

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

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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.

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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.