

# **SALESIAN MISSIONARY ACTIVITY WHILE BLESSED FILIPPO RINALDI (1921-1931) WAS RECTOR MAJOR WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO EASTERN ASIA**

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## **Introduction**

On 6 February 1922, Pius XI (†1939) ascended the Papal throne: he would become known as a “Pope of the Missions” (as was his predecessor, Benedict XV). Two months later, on 24 April, Fr. Filippo Rinaldi († 5 December 1931) was elected Rector Major: his ten years in office would be recalled for the great re-launching of the Salesian missionary movement. After a rapid glance at the “missionary policy” of the Papacy during the same period, we shall concentrate on that.

## **1. A change in the ecclesiological-missionary approach of the pontifical magisterium**

With the promulgation of the apostolic letter *Maximum illud* (30 November 1919) Pope Benedict XV launched a new missionary era in the Church, setting out fundamental principles for evangelisation and practical courses of action.

Having praised past missionary activity, he indicated the current weaknesses: the nationalistic mentality of many missionaries, the colonialist style of some forms of evangelisation, the being too easily satisfied with the results achieved, the too restricted esprit de corps of missionary institutions. He indicated the aim of setting up new Churches for whose development the serious and in-depth formation of native clergy who one day would themselves assume pastoral responsibility for the people was necessary.

To the change in the theory there followed significant practical initiatives. Above all in *mission territories*, with the erection of 28 Vicariates Apostolic, eight Prefectures, the Apostolic Delegation for Japan-Korea-China-Formosa and various Apostolic Visitations (China, South

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Africa...). Then *in the mother-churches*: a) the transfer to Rome (dependent on Propaganda Fide) of the St. Peter's Work for Native Clergy; b) strong support for the "Missionary Union of the Clergy" – created to encourage interest on the part of the faithful in the Missions with a widespread development in individual parishes; c) finally the setting up of some missionary seminaries in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

The new Pope Pius XI continued the work of his predecessor. In the short space of four months: a) he gave precise instructions for the reorganisation of the methods of collecting and distributing offerings for the Missions; b) he re-launched the "Missionary Union of the Clergy" which celebrated its first Congress in Rome; c) he transferred to Rome the Work of the Propagation of the Faith founded in Lyons (France) a century earlier; d) he took the occasion of the Third Centenary of the founding of the Roman Congregation of Propaganda Fide to emphasise to the whole Church that she existed solely for the sake of all mankind, so that every baptised person had the duty to promote the Missions. The focus of attention was Asia, the continent in which the progress of the Catholic faith had made little significant headway, so that there needed to be a change of strategy, introducing a new approach: that of indigenisation. In practical terms, bearing in mind that in those days speaking about the Missions meant "China and Pope Pius XI": a) that year 1922, he sent as Apostolic Delegate Celso Costantini who was in favour of the "inculturation" ("adaptation" in those days) of the Church; b) two years later, he encouraged the first National Chinese Council presided over by Costantini himself; c) in October 1926, in St. Peter's, he consecrated the first six Chinese bishops (and three more in 1933); d) on 15 June 1926, in the face of ultra-nationalistic anti-western agitation in China, in an apostolic letter to those in charge of the local Church, he expressed the respect of the Catholic Church for their legitimate aspirations for the unity and independence of the country, the determination not to be a political tool of the western powers and the desire to safeguard the cultural traditions of the Chinese people; d) in the secret consistory held on 20 June 1927, he attributed the horrors of the war being waged in China, and also against the missionaries and their works, to the "seeds of civil war and social

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<sup>1</sup> In Rome at the University of Propaganda Fide from 1920 courses in missiology had already been held for a decade before the setting up of the appropriate faculty at the Roman Gregorian University (1932) and the Urban College of Propaganda Fide was founded (1931) which had within it an academic Missionary Institute (1933).

revolution" imported from abroad; e) on the occasion of the reunification of the country under the Kuomintang of Nanking, on 1 August 1928, he did not fail to send to the Chinese people his greetings and to express his approval of their aspirations for independence, requesting for the missionaries and for the faithful no more than "freedom and the protection of the law". It was in effect a condemnation of the Protectorate, and at the same time of the well-known Unequal Treaties.<sup>2</sup>

The Holy See also took action on behalf of other missionary areas, especially Afro-Asian: a) Apostolic Visitors and Delegates were appointed in Indochina, South Africa (1923), in the Belgian Congo and the rest of Africa (1930); b) in October 1927, the Japanese Hamayaya was consecrated Bishop of Nagasaki; c) with liberality and some farsightedness, relations with Christians of other rites were regularised in Ethiopia, India, Egypt, taking into account respect for local traditions; d) a Japanese Synod was held in 1924 and another in South Africa in 1924-1927.

Of considerable importance also was the letter of the Prefect of Propaganda Fide on 20 May 1923 in which he exhorted the Superiors of Religious Orders and Congregations which were dedicated to the Missions: a) to a serious cultural and practical preparation of personnel, whether carried out in Europe or in the mission lands, to prepare eventual successors for the Vicars or Prefects Apostolic; b) to an adequate formation of native clergy and local male and female religious; c) to foster lay vocations for the teaching of arts and trades, the formation of catechists, teaching in primary schools.

A significant event during the first decade of the pontificate was the Vatican Missionary Exhibition for the 1925 Holy Year, which attracted very favourable public and critical notice on account of the attention given not only to strictly religious aspects but also to the scientific, which was understood as support being given to science by the Missions.

Two months after it closed, on 28 January 1926, Pius XI published his encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* in which, in line with *Maximum Illud*: a) he repeated the need to separate the work of evangelisation from any kind of political or temporal bargaining and to make determined efforts in the preparation of local clergy; b) he insisted that there should be the erection of new churches entrusted to local clergy who should not be in any way

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<sup>2</sup> It was not insignificant that a few months before, there had been a sort of de-westernisation of the Indies with the elimination of the problematic heritage of the Portuguese "padroado".

inferior to the European clergy in their scientific, sacred and secular preparation, and this to be done through local seminaries; c) he expressed his hope that autonomous male and female religious communities would be founded, and that an equally local monasticism would be established to bring its irreplaceable contribution to the building up of a new church; d) he looked forward to a church blessed with many local catechists and an elite laity that would be decisive for the future of the Church and the country itself; e) he proposed the continuation of the “classical” works (hospitals, care of the sick, elementary schools...) besides the new ones: schools for agriculture, for arts and trades, high schools. Naturally the encyclical also dealt with the need for missionary collaboration through prayer, vocations and economic support.

In synthesis: from an historical point of view, it can be said that in the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Missions in the Far East came to the forefront in the pastoral concerns of the Church. Documents setting out future planning were produced, almost, one might say, at the request of missionaries from the West in China (Fr. Vincenzo Lebbe) and of the Chinese synod. The Holy See did not limit itself, as in the previous century, to indicating aims and ideals for missionary cooperation; it also gave a new theoretical and practical design with specific tasks for all sections of the Church.

As far as numbers are concerned, in these years there were about half a million baptisms a year, a considerable increase in missionary territories (some of them entrusted to local clergy), a significant increase in the income of the three Pontifical Organisations, all now coordinated in Rome with links at national level.

## **2. Location, form and timing of a Salesian missionary reawakening in the decade 1922-1931**

To this widespread activity of government and animation at Church level, there corresponded on a notable scale that of the Salesian Society. The concerns and the directives of the Holy See gave a further impetus to the missionary awareness and activity already evident within the Salesian Society which in the decade in question celebrated two particularly spiritually significant events: the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Missions (1925) and the beatification of Don Bosco (1929). We shall briefly note some of the main practical initiatives of the time.



## 2.1. Missionary expansion

Between 1922 and 1931, the Salesian Society not only had a notable development in those countries where it was already present, but it also founded works in new European countries such as Czechoslovakia (1924), Holland (1928), Sweden (1930), and in countries outside Europe, such as Australia (1922), Canada (1924), Japan (1926), Hong Kong, Timor, Thailand (1927), Guatemala and Morocco (1929).<sup>3</sup> The Salesian houses in the world increased from 444 to 692, while the Salesians went up from 5,194 (4,733 SDB + 461 novices) to 8,904 (8,059 SDB + 895 novices), with a total increase of 3,710.<sup>4</sup>

According to some statistics, all of them however needing to be verified,<sup>5</sup> in the decade, 1,868 people, including professed, novices, aspirants (with some lay volunteers as well) left for the Missions – understood here simply as countries outside Europe. According to other sources there were a hundred or so less. The high point was the year of Don Bosco's beatification (1929) with 174 missionaries; on the other hand 172 was the figure of those setting out for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Missions (1925).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On 13 September 1928, Don Rinaldi stated in a session of the General Chapter: "Never before have our missions had such a great development especially in the East as at present [...] It is necessary not to forget those in America which need to be reinforced and reorganised". He continued saying that for four years it would be best not to accept any new missions or houses, so as to send the clerics to study Theology: Minutes of the General Chapter, 13 September 1928 in ASC D 873.

<sup>4</sup> M. WIRTH, *Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni. Tra storia e nuove sfide*. Roma, LAS 2000, pp. 530-531.

<sup>5</sup> The statistics available in both the Salesian Central Archives and publications are imprecise, unreliable and often contradictory. A basic examination is required regarding the actual number of people leaving year by year, even on different dates, taking account however of those leaving for the second or third time (sometimes 30% of the total).

<sup>6</sup> By way of example: regarding places of origin, for the six years 1923-1928, out of 796 missionaries 453 came from Italy and 328 from Europe (statistics of the General Chapter XIII, 1929); the 165 leaving in 1927 came from 17 countries: 92 from Italy, 26 from Germany, 12 from Spain, 10 from Poland, 5 from Belgium, 3 from Brazil and from Ecuador, 2 from France, Argentina, Mexico and Yugoslavia and one from other countries (*Bollettino Salesiano*, October 1927). Regarding the destinations of missionaries leaving in 1929, 104 to America, 19 to India, 15 to Thailand, 12 to Palestine, 10 to Japan, 5 to China, 4 to Congo and 2 to Australia (*Bollettino Salesiano*, December 1929). Regarding status, out of 120 leaving in 1922, 28 were priests and brothers and 92 youths and clerics (*Bollettino Salesiano*, January 1923). In 1924 out of 167 leaving (32 in fact returning), 41 were priests, 77 clerics and 39 brothers (ASC A 8310111, Report to the Holy See). In 1928 those leaving were 108, of whom 15 priests, 95 clerics and 40 aspirants (ASC D 873 Minutes of the Superior Chapter, 29 August).

Limiting ourselves to the Far East and Australia which at present are our main concern, the *General Elenco of the members* in the years referred to shows the following number of missionaries:

| Year | China           | India | Thailand | Japan | Australia | Total |
|------|-----------------|-------|----------|-------|-----------|-------|
| 1923 | 16              | 24    |          |       | 6         | 46    |
| 1924 | 42              | 39    |          |       | 8         | 89    |
| 1925 | 69              | 63    |          |       | 9         | 141   |
| 1926 | 83              | 79    |          |       | 6         | 168   |
| 1927 | 98              | 96    |          | 9     | 6         | 209   |
| 1928 | 71 <sup>7</sup> | 105   | 28       | 8     | 19        | 231   |
| 1929 | 72              | 118   | 46       | 11    | 17        | 264   |
| 1930 | 72              | 129   | 65       | 21    |           | 287   |
| 1931 | 68              | 140   | 73       | 25    |           | 306   |

As regards “missions properly so-called”, a statistic from the middle of the decade,<sup>8</sup> indicates 13 “huge territories entrusted entirely to the Salesians” in addition to another 12 “extremely important missionary works” in Turkey, Asia Minor, Palestine, Shanghai, Macao, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Cape of Good Hope, Australia, etc. From the same source we find, in the 1,077 “missionary works for youth” – though some clarification would be needed as to the precise meaning of “works” – 1,169 SDB and FMA were working divided as follows:

|           | Missions | Works | Personnel<br>SDB+FMA |
|-----------|----------|-------|----------------------|
| America   | 8        | 644   | 721                  |
| Asia      | 10       | 298   | 316                  |
| Africa    | 5        | 119   | 116                  |
| Australia | 2        | 16    | 16 (SDB)             |

At the death of Don Rinaldi, the new *missiones ad gentes* were eight (which were added to the other previous eight): the Prefecture Apostolic

<sup>7</sup> The number had gone down considerably on account of the transfer of the novitiate from China to Thailand.

<sup>8</sup> In the issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* dedicated to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the missions (1925).

of Assam; Missions of the Chago Paraguayo; Prefecture Apostolic of the *Alto Luapula* in the Belgian Congo; Prelature Apostolic of Porto Velho in Brazil; Archdiocese of Madras in India; Diocese of Krishnagar in India; Independent Missions of Miyazaki in Japan; Independent Missions of Rathburi in Thailand. To these should be added the provisional Vicariate Apostolic of Kimberley (1922-1928) and the Missions entrusted to Salesians but under the jurisdiction of an Ordinary who had entrusted them to Heung Shan in the Diocese of Macao.

Such a development of the Missions was due to a number of favourable circumstances among which cannot be denied the military exemption (provisional) for young students of religious institutes recognised as being prepared for the foreign missions (9 November 1923),<sup>9</sup> in addition, of course, to the continuing requests of the Holy See, and the willingness of the Salesian Society at both top and bottom. Among those at the top should be especially remembered Fr. Pietro Ricaldone (1870-1951), extremely active in his dual role as Prefect General at the side of the Rector Major (to whose competence *ex officio* some sort of responsibility for missionaries was already ascribed) and as delegate of the Rector Major for the Missions (from January 1924). Favouring his appointment, in addition to his undoubted personal gifts and his long experience as a Councillor for vocational and agricultural schools, came into play his experience of visiting the Salesian houses in Latin America (1908), North America (1911), Egypt and Palestine (1919) and parts of Europe (Spain, England, Belgium and France).

## *2.2. The opening of houses for missionary formation*

Also following the request of several Provincials from Latin America present in Turin for the XII General Chapter, in summer 1922, Don Rinaldi launched the project of a formation house for aspirants to the missionary priesthood: the Cardinal Cagliero Institute named after the well-known missionary to Patagonia who that year was celebrating his diamond jubilee of ordination.<sup>10</sup> The work grew rapidly, thanks also to its important

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<sup>9</sup> In Salesian circles there were 15 Institutes in Italy, and 16 abroad, including one in the Catholic mission of Shiu Chow in China and one in that of Shillong in India: cf list in *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, 24 June 1924, n. 25, pp. 304-305.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the Superior Chapter, 18 July 1922, in ASC D 872. Prior to that, some Provincials paid for the support of late vocations (Sons of Mary) or for very young missionary aspirants who they would take back to their own countries.

recognition by the S. Congregation of Propaganda Fide<sup>11</sup> as a missionary institute “under its wing and enjoying all the rights and privileges of other similar institutes” and also the equally important civil recognition,<sup>12</sup> as a legal body with its own property “for the support in every way, religious, moral, material [...] of Salesian Missions abroad”.

In the Superior Chapter in January 1925, preceded as a house for missionary aspirants by that of Penango (Alessandria), founded as a college in Don Bosco's lifetime, it was followed by similar houses at Foglizzo Canavese (Turin, 1926), at Cumiana (Turin, 1928 for missionaries working in agriculture), at Castelnuovo d'Asti (Turin, 1929), at Gaeta (Rome, 1930), at Bagnolo (Cuneo, 1931), at Turin-Rebaudengo (1931 for missionaries working in arts and trades). To these should be added one at Astudillo, Spain (1928)) and one at Shrigley in England (1931).<sup>13</sup>

Similar houses in individual provinces were discussed on account of the impossibility, also on financial grounds, of all coming to Piedmont, while it was still considered a good thing that all should spend a short time in Turin in order to get to know the superiors and their language, and to better imbibe the spirit of Don Bosco. The Chapter also remained firmly of the opinion that Missions should not be accepted by individual countries in order to preserve their hoped for international character;<sup>14</sup> others were of a different opinion however, since the very strong Italian component among the missionaries and the almost exclusive use of their language gave the impression of an excessively Italian mission, and therefore not conducive to encouraging either foreign financial support or vocations.

The contribution made to missionary works by these new foundations at home was enormous. In 1927, the total number of students was more than 600; in 1930 over 1,000.<sup>15</sup> This was also a response on the part of the

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<sup>11</sup> Dated 30 April 1924, quoted in the *Bollettino Salesiano* for June 1924.

<sup>12</sup> Royal decree dated 13 January 1924, still effective today as “*Istituto Salesiano per le Missioni*”.

<sup>13</sup> In the same year, there were plans for the opening of another house at Montodine (Crema, 1931), for brother catechists and available for all the works of spiritual, material and health assistance “which constitute a large part of missionary work”. The situation was always quite fluid: in July 1927, the Superior Chapter discussed whether to move the missionaries from Foglizzo to the house of Turin-Martinetto which would be better for them; on 5 March 1930, it was decided that the house at Bagnolo would take the student aspirants from Foglizzo and from Castelnuovo, which would cater only for those for America. The aspirants at Gaeta would have to move to the north after middle school.

<sup>14</sup> Minutes of the Superior Chapter dated 13, 15, 21 January 1925: ASC D 872.

<sup>15</sup> *Bollettino Salesiano*, March 1930. As regards Salesians brought to Turin to study Philosophy and Theology, e.g. July 1927, Don Rinaldi mentions a total number of 176 (108 in the two years of Philosophy): ASC A 8290211.

Salesians to the appeal of the Holy See regarding the provision of lay personnel to teach arts and trades and the preparation of native catechists.<sup>16</sup> The *Bollettino Salesiano* in February 1924 called for lay volunteers of all professions (doctors, architects, surveyors, skilled workers, labourers, farmers...); in December 1927, Don Rinaldi referred directly to Salesian Brothers, in response to both a renewed appeal by Pius XI, and to the “growing vitality” given them by Don Bosco.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.3. A missionary youth movement (1922...)

It wasn't enough to found institutes or “apostolic schools” for missionary vocations. It was necessary to promote them. This was taken up by the *Associazione Gioventù Missionaria*, which having been started in Turin-Valdocco at the time of *Maximum Illud*, spread to many Salesian houses and to those of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, thanks to the support of Don Rinaldi. Enriched with indulgences and spiritual favours granted by the Pope in 1923, it had its own statutes, which described its purpose as follows: “1) to educate the young to love and support Vocations and the Missions with their prayers and offerings; 2) to promote Missionary Vocations and bring them to maturity”.<sup>18</sup>

Then to provide a magazine for what was described as a “youth missionary movement”, at the end of 1922 the Superior Chapter decided to publish a 16-page illustrated monthly magazine: *Gioventù Missionaria*. Although it was first thought that it would only be published during the preparatory stage of the silver jubilee of the Missions (1925), the magazine continued for decades, and following requests from abroad was published from 1926 onwards in Spanish, Portuguese, French, English and Polish.

This was done in such a way, however, that it did not have a negative effect on the *Bollettino Salesiano*, - edited in Turin in five languages and abroad in four – which was already in itself an extremely missionary oriented magazine, and which was requested to increase and make more attractive the space devoted to the Missions.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Document of 20 May 1923, published in its entirety in the *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, June 1923, n. 20, pp. 106-108.

<sup>17</sup> *Bollettino Salesiano*, December 1927.

<sup>18</sup> The Statutes-Regulations took into account the presence of adult members.

<sup>19</sup> Though the section on the missions often changed its name (“The Salesian Missions”, “Life in our missions”), the *Bollettino Salesiano* itself introduced a missionary subtitle from 1927, becoming “monthly periodical for the cooperators of Don Bosco’s works and missions”.

#### 2.4. Vatican missionary exhibition (1925) and Salesians in Turin (1926)

To strengthen existing missionary works and to promote new missionary projects, creating structures and finding fresh energy, a notable contribution was made by the solemn celebration for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first missionary expedition.

Don Rinaldi had only just announced it officially,<sup>20</sup> when Pius XI announced for the same 1925 Holy Year an *International Missionary Exhibition*, to be held in the Vatican Palaces with the participation of all the Missionary Congregations and Institutes of the Catholic Church. The two dates coincided, and so in June 1923, Don Ricaldone presented to the Superior Chapter a vast programme of activities that the Chapter approved, and which was to be promoted by a Central Committee at Valdocco, under the presidency of Fr. Ricaldone himself. Through a series of circular letters and a very extensive correspondence,<sup>21</sup> it was possible to organise all the Salesian and FMA houses in such a way that the Salesian section in the Vatican exhibition met with general approval.

With items not sent to Rome and others, which arrived to replace those, which were not returned from the Vatican as they were destined by the Holy See to form part of the permanent exhibition at the Lateran, on 26 May, a similar Salesian Exhibition was opened in Turin. It was visited by 300,000 people and honoured by the constant presence of civil and religious authorities throughout the four months it was open.

In the meantime, the Rector Major had written a circular letter commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary<sup>22</sup> in which, following up some of the concerns expressed in *Maximum Illud*, he asked for special prayers for the Missions, in particular on the 24<sup>th</sup> of each month;<sup>23</sup> in addition, he devoted himself to the promotion and recommendation of missionary vocations for young people and also adults (Sons of Mary), as well as supporting the Missions and missionaries<sup>24</sup> financially through various

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<sup>20</sup> *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, January 1923, n. 17, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Preserved in ASC A 831; see also *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, 24 June 1924, n. 25, pp. 296-297.

<sup>22</sup> *Atti del Capitolo Generale*, 24 June 1925, n. 30, pp. 364-373.

<sup>23</sup> In the *Bollettino Salesiano* of November 1923, all the Salesian houses in the world were invited to celebrate the Annual Mission Day on 11 November; then in 1927 the Holy See established World Mission Day.

<sup>24</sup> In October 1923, the *Bollettino Salesiano* gave 1,000 lire as the cost for the maintenance of a pupil at Turin-Valdocco, 1,500 lire for Ivrea and 1,800 lire for a native teacher and catechist.

practical initiatives (missionary celebrations, charity bazaars, sales of work and exhibitions of sacred vestments, collections organised by children, adults, families, wills and legacies).

## 2.5. "Missionary" Congresses of Cooperators, of Youth and of Salesians (1925-1926)

Preceded by the International Missionary Congress in Buenos Aires for the opening of the Centenary of the Missions (October 1925) and by other local and provincial congresses, at the same time as the Exhibition in Valdocco, the Cooperators (with the past pupils) held a Congress that was meant to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their foundation (1876). Naturally this too had a missionary aim fostered especially by the various organising committees and promoters. Great attention was placed on the aspect of cooperation both material and spiritual, even though it was not possible to take account of *Rerum Ecclesiae*, published in February 1926, after the programme had already been settled.

In their turn, young pupils in many Salesian houses between November 1925 and January 1926 held their own local, regional and national *Congresses* (about 800), in which they discussed missionary topics, producing and then publishing the Acts.

In the summer of 1926 at Turin-Valsalice, two similar Congresses were held, one for the Rectors of Europe and one for the Rectors of Italy. The fourth of six topics dealt with was regarding the Missions.<sup>25</sup> It was soon appreciated that it was first necessary to form a missionary *awareness* before being concerned about missionary *cooperation* and two points in particular were emphasised: the *importance* and the *urgency* of the problem: the first in so far as by the will of Christ the Church cannot fail to preach the Gospel throughout the world and, the Salesians on their part were bound to follow Don Bosco's prescriptions; the second in so far as the point was made by the "two famous Encyclicals *Magnun* (sic!) *illud* of Benedict XV (1919) and *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) of Pius XI".<sup>26</sup>

In the judgement of the Salesian Rectors, the urgency was also due to the need to combat the materialism that was spreading among the "pagans" who are being reached by "civilisation" (the West), to form a

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<sup>25</sup> A full account in *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, 24 September 1926, n. 36, pp. 502-507.

<sup>26</sup> *Ib.*, p. 502.

native clergy that would be capable of continuing the work of the missionaries should foreign missionaries be expelled, to prevent the spread of Protestantism and Islamism. As regards effective *cooperation*, three kinds of means were indicated: 1) above all prayer and “spiritual sacrifices”, for which some specific suggestions were made; 2) vocations, to be cultivated by a series of practical initiatives to be implemented in the various houses; finally, 3) material means to be obtained in traditional or in new ways.

## 2.6. *Visit by Fr. Ricaldone to the Missions in the East (1927)*

The solemn celebrations of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary had scarcely finished when Don Rinaldi, considering that in previous years, members of the Superior Chapter had visited almost all the Salesian houses in Europe and America, responding to the needs of the Missions in Asia which “on account of the variety of races and for other reasons are very different from the Missions in the West”, sent as a Visitor, the Prefect General Fr. Ricaldone, almost certainly the “one most suitable” also given his past experience.<sup>27</sup>

Sailing from Venice on 25 December 1925, he returned on 9 December 1926, after having visited practically all the Salesian houses and foundations in India, China, Japan, Thailand, passing also through Burma and Vietnam. I leave to other colleagues at this seminar the presentation of his journey and its consequences country by country. Here, it is sufficient to say that added to the travails of having to cross a continent with the means of transport then available (steamer, train, boat, ship, horse, sedan chair, on foot), he was faced with the hard work of meetings (with missionaries, Bishops, Prefects Apostolic, Religious Superiors, civil authorities), sermons, correspondence, dangers from brigands and local wars, which are all recorded in travel diaries, in his vast correspondence, and in reports. Fr. Ricaldone’s experience was of a total immersion in the Missions of Asia, which, by his getting to know the religion and cultures, languages and customs, political and social situations, enabled him among other things on his return to organise, in collaboration with other Salesians, an intense campaign on behalf of the Missions through a series of very frequent conferences, slide shows and films, for youngsters and adults.

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<sup>27</sup> *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, 24 December 1926, n. 37, p. 527.



## 2.7. *Missionary Crusade (1928)*

From Thailand, shortly before returning home, Fr. Ricaldone launched the idea of a “Missionary Crusade”, aimed at collecting 1,000 bursaries each of 20,000 lire, from the interest on which it would be possible to support a missionary aspirant (1,000 lire), a catechist (500 lire) or cover the expenses of a student (200 lire).<sup>28</sup> It would also be possible to collaborate by making free offerings, of goods or materials. The names of benefactors would be published each month under the heading “Golden Book” in the *Bollettino Salesiano*.<sup>29</sup> For those who might have large sums of money available, Fr. Ricaldone suggested building at one’s own expense houses for missionary aspirants.

Don Rinaldi welcomed the idea: on 24 March 1928, he told the Rectors about it and two months later, officially mentioned it to the Salesians;<sup>30</sup> the *Bollettino Salesiano* presented the project to its readers. And so while Count Rebaudengo offered to build a new institute in Turin at his expense, there was a real rush to provide missionary bursaries among readers of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, among cooperators, past pupils, friends and admirers of Don Bosco and of the Salesian Society, identified by name or anonymous, an enthralling competition broke out between youngsters from Salesian houses. Businesses too offered their products.

## 2.8. *Beatification of Don Bosco, 13<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (1929)*

1929 was the year of the apotheosis. For the beatification of Don Bosco on 2 June, the Holy See granted permission for a delay in the celebration of the XIII General Chapter; the missionary expedition of

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<sup>28</sup> He wrote to Don Rinaldi: “why doesn’t [...] the successor of Don Bosco raise his voice and invite everyone to start a crusade on behalf of the people in the East, as Don Bosco did for the peoples and the lands in the West? [...] it is the East especially that today needs to be the object of the concern, the care, the anxious work of people of good will. Here we cannot, we must not shut our eyes to it. What are involved here are the great concerns, the vital problems for the future of these peoples. A Christian East would be a guarantee for the security, the peace of the world, while if it were to fall victim to Bolshevism, hatred and anarchy it would be a constant and terrifying threat”.

<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, the names for the various bursaries would be published every two or three months; in addition, it was decided that to open new bursaries a starting figure of 5,000 lire would be required, while smaller sums would be used to complete those still open.

<sup>30</sup> *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, 24 May 1928, n. 44, p. 660.

that year was the largest to date and perhaps in the whole of Salesian history; more than 100 missionaries for America and 50 for Asia.

For the consideration of the Chapter members assembled in Turin between 9 and 20 July, a scheme (the third) was presented with the title: "A structured development of our Missions in the spirit of our Salesian system and method of education and in conformity with the norms issued by ecclesiastical authority".<sup>31</sup> In presenting it, Don Rinaldi had written: "In the first place it is a matter of gathering together the experience of everyone for it to contribute to the common good: then to agree on the way ahead which must bear the Salesian seal. It is necessary that the Superior understands the difficulties of confreres far away and that the confreres far away know the mind of the Superiors well. There has to be unity of aims so as to achieve the wishes and the hopes of the Ven. Don Bosco. The Holy Father, Pius XI also wants us to apply in the Missions the educational methods given us by our Salesian Founder".<sup>32</sup>

In the Chapter, the scheme on the Missions, subdivided into 11 points (Missionary Spirit, Missionary Vocations and missionary formation houses, the Mission [forms and works], Ecclesiastical Superior and Religious Superior [their relationship], Goods of the Missions and Goods of the Society, Native Vocations, Norms for missionaries, Relationships and questions of subsidies, Mission Offices general and particular, Propaganda, the one in charge of the Missions) was approved far too quickly (a few hours!) as the "Regulations *ad experimentum*" with the appointment of a Commission with the task of going further into certain points for which there had not been an agreed conclusion.<sup>33</sup>

The three articles (quite general) about native vocations, which might have created problems, were easily accepted after an intervention by Fr. Ricaldone, who pointed out how it was necessary to obey the Pope, as Don Bosco would.<sup>34</sup> The point that led to most discussion was that regarding the juridical relationship between the ecclesiastical superior and the religious superior (as well as the distinction between the goods of the "local Church" and those of the "Salesian Society") bearing in mind

<sup>31</sup> *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, 6 January 1929, n. 47, p. 711.

<sup>32</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>33</sup> *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, 24 October 1929, n. 50, pp. 814-823.

<sup>34</sup> In this regard a report from the Salesian Secretary General dated 22 June 1926 sent to Paris, indicated in native vocations "a certain instability" and also the danger of nationalism, on account of which it did not seem that it would be possible "gradually to completely replace all the Europeans in their country", while it should be possible to entrust them with "the direction of a House": ASC A 8300143.

that present in the hall were Provincials and Prefects Apostolic (Fr. Canazei and Msgr. Versiglia among others) obviously with different points of view. Don Rinaldi tried to mediate saying that the problem had already been considered elsewhere without an agreed solution being arrived at, and that it had been decided that charity should be the guide for the two Superiors.

Some months later, on 8 December 1929, the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* issued an *Instructio* on the matter, which meant that Don Rinaldi, the following year had to submit for revision what the General Chapter had provisionally established, requesting and proposing contributions for clarification. Fr. Canazei, among others, did not fail to express once again his precise and well-articulated opinion in July 1930,<sup>35</sup> at the same time that he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Shiu Chow, in the place of Msgr. Versiglia, killed with Fr. Caravario on the previous 25 February.

### **3. Some problem issues**

At this point, in view of the indisputable reawakening and development of Salesian missionary activity in the twenties so as to arrive by the middle of the decade in fourth place for the number of missionaries (935, without counting the 1,647 Salesians spread throughout 145 SDB foundations in the Americas) and fifth place for the number of missions (28)<sup>36</sup> – one can still legitimately ask oneself whether perhaps there were also within it all some problematic aspects, some weak points. The reply can only be in the affirmative, even though the scarcity and the limitations of the studies and research available at present prevent us from forming an accurate judgement in this regard. However, on the basis of the documentation consulted for this presentation, a provisional view could be expressed as follows:

1. In the decisions of government and in its praxis the Salesian Society, spiritually guided by Don Rinaldi and at the operational level by Fr. Ricaldone, for the most part continued to operate according to the cultural and religious schemes of Don Bosco. On all sides, the need to follow the

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<sup>35</sup> The document is preserved in ASC A 8300157. In ASC the section “missions” in relation to these years is very full and would deserve a suitable study.

<sup>36</sup> So one reads in a letter of Don Rinaldi to the Superior Council of the Pontifical Work of the Propagation of the Faith, dated 31 December 1926: ASC A 8310123.

traditional Salesian educational model was constantly affirmed, as in various audiences Pius XI had insisted with Don Rinaldi. In the missionary context therefore, the Salesian Society of the time also remained basically rooted in the “charismatic phase” of the foundation, without succeeding in producing the necessary evolution of the charism received, still including a strong centralisation of government, even though tempered and enlightened by visits that were necessarily quick so as to become aware of the situation on the ground and by personal conversations or by correspondence with missionaries.

2. With some praiseworthy exceptions, it does not seem that the changed ecclesiological-missionary approach requested or taken for granted in pontifical documents or a more careful missiological reflection had been fully appreciated. The suggestions and the directives of the two encyclicals in question, while recognised as the “Magna Carta” of missionary work, were taken into consideration mainly for what they had to say about the urgency, the importance and the promotion, especially at home, of vocations; not so much for what might raise questions about the missionary methods adopted, or indeed might suggest a quality change in those places where Salesian evangelisation had recently begun. Proving more of an obstacle to “inculturation”, especially in the East, were the missionary experiences in progress in America, which were not easily adapted in other places, the greater attention constantly being given to practical-organisational aspects of the Missions rather than to reflection on the theory, the very limited decision-making powers of the authorities on the periphery.

3. A certain self-sufficiency in the Congregation prevented the development of a better organisation of all missionary activity that would have meant on the part of central and peripheral bodies of the Society, accuracy in data, precision in terminology, coordination with pontifical authorities with responsibility for the Missions, so as to ensure that the information requested was submitted carefully, regularly and speedily. At various levels including the economic one the absence of a specific office for the Missions in Turin was clearly felt, one which could have encouraged and collected data and news and submitted it frequently to a secretary in Rome, given this exclusive role.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This was the opinion of the President of the “Central Council of the Propagation of the Faith”, Msgr. Angelo Roncalli (future Pope John XXIII) and of other authoritative members of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* who refer in this regard to the inferior state of the Salesians in respect of other Religious Institutes: cf. vast documentation preserved in ASC A 831.

4. However, the fact should not be undervalued that the Salesian Society was and saw itself to be a “*society of educators*” working on an international scale (to which the Holy See had entrusted missions *ad gentes*) and not a “*Missionary Institute*” in the strict sense of the term.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, while it considered as “missionary works” all the foundations outside Europe while distinguishing in mission lands between “works that were strictly missionary” and “auxiliary works”, the Holy See recognised as missions *de facto* and by law – and therefore financed – only the Vicariates and Prefectures and those territories of the “infideli” destined to become such. Consequently the works that the Congregation of Propaganda Fide considered “secondary” (schools, orphanages, colleges, nurseries, leper colonies...) in contrast to those directly concerned with evangelisation (catechesis, sacramentalisation....) for the Salesians, they were on the contrary “primary” and often absorbed more of the financial and personnel resources than those places where they were working directly for the *plantatio ecclesiae*. Direct catechetical activity in the few dozen missions *ad gentes* not infrequently was reduced to second place after the hundreds of schools and colleges in the extra-European areas where the young people could also find the best conditions for growing in the faith. This situation gave rise to more occasions for conflict between the religious superior and the ecclesiastical superior (when these were different people), especially if the second was a bishop or vicar apostolic.

## Conclusion

We can conclude indicating some possible areas for research:

1. The presence among the Salesian “missionaries” of a large number of “youngsters” (novices, pre-novices, aspirants) and of “young men” (clerics) distinguished from “adults” (priests or brothers), necessarily led

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<sup>38</sup> Dated 31 December 1927, Don Rinaldi communicated to the Holy See that the Salesian Society was divided into 39 provinces with 44 houses for aspirants, 31 novitiates and 27 studentates of Philosophy and Theology, “which form and generously provide a large number of personnel for the missions”. As regards “institutions opened for the formation of exclusively missionary personnel (...) to respond to zeal for the missions and following the directives of the Supreme Pontiffs” he mentions three: Ivrea with 162 pupils, Foglizzo with 182, and Penango with 179: ASC A 8310133. Two years later, he was in the position to be able to add three others (Castelnuovo, Cumiana, Rebaudengo): letter of 27 January 1929, in ASC A 8310313.

to various consequences in the set up and organisation of the Missions. Which? This innovative option for youth by the Salesian Society, was it a risky step or a winner? What is the “perseverance rate” of the very young missionaries?

2. The Missions were entrusted by the Holy See to the Salesian Society as it was. What was the theological and specifically missiological preparation that the Salesian Society gave its missionary priests? What was the formation, cultural in general and missionary in particular, given in the missionary aspirantates in Italy and in the houses of formation in mission lands?

3. The opening of Salesian Missions in the twenties in Asia (and in Australia)<sup>39</sup> changed the previous internal balance of the Salesian Society. What significance did this missionary opening up in new continents have for the old and more recent missions in America? What was the influence on East Asian experiences of those of America?

4. In the political area, the Salesian Society, with its marked Italian background, following its own tradition, refrained from any direct or indirect commitment, without on that account giving up some state contribution that was not too demanding politically. Were there forms of nationalism in the twenties? What kind? In which countries?

5. For a better understanding of the Salesian Missions comparison with those of other Religious Orders and Missionary Institutes ancient and modern is useful. What were the objectives, the methods, the strategies, the preparation of personnel, the results of their missions in the same geographical areas where the Salesians were working?

6. Over 70 years after the events, it is perhaps possible to attempt an evaluation of the results in terms of education-evangelisation. For such a survey, it will be necessary to study what might be the most appropriate indicators, bearing in mind the difficulties of a charismatic, structural, circumstantial and personal nature to which we have simply referred.

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<sup>39</sup> Africa would have to be considered separately. In the twenties, there were Salesian works on the Mediterranean coast, in the Republic of the Congo and in South Africa.