, as well as many other athletic teams. In the years before World War II, the main attraction of the Ljubljana sport public was when the football groups Mladika (Kodeljevo) and Korotan (Rakovnik) met. Particular attention was dedicated to the formation of numerous groups of altar boys, which were considered the best way as vocational recruitment. In 1938, a successful and well greeted congress of altar boys from all colleges in the territory of the Kingdom was organized. Life of the oratories had found an echo also in Slovenian literature.

For the education of middle-school youth, boarding schools were operated in Murska Sobota and at Rakovnik. In Celje, a similar college was also constructed, but it operated for only two years. According to the Salesian tradition, boarding schools offered all the necessary conditions for successful intellectual and spiritual growth, their main focus or objective expressed with Don Bosco's words: "Good Christians and honest citizens." Occasional meetings with the parents, special occasions being every month's memorial of Mary Help of Christians, contributed to the realization of integrated educational goals.

Vocational schools were successfully developed at Rakovnik (until 1935) and in Selo (1936-1945), where there also was an elementary school. Since the school at Rakovnik did not have all the necessary school programmes and books being established at the very beginning of the new Yu-

goslav state, it was up to its teachers to prepare the manuals and plans for carpenters, tailors, and shoemakers. The school was dissolved by the anti-clerical federal government in Belgrade in 1935¹⁴. The correctional college for juveniles at Selo was run by the Salesians according to the agreement between the Provincial government of Dravska Banovina and the Salesian Province in Ljubljana. The facilities, offered by the school and set up for up to 150 pupils, could have also been used for the candidates of the Salesian society. The two professional schools were considered by the Salesian community as well as by the public authorities as the most beautiful and the most eloquent evidence of Don Bosco's educational genius. Because of permanent care for the new professional teachers, it was possible to follow the educational project planned by the Provincial Dr. Francis Walland in his Provincial Costumary from 1933. That was, nevertheless, never approved by the superior council of the Salesian Congregation.

The Salesians strongly shaped public opinion through their own printing press, founded in 1922, and the expansion of their publishing activities, as well as supporting the local bishops in their pastoral plans. They edited the monthly *Salezijanski vestnik* (*Salesian Bulletin*) as well as *Mala Cvetka* (*Little Flower*) a monthly bulletin at the church of Kodeljevo. Every two weeks, beginning in 1931, they also published *Knjižice* (*Booklets - Letture Cattoliche*), that dealt with current questions in a more comprehensive manner. After a couple of years as a supplement to the *Salezijanski vestnik*, the booklets were published bi-weekly as an independent publication starting in 1933. More than 240 titles were published until May 1945. For the promotion of religious life among the faithful, a series of biographies was established, the first one being the biography of St. Francis de Sales in 1922. In 1938, they opened their own bookstore and stationery store, where religious material was available. And as part of a service to the Church, they supplied the Slovenian market with literature for sermons and with catechetical handbooks. Salesian publications and their fidelity to the teaching of the Church, particularly regarding the Church's attitude towards the communist movement, were among the principal reasons for the strong reaction against Salesians by the revolutionary forces that took power in Slovenia after World War II¹⁵.

Two features which had the most impact on the Salesian place in the local Church were: their interest in missions and their devotion to the Virgin

¹⁴ See B. KOLAR, *Le attività a carattere rieducativo e correzionale dei salesiani tra gli sloveni (1901-1945)*, in F. MOTTO (a cura di), *Insediamenti e iniziative salesiane dopo Don Bosco...*, pp. 395-408.

¹⁵ Besides the Salesians, the Jesuits and Lazarists were considered spies of the Vatican and because of their the so called counter-revolutionary activities banned from the public life.

Mary. Many Salesians decided to go to the missions and, some of them, to serve Slovenes abroad. A special bulletin called *Marijin sklad (Marian funds)* was published to encourage missionary benefactors. Before World War II, the Salesians had the largest number of missionaries among the religious orders in Slovenia, having a strong missionary impact on the local Church at large and the Salesian community in particular with their printing activities, various manifestations, and with the missionary museum at the college of Rakovnik. The work for the missionary vocations, realized by Fr. Jožef Radoha, who acted in full harmony with the Rector Major Blessed Filippo Rinaldi, is still to be evaluated. However, starting in 1925 he sent to various colleges in Italy, established for the formation of future missionaries, 76 boys, 39 of them became priests and worked in different parts of the world¹⁶. The region of Prekmurje with a rich religious tradition and solid family life became the most fertile field for the spiritual vocations of the whole Slovenian region with many of them becoming Salesians, regardless of the promise, made by the first rector of the college Martinišče in Murska Sobota, that the Salesians would not work for their own vocations.

The other characteristic feature of the Salesians in Slovenia was their genuine devotion to Mary Help of Christians¹⁷. The sanctuary at Rakovnik, dedicated in 1924 and in the following years brought to its completion had become the very centre for all their activities. Also every Salesian college became a center of the devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Every 24th of the month was a special occasion for the meeting of Marian devotees, special religious practices were set up in those days, and there was a kind of competition among Salesians to have speeches to honor the Mother of God. A series of books was prepared to promote that element of Salesian spirituality. Among the most popular religious practices was the 'novena' in honor of Mary Help of Christians. The attention of everyday life after Easter was focused on the month of May with the liturgical feast, during which all groups of the alumni took part in the celebration. Thousands of pilgrims, from all regions of Slovenija came to Rakovnik to celebrate. If we repeat the assertion of a well known Slovenian scholar, it was the devotion to Mary that made the Salesians so well known and influential among the Slovenes.

In 1936, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians settled in Slovenia; at first they worked together with the Salesians in the office of the provincial educational college at Selo near Ljubljana. Then in 1939, they opened their

¹⁶ See M. RASSIGA, *Don Andrea Majcen, missionario salesiano in Cina e Vietnam*, Ljubljana 1989.

¹⁷ See F. WALLAND, *Cenni storici sul culto di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice tra gli Sloveni*, prepared for the Marian exhibition in Turin, Italy, 1920.

own school, also a youth home, a pre-school, and a boarding school for girls¹⁸. A group of the sisters was already engaged in the missionary work in various parts of the world. The Salesian past pupils were also provided with a form of organization, even though their organization had never reached a very stable or efficient form. For a short time, they had their proper bulletin called *Vež med brati* (*Link Between Brothers*). Salesian Cooperators were organized for every Salesian house. They were offered many ways of practical religious exercises. Jožef Valjavec¹⁹ wrote a very successful (and among the cooperators appreciated) book as their spiritual vademecum *Duhovne vaje* (*Spiritual Exercises*), printed in a few editions.

3. The Period of Communist Yugoslavia

On April 6, 1941, Yugoslavia entered World War II. The Slovenian territory was occupied by the forces of three countries: the Hungarians occupied Prekmurje; the Germans, Gorenjska and ʘtajerska; and the Italians, Ljubljana and the western part of Slovenia²⁰. In the German occupation area all the Salesian colleges were confiscated, and the confreres and pupils were expelled. The college in Murska Sobota was attached to the Hungarian Province. The majority of the members of the Congregation took recourse in the Italian Province of Ljubljana, where there were many other refugees. In the Italian occupied area all the colleges retained their own property, and they still performed their own duties; the publishing of books, however, was reduced due to the fact that it was no longer possible to ship to the German area. For the novices, a new college was opened in Škrljevo near Šentrupert, and for the young brothers a manor in Lisičje near Škofljica was rented by the Province. As the end of the war neared, violence increased and was led and organized by the Communist Party itself. However, as early as 1941 the first victims began to fall. Many priests and seminarians were killed. On the grounds of accusations of cooperation with partisans many were sent to concentration camps. Through the efforts of the chief catechist Pietro Tirone, some Slovenian priests whom the Italian authorities accused of cooperating with partisans were interned in the Italian Salesian colleges. Some Salesians

¹⁸ See M. SECCO, *Stabilita sulla roccia. Suor Luisa Domajnko FMA (1897-1970)*, Roma 1991.

¹⁹ Jožef Valjavec (1879-1959) was one of the most popular Salesian writers, publisher, and preacher. He was also well known for his dictionaries. See B. KOLAR, *In memoriam III...*, pp. 406-407.

²⁰ See J. A. ARNEZ, *Slovenia in European Affairs. Reflections on Slovenian Political History*, New York-Washington 1958.

were dedicated to the organization of aid to exiles and refugees in Serbia and Italy; an office for refugees was opened at the college at Rakovnik, where they collected materials to aid the exiles. Because of the activity of some of the priests, the college at Rakovnik was proclaimed a focal point of anti-communism. Simultaneously with a war of liberation, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia carried out a socialist revolution, and a component part of it was a negative relationship with religion and everything regarding faith. The Church, including many Salesians, was accused of cooperating with the occupiers, and hence began many judicial proceedings with the main intention of confiscating Church property. Because of threats of revenge on all opponents, about ninety Salesians left Slovenia at the end of the war and went to Austria and Italy²¹. More than 20 of those who took refuge in Austria (along with other refugees) in the English occupation area of Austria were returned to Yugoslavia and afterwards killed.

Because the Catholic Church in Slovenia remained the only organized institution outside the influence of the Communist Party, it was constantly under many of the pressures and repressive measures of the system²². Even though the main lead of the bishops and the religious superiors in Slovenija throughout the communist era was that they should avoid any confrontation with the regime, there was always enough reason for the authorities to tie up the Church's presence. All of the property of the Salesian congregation that exceeded 10 hectares was nationalized. Colleges confiscated by the Germans (Radna, Veržej, Murska Sobota, Kapela, Celje) were also seized by the new authority. Still others which were not seized during the war were also confiscated (Ljubljana-Kodeljevo, Rakovnik). The church in Kodeljevo was changed into a military warehouse and the college into a prison for German war prisoners. If a Salesian was tried and then condemned (and if the primary reason was because he was a supposed betrayer of his country and had collaboration with the forces of occupation) he was given a concurrent sentence, i.e. the property of the college where he lived was confiscated as his private possession. The Slovenian government that emerged in May 1945 had a very clear intention to suppress the religious orders and communities what could be considered as a beginning step in the process of dechristianization of the country. The Church as such, actually, was regarded as an institution of reaction and of counterrevolution²³.

²¹ J. A. ARNEZ, *Slovenski tisk v begunskih taboriščih v Avstriji 1945-1949* (The Slovenian Press in the DP camps in Austria 1945-1949), Ljubljana-Washington 1999.

²² See Cerkev na Slovenskem v 20. stoletju (The Church in Slovenia in 20th Century), Ljubljana 2002.

²³ See D. DRNOVSEK, *Zapisniki Politbiroja CK KPS/ZKS 1945-1954* (Records of the Po-

The printing press at Rakovnik was confiscated and shipped to Skopje, Macedonia, where it was used as a military printing press. The printing activity was taken completely under the control of the revolutionary forces, put in the service of the new order and subjected to the rigid control of the Communist Party. *Knjižice (Booklets, Letture Cattoliche)* which were well known for their anti-communist attitude before and during World War II were put on the list of prohibited literature and not allowed to be seen in the hands of the faithful. In the complex of the church at Rakovnik, there remained only a couple of rooms, and in 1947 the seminarians had to go to the diocesan seminary in Ljubljana²⁴. At first, a public school was founded in the college, then the building was changed afterwards into a military warehouse and finally, in the 1960's, it became a textile factory. Only in 2000 the college at Rakovnik was returned to the Salesians but in such bad condition that a complete restoration of the college had to be undertaken.

In the years immediately after World War II, many parishes were without priests, so in response bishops offered them to the Salesians as replacements; hence they began to be included in diocesan pastoral activities. At its peak there were over 40 parishes under the administration of the Province; for Salesians in Slovenia this was the only way they could survive. Following the demands of the bishops in the southern parts of Yugoslavia, commonly called 'diaspora', a few Salesians from Slovenija moved there and concerned themselves primarily with parish work, thus founding new centres for Christian life. The possibilities of community life were very limited. In order to retain at least some of the characteristics of Salesian activity and to keep Salesian identity so that it would not be completely lost, the Provincial chapter prepared *Smernice za salezijansko življenje po župnijah (Guidelines for Salesian life in parishes)* (confirmed 1958) in which the Provincial Jakob Augustin (Provincial from 1954 to 1964)²⁵ outlined the fundamental features of Salesian work in parishes. In 1959, after 25 years, a member of the highest administration of the congregation visited Yugoslavia once more. This was the Prefect General Fr. Albino Fedrigotti, who conducted an extraordinary canonical visitation and with the exception of the houses in Serbia, visited all the communities in Croatia and Slovenia. However, upon his return the police at the border confiscated all of his records. The Association of the patriotic

litburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia and the Executive Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia 1945-1954), Ljubljana 2000.

²⁴ See *V prelomnih časih. Rezultati mednarodne raziskave Aufbruch (1995-2000). Cerkev na Slovenskem v času komunizma in po njem (1945-2000) (Kirche im Aufbruch. The Church in Slovenia during the Communism and after it. 1995-2000)*, Ljubljana 2001.

²⁵ Fr. Augustin Jakob (1912-1990) contributed an essential part to the process of accommodation of the Salesian Congregation during the communist period in Slovenia. He was also

priest, organized by the Slovenian secret police, which claimed to be the representation of the Slovenian clergy, did not get much support from Salesians, in spite of the fact that many privileges were offered.

After many difficult years, about 1955, some possibilities of specialized work with pastors were offered. The Salesians began to assume the leadership of parish missions and in this area achieved great progress. They prepared many manuals regarding the method of these missions and were members of the church working bodies that planned pastoral activities. After 1955, they began to prepare catechetical aids, from the writing of catechesis and compiling catechisms to the making of color films, which they translated from Italian and then duplicated. Franc Mihelčič (1925-1978) and Vinko Furlan (1911-1997) pioneered the efforts in this area. In 1963, the first Salesian catechetical center was established. In that same year the first meeting for altar boys was organized, where they celebrated the name day of St. Dominic Savio and had a social get-together. The work for altar boys remained the same until the year 2000. They provided a great deal of help to priests through the preparation of sermon guidebooks published separately or as the sermon journal *Sejavec (Sower)*²⁶. In 1963, Dr. Valter Dermota (1915-1994) returned to Slovenia and in the next ten years became the central figure involved with catechetical work here. Besides taking over the lectures for this subject at the Theological Faculty, he was in charge of qualifying catechetical teachers, translating official documents, and putting together textbooks. He was a member of some working bodies of specialists at the Yugoslav Bishops Conference and an adviser to the Vatican institutions. He oriented the Salesians toward an increased engagement in the catechetical field, the preparation of catechisms, and the introduction of catechism classes for youth²⁷. Communities of young priests were established which offered expert help to pastors and took over the preparation of the meetings of various groups. In 1963, the Salesians began to organize retreats for youth and to help them with vocational decisions. That could be considered a beginning of the qualified youth pastoral in the Slovenian local Church after the end of World War II.

After 1948, there were no longer Salesian educational institutions in Slovenia. Salesian aspirants, novices, and young confreres were educated and introduced into the congregation in Croatia, where there were more possibilities for their activity. In the course of some years colleges were opened in Ri-

among the first Slovene priest allowed to leave the country and to get in touch with the superiors in Italy. See B. KOLAR, *In memoriam III...*, pp. 120-121.

²⁶ See B. KOLAR, *Predicatori sloveni*, in *Dizionario di omiletica*, Torino 1998, pp. 1194-1198.

²⁷ See *Men of Achievement 1984*, vol. 10, Cambridge 1984, pp. 251-252. His particular

jeka, in Križevci, in Zadar, and in Zagreb. The students of theology attended the lectures at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana, which in 1952, was excluded from the University of Ljubljana but was given the status of a Papal educational institution²⁸. For the entire period during World War II and after, a special Provincial delegate was named for the Croatian region and two advisers from Croatia were on the Provincial council. Slovenes were active in the colleges in Croatia and in the diaspora in the south of Yugoslavia; here they took over a large number of parishes and helped in the organization of church communities. The work among the dispersed Catholic community was perceived as an original contribution to the conservation of the Catholic presence in that region. In the archdiocese of Belgrade Salesians were closed collaborators of the Archbishops in the leadership of the local Church. Since 1965 the Salesians of the Ljubljana Province have been involved in the pastoral activities among the Hungarian faithful in the Province of Vojvodina, Serbia.

Those who went abroad were first with refugees in the refugee camps, and among them they organized authentic Salesian activities (youth houses, printing press, religious life), then they accompanied the refugees to their new countries²⁹. For the Salesians that fled Slovenia and made their first stop in Austria, it was a part of their legacy to take care of the refugees that repudiated the new social order adopted in Slovenia, a new community was organized under the patron saint Hildegard³⁰. Afterwards eighteen of the Salesians went to the USA; a few went to Argentina³¹, some to Spain, and some went to the missions. A new field of activity was offered to the Salesians after 1956 in the Austrian Province of Koroška (Kaernten), where there was a strong Slovenian minority. There they were invited to take over the boarding house (property of the St. Hermagoras Confraternity) for the Slovenian High School students. Dr. Franc Cigan, who was made director of the community, then developed a large set of musical activities. He was teaching in the High School; he collected the rich musical cultural heritage among the population; he also guided various choirs and finally organized a school for church organ-

contribution to the salesian life in Slovenia was a translation of a few basic texts into Slovene, among them he translated 18 volumes of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*.

²⁸ It was an eloquent expression of the revolutionary arrogance towards the Catholic Church that the Faculty of Theology was excluded from the University on a non-existent day, i.e. June 31, 1952.

²⁹ See *Slovenians in Canada*, Hamilton, Ontario 1984.

³⁰ See R. ŠVENT, *Slovensko begunsko šolstvo po letu 1945* (Slovenian Refugee Schools after 1945), in *Šolska kronika – Zbornik za zgodovino šolstva in vzgoje 6-XXX-1997*, Ljubljana 1997, pp. 61-77.

³¹ See *Življenje in delo Slovencev v Argentini (po letu 1945)* (Vida y obra de los Eslovenos en la Argentina desde 1945), Ljubljana-Washington 1994.

ists. The Slovenian Salesians were in charge of the boarding house, which in 1984 moved to the Modestov dom (Modestusheim), until 1991. By the end of 1945 a group of Slovenian Salesians settled in Turin, where some of them carried out their theological studies and others were appointed to various duties at the Salesian colleges. At that same time, Anton Vode founded a simple bulletin called *Naše delo* (*Our Work*) which later on became an important link among the Slovenian Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who moved to various parts of the world. It was published between the years 1945 and 1978, until Anton Vode (1904-1978) passed away.

The conditions became better for the Church after 1966 when the Belgrade Protocol was signed and a relationship between the Holy See and Yugoslavia was restored. The same year a novitiate was established in Želimlje, where in the years that followed the central Salesian educational college with a religious high school was established through a great deal of international assistance and the efforts of Provincial Martin Jurčak (Provincial from 1964 to 1970)³². The high school had, according to the Slovenian Constitution and the common Yugoslav legislation, the right to register only those students who expressed an intention to become priests or members of a religious order. Since it was not part of the public school system the students had to take exams in the public schools at the end of each school year. The college in Želimlje was available for various gatherings, from retreats for altar boys to catechetical meetings and study days for priests. In 1970, the Croatian Vice-Province was established, which in 1972 developed into the independent Province of St. John Bosco with its seat in Zagreb.

4. A New Beginning

In the eighties, soon after the death of Tito (1980), there were already some signs suggesting significant political changes in which demands were voiced for more political freedom and the end of the one-party system. With the process of democratization and the enforcement of human rights, which quickly developed after the proclamation of the sovereignty of Slovenia (1991), we can speak about new beginnings in the life of the Church and the Salesian congregation. New possibilities for Salesian work opened up, however, in the period of transition, their work was slowed down and made more difficult. The passage of the law on denationalization (1991) was to have cor-

³² Martin Jurčak (1907-2002) was arrested in December 1945, condemned to death and then amnestied. He spent eight years in prison.

rected the wrongs that were done to individuals and legal entities at the time of the revolution. Systematic obstructions to the implementation of the law caused numerous complications, expenses, and incapacities regarding the Salesians full engagement in their work. The Salesians were returned their colleges in Veržej, Celje and Rakovnik. The remaining colleges have still not and will not be returned; instead the state has issued bonds from the indemnity fund as compensation.

Under the new circumstances, the Salesian congregation began with various activities that had become their original contribution to the life of the Church in Slovenia. In 1991, the first private Catholic high school in Slovenia (Želimplje) was opened; the school's founding act was adopted on April 23, 1991. The premises that had been previously set up for the small seminary was enlarged, modernized, and new facilities were added. The construction works that had been going on since 1994 were concluded in the 1999-2000 academic year. The school was intended to show the actuality of Church teaching in the field of education and schooling that would bring long-term effects to Slovenian society and, at the same time, improve the Church's place in educational work³³. The inauguration of the school had placed the Salesians among religious orders that were bound to this kind of pastoral activities. Since then the school and boarding house in Želimplje (which comprehends also a school of music and a family retreat center) has constituted the core of the Salesian presence in Slovenia.

Great growth occurred in the area of media and the preparation of catechetical resources after 1980, when the Catechetical Center was opened with a specialized library as well as a team of members in the Community of the Good Shepherd. Then in 1995 the publishing house *Salve* was established, which had been active in the areas of publishing, preparing audio-visual aids, and merchandizing. Taken in its historical perspective, this kind of activity carries on the efforts that have become characteristic for the Salesians in Slovenia from the mid 1950's and on.

The Salesians began to carry out fresh work in the area of ministering to youth. Two institutions were established which offered a new form of work for youth: the college Janez Smrekar and the Youth Guild. The former organizes activities for young people who interrupted their formal education and are trying to pursue their vocational formation and to enter responsibly into the world of work. It runs also a project called Skala (A Rock) meant for youth on the streets in bigger cities. The Youth Guild, on the other hand, of-

³³ "In the words of Dr. Alojzij Šuštar, archbishop of Ljubljana and Slovenian metropolitan, it is a 'living monument to the year in which we gained independence'". See *Letno poročilo 1999-2000* (Annual Report), Želimplje 2000, p. 7.

fers a variety of professional help in the field of organizing meetings, professional formation for collaborators and covers legal questions for the whole area of the Salesian youth ministry. Cooperation began with the movement of Salesian Sports for Youth (PGS), where Slovenian Christian youth was provided with the possibility of participating with sports groups from other countries³⁴. For the formation of parish co-workers, a special project has already been operating since 1985 – the school for animators, led by Jože Vidic. Regular courses are organized every year during summer holidays at Uskovnica.

The Salesian movement, which introduced new possibilities of cooperation on behalf of work for youth, was strengthened. Regarding the members of the Salesian family, the past pupils of Don Bosco were organized anew. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who obtained their own Province in 1993, engaged intensively in catechetical work and took over new forms of working with youth (retreats, kindergartens, providing for the Papal Nuncio in Slovenia). After 1979, groups of Don Bosco volunteers were started in Slovenia. Several groups of young cooperators were established as well as the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians. In 1993, the Apostole della Sacra Famiglia were first introduced in Slovenia. Members of the Province Sts. Cyril and Methodius are still found among Slovenes in Italy and Austria (Opčine/Villa Opicina and Celovec/Klagenfurt) and elsewhere (Hamilton, Canada)³⁵. Slovene Salesians still have a consciousness of the missions (10 percent of them are in the missions). They are also involved in the beginnings of Salesian work in Albania. Collaboration with other religious communities developed new and rich lines of activity (courses in common formation for Novices, common projects, St. Anna funds); and that with Church institutions resulted in cooperation with bishops, participation in the Theological Faculty and in catechetical-pastoral courses. Two members of the Ljubljana Salesian community became leaders of local Churches: Archbishop Msgr. Zef Gashi in Bar (Montenegro) and Archbishop Msgr. Stanislav Hočevar in Belgrade (Serbia). The central focus of veneration of Mary Help of Christians is still at the church at Rakovnik, but there are also other places where local associations of her devotees gather (Celje, Veržej, Murska Sobota).

³⁴ In 1993, the 4th European Salesian Sports meeting was organized in Ljubljana, the first meeting of that kind in the new Republic of Slovenia.

³⁵ See *Slovenska cerkev sv. Gregorija Velikega* (St. Gregory the Great Slovenian Church), Hamilton, Ontario, 1982.