

THE BEGINNING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SALESIAN WORK IN JAPAN

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To write this paper, I used a great part of the materials gathered by the deceased Fr. Alfonso Crevacore in the “Cimatti Museum” of Tokyo (CMT), situated in the Salesian Seminary of Chofu. It deals specially with the mail correspondence. The originals are found according to the container, or in the Vatican Archives, or in the Central Salesian Archives of Rome (ASC) or in the archive of the China Province in Hong Kong or in the said Cimatti Museum. Fr. Mario Rassiga’s manuscript “Breve cenno storico dell’opera salesiana in Cina” (vol. II, chapter XCIX, pp. 125-136),¹ which reported the correspondence between the Holy See and the Superiors in Turin before the foundation of the Salesian work in Japan. One should note that the actual Japanese Province, up to 1 January 1928, was part of the Visitatoria of China, of which the superior was Fr. Ignazio Canazei.

1. The Negotiations for the Salesian Work in Japan

The request of the Holy See for the opening of a Salesian mission in Japan, dates back in the beginning of February 1923. This results from the first existing document, a letter of Msgr. Marchetti of Propaganda Fide of 19 July 1923 to Fr. Rua:

“The P.V.Rve.ma in the past month of February welcomed favorably the invitation of this Congregation to assume the evangelization of a part of the territory of the diocese of Nagasaki in Japan”.

At that time, the whole Island of Kyushu at the south of Japan was part of the Diocese of Nagasaki, entrusted to the Foreign Missions of Paris with Bishop Msgr. Claudio Combaz. The Holy See having decided to divide the missionary work among the various missionary congregations: Franciscans, Jesuits, Salesians, etc. For this, it has proposed to the

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¹ *Breve cenno storico dell’opera salesiana in Cina*, vol. I, II. Hong Kong, Aberdeen Technical School, 1973.

Salesians the two civil prefectures of Oita and Miyazaki, situated in the South towards the Pacific Ocean. There were three missionary residences, Miyazaki, Oita and Nakatsu, with a million and a half inhabitants and a total of 300 Christians. Economically, they were the poorest of Japan. In the same letter, one could note:

“Allow me to remind you P.V., also in view of the intellectual and civil development that is verified in Japan, that it is convenient that the Missionaries be doted not only of common qualities, but also that they may be at the level of administering colleges and institutes of education”.

On 27 July 1923, Fr. Rinaldi answered the Propaganda Fide:

“The Salesians, God-willing, are prepared to go to work in Japan in the autumn of 1925.... We shall procure that the personnel may be able to correspond to the expectations of the Holy See.... We shall begin to send there at least six priests and the same number of catechists”.

From Turin, the Superiors communicated their decision to Fr. Canazei, who immediately contacted the Bishop of Nagasaki, who in turn, on 19 November 1923, explained in this manner the situation in the two provinces:

“As you know, the conversions are more difficult in Japan rather than in China. Experience will reveal the obstacles which we have to overcome”.

Cardinal Van Rossum, later, on 31 January 1924, wrote to Fr. Rinaldi:

“This Sacred Congregation would willingly see that in the current year 1924, any Father could already go to the new Mission in order to get acquainted of the places and of things, and in agreement with the apostolic Delegate, to prepare the necessary things for the arrival of the other first missionaries”.

The Apostolic Delegate then was Msgr. Mario Giardini, who followed all the practices, and later became a great benefactor and friend of Fr. Cimatti and the Salesian Mission.

To satisfy this wish of the Propaganda Fide, on 1 July 1924, the Visitatore Fr. Canazei went to Tokyo, and from there, accompanied by the Apostolic Delegate Msgr. Giardini, went to Nagasaki to meet Msgr. Combaz. It was on this occasion that it was discussed to entrust to the Salesians the two prefectures of Miyazaki and Kumamoto, instead of Miyazaki and Oita. At Kumamoto, in fact, there were more possibilities of evangelization, more missionary works and a great number of Chris-

tians. This was the wish and the proposal of the Superior General of the Foreign Missions of Paris, Msgr. De Guebriant, who wanted to be more generous to the Salesians. However, this proposal vanished immediately. Contrary opinions came from the missionaries of religious congregations of the place. The S. Congregation of the Propaganda Fide, on 4 October 1924, communicated to Msgr. Giardini that the prefectures entrusted to the Salesians remained definitively those of Miyazaki and Oita, and these he communicated to Fr. Canazei.

After having made the visit, Fr. Canazei, in his report to the Superior of Turin, of which in Hong Kong, there existed only a rough copy, notes among others:

“The terrain is above all sterile and difficult. But the Lord will help us to evangelise it.... I note that the life in Japan is very expensive. Nay, they say that it may be the most expensive country in the world.... The country, for how many similarities with the Chinese civilization it may have, nonetheless is very diverse. In general, the people are more educated; there reign order and discipline and a scrupulous cleanliness. Kyushu is relatively more backward. Miyazaki, especially, is a poor country”.²

After this first visit, Fr. Canazei returned to Japan on 26 February 1925. From Shanghai, he reached Nagasaki, and then for the first time, went until Oita and Miyazaki for a direct look of the place. He could then personally see the poverty and the financial straits of the three residences. The Superiors of Turin decided to send six priests and three coadjutors in November of that year, and this was communicated to the Bishop of Nagasaki, who on 19 October 1925, answered Fr. Canazei:

“I do not question the decisions of the Major Superiors of your Society. Perhaps, however, they do not have a true idea of actual Japan. In many ecclesiastical centers, there is full of admiration for the material civilization of this country. They should not allow themselves to imagine that results would be beautiful and easy. When your missionaries will arrive in Japan, they will find themselves in front of the nude reality; the scales will not delay to fall off from their eyes. They are to fear disappointments and discouragements. Everyone will say to the world: it is not that which they have told us, that which they have made us think.

You have seen the residence of Miyazaki. In my opinion, it will be difficult to put therein nine persons... Life is so expensive here as in San Francisco and Paris”.³

² *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 129.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 130.

2. Choice, Departure and Travel of the Missionaries

While the Visitatore Fr. Canazei prepared the terrain for the missionaries, the Superiors of Turin were thinking on who to send in the first expedition.

On 9 November 1923, in the same year in which Fr. Rinaldi received from Rome the proposal of a new foundation in Japan, he received a letter from Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti with this request:

“Please pray for me and so that I may find a place in the Mission that is *most poor, tiring and abandoned*. What else do you want! I do not feel at ease with (even if they may be relative), etc. I do not see myself. Oh that you may listen to a good plea”.

Fr. Cimatti was then the rector of the house of Valsalice and principal of the Teachers’ Training School of the same house. Mamma Rosa died the preceding year; his brother Luigi was missionary in Peru; and his sister Santina, now Blessed, was a sister of the Hospitallers of Mercy with the name of Sr. Rafaella.

Most probably, his request, renewed several times, inspired Fr. Rinaldi the choice to make him leader of the missionary expedition. Fr. Cimatti was a known personality not only for music (he received his diploma as master of the choir at the Regio Conservatory of Parma) and for the scholastic books of pedagogy and agriculture that he had written (he finished the doctorate of both disciplines at the University of Turin). But he was also an exemplary Salesian, an able professor and formator of young Salesians, who esteemed and loved him as a father. His was the first study on the Preventive System with the title “Don Bosco Educator”, published in 1925 by the SEI. In the 28 years that he lived at Valsalice, with an intermezzo at the Oratory of San Luigi near the church of St. John Evangelist, several generations of Salesians and of missionaries passed through his hands. Msgr. Versiglia was his assistant in the novitiate, and Fr. Caravario, who frequented the Oratory of St. Joseph united during the war with the Oratory of St. Luigi, was directed by him towards the Salesian life.

Sensing that he was chosen for Japan, he wrote in the beginning of June 1925 to his former student, Fr. Braga who was in China:

“Dearest Braga, I shall send you the book “Don Bosco Educator”. I shall be happy to hear your evaluation of it. Courage, always, because Jesus wishes you well. Lavora ut bonus miles ... Remember, however, that he who works is Jesus, and only Jesus; it is always Jesus through Mary.

My letters will get lost, at any rate, but believe me, you are remembered always, specially in prayers and when we meet each other with the past pupils of Saint Luigi. I never supposed that they wished us well those poor little ones. Beautiful souls your friends, as it is seen in the photographs.

Have no fear and always go forward, projecting beams of light.

Who knows, we might see each other. Everybody mentions my name for the Orient, but I do not know anything.... I wait. A good thing if it is my time now. Jesus will listen to me; if not, we shall continue to educate for the good of humanity.

Be cheerful and good. My life is as usual: I would not know how to make it different. A doubt assails me once in a while. That in the missions there can be forced idleness. It would be my ruin...! But when I think of my Don Carlos, what idleness! But who are we in comparison with you? There is reason to blush. At any rate, pray for me, and Jesus in your masses may make us yours”.

After having received the announcement of his nomination, he wrote on 15 October 1925 to his past pupil, Fr. Giuseppe Grigoletto, who then was one of his greatest benefactors:

“Dearest Bepi, this night, *media nocte*, I end my office. I begin a new course of thoughts, aspirations... the Rising Sun, the cherry blossom, the chrysanthemum, the loquat, the persimmon, the rice, the mosquitoes, the volcanoes, the earthquakes... As you see, a complete arsenal of natural history in action. I cry and I rejoice! ...Pray for me. You know how I need it, especially now: everything has an eastern orientation and there will be to laugh at, but also to suffer much in all senses. Deo gratias!”.

They began the preparations, and in November there was the farewell ceremony in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, where Fr. Cimatti met for the first time his companions of the mission. They were almost all unknown to him. This is the list of the nine destined for Japan:

Fr. Cimatti Vincenzo, 46 years, Italian from house of Valsalice;

Fr. Tanguy Jean, 45 years, French, from Spain;

Fr. Cavoli Antonio, 37 years, Italian, from the house of Perugia;

Fr. Liviabella Leone, 30 years, Italian, from the house of Rome;

Fr. Margiaria Angelo, 27 years, Italian, from the house of Alexandria of Egypt;

Fr. Piacenza Pietro, 26 years, Italian, from the house of Lanzo;

Coad. De Mattia Giovanni, 37 years, Italian, from the house of Faenza;

Coad. Guaschino Luigi, 32 years, Italian, from the house of Aosta;

Coad. Merlino Alfonso, 24 years, Italian, from the house of Martinetto Turin.

It was the 50th foundation of the Salesian missions, and the new mission of Japan was the commemorative act. Pope Pius XI, in the audience conceded to them, reminded them of this:

“You leave in the light of the 50th anniversary of the first expedition to Argentina and Patagonia. We wish that equal success to this first expedition to Japan. You go like the Apostles sent by Jesus Christ. May you have the same dispositions of heart and may you work for the spread of the Kingdom of God in the souls entrusted to you”.

Before departing, Fr. Rinaldi celebrated mass for them in the room of Don Bosco, and left them this remembrance:

“You go to a far but very materially developed nation, which does not need you. That which you must bring there is Jesus ... et hunc crucifixum!”⁴

On 29 December 1925, they left Genoa on the boat “Fulda” of a German company. Together with another group directed for China, there were 27 Salesians, among whom were Mario Acquistapace, Innocente Alberti, Antonio de Amicis, Vincenzo Ardissonne, Pietro Battezzati, Carlo Casetta, Carlo Frigo, Ercole Tieri and others.

They were going to an unknown country, but full of hope. We report here some passages of letters which Fr. Cimatti wrote during the trip, revealing clearly his missionary spirit:

2 January 1926 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

“I try to offer to Jesus (the only things I can do in my pride, I who believe knows everything) the voluntary sacrifice of myself; of the forces that He gave me; of the good will that everyday He grants me with royal generosity. I procure to always render more resolute the detachments of this departure, in order that I may be able to love Him more and the souls that He would want to confide me in his goodness. Please pray that Jesus may accept this as my total sacrifice, which must on one hand assure the salvation of my soul, and on the other, to lovingly bend it as to open its heart to the humble souls of the Japanese, to move them to the action of grace”.

21 January - to Fr. Rinaldi:

“For the observance of the vows and the rules, I tried to give good example to all. Nothing special. Certainly, I have to restrain my pride and sensitive-

⁴ Angelo MARGIARIA, *Rampe di lancio e fiori di ciliegio*. Roma, Libreria Editrice Salesian, 1967, p. 26.

ness. And also for this that I asked to go the missions. I was loving the confreres and the clerics too much and specially my poor *normalisti* of Valsalice! But, O Jesus, what can I do if you have given me such a heart? Oh, that it may be all yours! I do not hide them that the thought of so many holy souls and of many would need continues pushes to be good Salesians moves me so as to fill me the eyes of tears! I was loving them too much! Oh, that Jesus may accept my most miserable sacrifice for their better formation, which Fr. Cimatti did not know how to give”.

28 January - to Fr. Rinaldi:

“As I inform you that our beloved Fr. Canazei, who was on his return from his visit of Siam, awaited us in Singapore. One can imagine the comfort of everyone. He accompanied us, partly in carriages, and partly in car to the Catholic Portuguese Mission, making us visit the principal Catholic Churches and to taste the refinement of Christian charity.

Having made the necessary provisions, we returned on board. As usual I found myself in that state of inexpressible nausea and discomfort in seeing the proud fierceness of the dominators... In this, I recognize better my proud character. Physical tiredness, perhaps, nausea of myself, of all those miseries which always draw those natives further away from God. Because they see the material well-being of the others, they let themselves be influenced and they allow themselves to be seized... Enough, enough!

As I write, the Fulda passes in front of the island of Sanciano. Oh, how many memories! St. Francis Xavier! I seem to see his person smiling, to greet those protected by another St. Francis and to wish for their missions abundant heavenly graces. *Faxit Deus!*

Tomorrow, in recollection and in prayer, we shall remember our dearly deceased confreres, as we remembered in these days the Chinese confrere coadjutor and the young who died in a sea disaster of Shanghai, which surely you have been told”.

2 February 1926 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

“We shall arrive in Shanghai this 3 February. Here is a brief report of the trip from Hong Kong to Shanghai.

The visit of our dear confreres from Macao, the visit of the Superior of the good missionaries of St. Calogero of Milan (PIME), the paternal hospitality granted to our various confreres during the night, the fantastic view of the illuminated city seen from the sea (it is an enormous mountain of light) – all these made a strange contrast with the sight of the Chinese at the port of Hong Kong, who threaten strikes and reprisals against the English. Think of it, some had to proceed to Shanghai in order to disembark in China (among these, some Protestant pastors), and the more we felt the dolorous nearing of separating from confreres and novices who had to go to Macao. At 7.30 a.m., of 30 January, between the commotions of all, we bade each other

farewell. While the majority goes to Hong Kong, I wandered with Fr. Piacenza in the fields, between the rocks, at the seashore, between the poor quarter of the Chinese, in order to distract me, to find in the beautiful sun and in the works of the good God and among his poor friends, comfort, instruction, calm.

At midday, while we praise Mary with the Angelus, we leave. It is the day consecrated to prayers for deceased confreres; we most cordially unite for common prayers. Eternal peace grant to our brothers, O Lord!...

On 3 February, at 7 a.m., we disembarked at Shanghai, welcomed by Fr. Garelli and by the son of Lo. We were brought by car to our institute, where, with the music of the band and amidst the applause of the students we embrace our dear confreres. We forget everything: fatigue, boredom, and everything of that special state in which one remains after a long trip.

We are among our brothers, in a Salesian house. We can greet Jesus in the chapel and see again the smiling face of our Help of Christians. A Chinese artisan reads a welcome address in Italian. I answer in Italian, while Fr. Garelli translates. And in order to celebrate our arrival, he declares vacation to the joy of everyone.

During the light refreshment and lunch, we extol the Superiors, our Congregation, the union between Shanghai and Japan. I go with Fr. Tanguy to the missions procure of the Jesuit fathers to speak of our mission. The plan to leave for Nagasaki remains modified, because the Japanese steamboats leave late. Besides, it is not convenient to leave. Thus, we return to the original plan: everyone leaves for Moji, and then we shall see.

In the evening, visit to the Hospice of Lo, long conversation with Fr. Garelli. He has difficulties with regards his health (always the stomachaches). Lo will not help him to finish the Institute, so beautiful and so grandiose. He had to suffer for the health of the confreres (for now, they are alright, thanks to God; it remains to be a preoccupation); for the lack of personnel in which he finds himself; and greatly for the recent disaster, which till now he could not explain nor understand why.

The next day, 4 February, I celebrated mass in the chapel of the Hospice of Lo, who served with great pomposity, and who after breakfast, wanted to accompany me around. The Cottolengo in small version is here reproduced. Thanks be to God! It is a pity, the religious assistance is still very reduced: only one priest, old, for 1,300 patients; few sisters. And unfortunately, with the usual questions between the regular and the secular clergy, for the usual rights, much of the good which should be done to souls is paralysed. Also for this, Fr. Garelli, has and will have many crosses. *Et inimici hominis domestici eius...*

This evening, Mr. Lo-pa-hong wants us to dine in his house. During the toast, I remembered you and everyone. Chinese dinner! Better our polenta than all these stories even if offered with the best charity of the world!

They made me play music, and I played varied music amidst the admiration of all (I do not know why!). At the exit, Lo-pa-Hong gave me the first donation of a check of \$600. *Deo gratias!* He is the first Chinese benefactor. Tomorrow, before departing, I shall write you a beautiful letter".

4 February 1926 - to the clerics of Valsalice:

"At this time, I had to go around Shanghai, specially on the Chinese sector, where our house is. The international grant and the French are like European cities. The Chinese sector is a human swarm of work and activity, in which adjacent to the wealth and well-being, there is the greatest of poverty, dirt, human degradation. Near sumptuous palaces and stores furnished with every good thing from God, there were sprawling areas, where numerous families live in true and proper filth. They are preparing for the Chinese New year (14 February) with food of every kind, especially poultry, pigs' meat (one can see cows too) and vegetables.

How many millions of abandoned souls! Oh, if you see the multitude of the young and the children of Shanghai!... The oratories and the youth institutions are rarely known. Of two or perhaps three million inhabitants, only 15,000 Catholics. Pray, pray, pray".

On 5 February 1926, I wrote from Shanghai to the Apostolic Delegate Msgr. Mario Gilardini in Tokyo:

"Very reverend excellency, I pre-announce to you our approximate arrival at our Kyushu. Saturday, 6 a.m. on the Fulda, we leave from Shanghai. We shall disembark at Moji and all will proceed for Miyazaki according to the instructions we had from our Provincial Fr. Canazei.

When we shall have learned a little the language and after having clarified the situation, I shall divide the personnel in the residences.

Your visit is not only welcome, but necessary. And Fr. Canazei pleads vivaciously that you coordinate with him, so this visit may be effected with him. The Salesians of Don Bosco are willingly set to work and fully trust in your advise and your prayers. And on my behalf, we implore your blessing.

That you may pray in a special way and may bless he who has the honor to profess himself your most devoted Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti Salesian missionary".

3. Arrival in Japan

Finally, on 8 February, they disembarked in the port of Moji in the island of Kyushu. In the evening, they left by train for Nagasaki to visit the Bishop, Msgr. Combaz, to whom they were to depend. They stayed there for a week, making precious acquaintances.

They arrived in Miyazaki on 17 February, welcomed by Fr. Bonnezeze of the Paris Foreign Missions Society. Here, they lived together with him for one year to learn the language and to ambient themselves. They had to adapt as much as they could at the second floor of the crowded residence. This was how Fr. Cimatti described their arrival:

19 February 1926 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

“Te Deum Laudamus! Deo Gratias! Is the shout which, with emotions, I threw to God, when we arrived finally at the place of our hopes, work, sacrifice. We are finally in Miyazaki. I have a lot of things to say to you: I will force myself to be complete and to proceed with order.

6 February. Greetings to the confreres of Shanghai and we proceed on our way.
8 February. At 8 a.m. we are in the big port of Moji. A thick fog prevents us from seeing the magnificent panorama which delineated itself once in a while, illuminated by the sun. It is a splendour, which when the fog vanishes, reveals itself to the ecstatic eye, easier to idealize rather than to express. Islands covered by thick forests dominated from afar by chains and mountain peaks, covered by snow, glowing by the rays of the sun. At our feet the ample gulf, outlining the industrial city of Moji, in its hundred of chimneys, in the magnificent scene of its houses along the slope of the mountains. Deo gratias! Long live Japan!

9 February. At 8.30 a.m., we are at Nagasaki, received festively by Fr. Thiry, Procurator of the Paris Foreign Missions Society. In a little while, we are at the Cathedral as guests of his excellency Msgr. Combaz, who after the mass, welcomes us affably. He gives me a paternal embrace, and manifests to us his gladness in having us to help him. After greeting him in your name and of the Superiors, and after the traditional ritual oath takings (Chinese ceremonies and modernism), he grants us all the faculties which are in his power (those which usually given by the Propaganda to the missionaries), and wishes that we stay with him until our baggages arrive at Miyazaki.

17 February. We arrived at Miyazaki at about 11 a.m. The pleasant Fr. Bonnecaze and a Christian were there waiting for us. At about 100 meters from the station, a group of children, instructed by the good Christian teacher who teaches them catechism and who wants to know us immediately, shout to us by the road «Banzai, banzai!» (Long live, long live) The first to greet us at the exit of the station are two fidgets who bow smiling. Oh! How Don Bosco must have wished that his first children of Japan should meet as first salute the elected portions of his heart and the heart of Jesus....

I arrived, as if day dreaming, at the mission. It is so magnificent, all Japanese. God has made us for this fall from paradise. At the exit of the Church, I sing the Te Deum with my companions. And we consecrate ourselves to Mary, who in Japan is honored with the title «Our Lady of Japan, Queen of Martyrs, Help of Christians». The Madonna of Don Bosco wishes to be honored in Japan also with this title. Deo gratias!...

What is lacking now is the most important instrument for action, the language. It seems true to us what St. Francis Xavier wrote in his letters: «In the midst of this people, we are but mute statues. They speak of us; they discuss about us, and we are without words.... At this point of time, we become like children, studying the elements of a language, and it is pleasing to God that we have the candor and the simplicity of children».

We are quartered to sleep and to study in the four rooms at the upper floor; it is a little bit crowded, but it is better than worse. At the ground floor, the

refectory, and the rest reserved to the Father Missionaries...

Everyone speaks of us and speaks to us:

- 1) of the enormous difficulty of the language,
- 2) of the more enormous difficulty of the apostolate.

Monsignor also spoke to me of the difficulty of ambiantation. Also with sacrifice, I believe it opportune (with the understanding taken with the provincial) to be free with the food and to use a little wine in order not to render too abrupt the passage of regime. We shall see everything in the practice: I believe that for six months, there is no need of forming other communities....”.

4. The First Difficulties to Adaptation and to the Language

From the letters of Fr. Cimatti, one could find a detailed description of the difficulties they encountered, because of the very difficult language, the humid climate, the political situation, the character of the Japanese people. Difficulties which went on until the Second World War. In one part, these were due to the not so good conditions of the health of a good part of them. Almost all have suffered because of the first world war, and Fr. Cimatti in his letters described his companions as “remnants of the war”.

3 March 1926 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

“Regarding the confreres... Fr. Cavoli: good for the spiritual part. He has been the most harassed in health during the trip and is now in the period of acclimatization. Only now that I know that he has been very sick during the war (rheumatism with complications of the heart and of the head). Certainly, he is a little irritable, and some of his outbursts had been the reasons for small disagreements and displeasures with the others. I shall make him undergo some health cure (he requested for it). I pray that the Superiors should know about it first, because here, the treatments are dolorous. Fortunately, we now are in months of relative rest....

On the account of the situation of the health of the confreres in this first period of acclimatization, the following are the pieces of advice of Monsignor and Fr. Provincial. For this, I have adopted *ad experimentum* the following *modus vivendi*:

Food: I have dispensed them from fasting. Breakfast: coffee and milk and for those who wish some egg. Lunch, as in Italy. At 16 p.m., for he who wants, a little tea (a piece of bread or orange et similia). Dinner, as in Italy. Our good coadjutors cook Japanese food (rice, fish, and vegetables) in a European manner, slowly learning the customs of the country. I have requested for a little supply of wine (which has not yet arrived): a quarter for every meal. There is milk for the one who wants, who can drink it instead of the wine. Egg in abundance (for now). A good Christian bakes the bread”.

The Visitatore, Fr. Canazei, came to visit us from 1 to 8 April 1926. He celebrated Easter with them and thus wrote his impressions:

"The confreres are intensely busy in the study of the Japanese language. They live in the same house in Miyazaki. It is not yet seen clearly what would be and could be our program of activity and Salesian work. The Provincial accompanies the local Superior Fr. Cimatti to Oita and Nakatsu in order to see the future residences in these two cities. After having spoken with Msgr. Combaz, Bishop of Nagasaki, Fr. Provincial leaves (8 April) for Shanghai".

Fr. Cimatti, on 8 April 1926, wrote to Fr. Rinaldi:

"My dear Father, thank you for your letter, which I immediately read to everyone as soon as it arrived from Oita-Nakatsu, where the Provincial Fr. Canazei (who paternally came to celebrate Easter with us) wanted me to give a first look. I return tired (or better, bored... never-ending rail tracks), but happy. Here is a quick report.

The area which has been entrusted - if it pleases God - to the poor children of Don Bosco is immense. The provinces are in continuous increase of population.

Miyazaki is proud to be the place of origin of the Imperial Dynasty.

In Oita, there are remnants of the work of Sr. Francis Xavier. I hope that the Salesians will manage to find some old Christians in their apostolic trips.

Nakatsu is a place where there are no instruction of any sort: there reigns Buddhism.

The residences of Oita and Nakatsu are discrete; the one of Miyazaki is smaller; for now it is more than sufficient to live in".

They immediately began to study the language. As texts, they used the books of the elementary schools, the same used also by Christian children. There were 12 small volumes for the six years of the elementary, and they finished them in one year. Fr. Cimatti put into music 31 poems contained in these books, and on Sundays, he made the children sing them in order to communicate with them. As professor, they had a Japanese who understood a little French, assisted by a missionary. Evidently not all of them understood French. The difficulty can be understood from these passages of letters:

2 May 1926 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

"Study and work: I give myself to these as much as I can, whether for duty, as well as for good example. My pumpkin (which you know for years) is always hard as usual, it is like the medlar, so difficult to mature. We are already at the third book: we can handle discretely the katakana writing,

used in the railways. We are now handling the Hiragana and with the letters used everywhere. In the evening, some conversation to understand the phraseology and the Japanese constructions (really terrible). At lunch and dinner we put out a letter to be studied, and with that character everyone must form a small phrase that is used publicly.

At the end of the month, I hope and I could already oblige the confreres to speak in the refectory in Japanese, at least for some time. We are all trying to sharpen as much as we can the arm... but, please believe me, it is so hard; nay, for the one who will come in the future, that he keeps this in mind. And with the children? Some phrase... but I shall speak of this later....

The festive oratory will certainly become daily, if we have the language.... We shall have a first difficulty with the Christians whose consciences we will have to direct to the way of the apostolate. You should see how jealous the children, and in a way the Christians, when they see us deal with the pagan children!... It is a task! Anyway, even in this, there is the need of making them understand and we hope well.... In short, if the enthusiasm or other does not prevail, or if the Lord does not wish to leave us in pious illusions, it seems that the harvests abound, notwithstanding the difficulties which are not light".

30 May 1926 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

"How do we manage with the language? We go slowly, but the progress is sure. It could not be otherwise, because (except for the pronunciation - which is already much) everything is a new super-construction. It would be good to make those who will come in the future remember this.

We have done something crazy. Listen!!!.... Either because we wanted to practice, or to win over our fear, or (we could not do otherwise) to honor the Blessed Mother in her month and feast, or to oblige her to come to our help during the novena, we gave a short sermon to the people (each one taking his turn), made, corrected, studied. They said that they understood and *Deo gratias*! In no shrine would have flourished such orators".

Admirable orators! The people said: "In Church they make us understand; but outside they are mute as fish".

Health problems began to appear immediately. Except for Fr. Cimatti, who knew how to adapt to everyone, everybody found himself in difficulty. Fr. Cavoli became a Salesian after having been a military chaplain; he was an excitable and imperious type, and felt very much the climate. Fr. Liviabella, once in a while, had light attacks of epilepsy. The coadjutor De Mattia little by little showed himself unbalanced and after two years had to return to Italy. Fr. Piacenza died young in 1935, and Fr. Tanguy returned to his country in 1938, as the two coadjutors returned later also.

Fr. Cimatti, in his manifestations with the Superiors, aside from his personal rendiconto, every month wrote the state of each confrere. For example:

29 July 1926 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

“Fr. Tanguy: had a light illness. He has some moments of homesickness of Spain, that makes him suffer. For the rest, good.

Fr. Piacenza: can not always sleep in the night. For the rest, good.

Fr. Cavoli: sleeps little, stomach disturbances – difficulty with the language. I encourage him. If he will not learn in one year, he will learn in two years. Irritable. Has some small outburst in relation with Fr. Liviabella. For the rest, good.

Fr. Margiaria: some stomach disturbance (constipation). For the rest, good. He will do well in the language. A little quick in judging.

Fr. Liviabella: he is a little better now. However, he need not work too much and to tire. For the rest, good. Still young and simple in judgement.

Coad. Guaschino: sleeps little in the night. Thus...he cannot study his books. It seems he is sufficiently and more abundantly busy. For the rest, good in everything.

Coad. Merlino: good. Suffers nostalgia on the thought of his mother. Little by little he is being formed. Has learned to cook well. For the rest, good in everything.

Coad. De Mattia: good in omnibus. He prepares for the next September (16) for the perpetual profession to which he was admitted. Has learned to cook well; a good sacristan, market-gardener, etc.”.

2 September 1926 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

“With regards my soul, I thank the Lord: I believe that there are voluntary shortages. I grow everyday in the absolute conviction of my being nothing, manifested in the difficulties of the language, in the difficulties of understanding these characters, etc. Oh, how many reasons to be humble, with all my arrogance, with the titles, with the glories more or less of beautiful Valsalice, of St. Luigi, of music, etc. Oh, what contentment to see in the name of God, who, in the midst of these souls, in the unique possibility to stammer, with whatever appreciation on the part of these Japanese who believe that they are the only great ones in the world. Deo gratias!

I needed this shower of humiliation, which I foresee will grow and will leave me for now, by the grace of God, calm and cheerful”.

4. The Missionary Work Begins

Finally, after a year of study of the language and of ambientation, our confreres took possession of the three residences of Miyazaki, Oita and Nakatsu. The rectors, Fr. Cimatti, Fr. Tanguy and Fr. Piacenza, were already named before the departure from Italy, and the three residences were already erected as religious houses by a year, when these were still in the hands of the Fathers of the Foreign Missions.

For every house, two priests and a coadjutor were assigned. Certainly one year study of the language was not sufficient. But their program of apostolate was very clear. The Bishop had died in the preceding autumn; the diocese was still vacant.

On 30 January 1927, Fr. Cimatti wrote to Fr. Rinaldi in these words:

"Now I can give you clearer news of our situation. Here is what has been agreed with the Vicar of the diocese. On the first of February, we enter officially Miyazaki; on 20 February Nakatsu; on 10 March Oita. Deo gratias! We realize our insufficiency. But on the other hand, if we do not throw ourselves in the water with this blessed language, we cannot swim. We shall do our best and where we do not reach, Mary Help and Don Bosco will do for us: nay, it is better that they do and will do everything, so that certainly everything will go well.

This is our program until the day of separation:

Two hours of school. I hope that by 20th of this month, we finish the 12-volume book, so that we finish the elementary. When we shall have in hand these 12 books (of which two were studied by memory), we shall already have material for the spoken and written language, that which a great part of the Japanese does not have. Almost all have already read the catechism and other books. The preparation for the Sunday sermons is already at hand. That which is lacking is the practice of the language which will surely be of help in these coming months. The priests already prepare themselves with great effort for the examinations of conscience and to have materials for the confessions. Fortunately, the Christians prepare themselves for these examinations. We shall say to them: «For now we understand this!» There is inside all the theology and still a little more.... And we go ahead in the Lord.

Please believe me, that it has been good for us to have utilized this time together with the reading of these books. Perhaps, we shall speak a little more, but we will not be able to read yet. But with the reading, one does more and one has in hand the key to work by oneself: and thus the way for the future is smoothened.

There is no need to deceive ourselves: to be alright, two years of intensive study are needed. Otherwise, one always goes shaky, and thus will never be

alright. The Japanese is difficult to speak and to write. It has absolutely no contact with our language (up to now only two words over a thousand I have found similar to Italian = *Pan* [bread, and it is not Japanese because they do not have]) and *tanto* (which has the same as our meaning for quantity). One would have to entrust to memory thousands of word, united in the strangest of constructions, which have a little of the Latin, and with indefinite slowness of expressions, which they consider emphatic....

I hope to begin soon, with a little more regularity, harmless publications on the Salesian Bulletin. The Japanese read and are well informed of everything. A European does not make one step that the police does not know. And everything with a manner that is so refined that it enchants. We go out little or almost never; but they even know what we eat. And if they ever understood Italian, they would have even known what we say.

Thus, of this noble land, either speak nothing or speak of good. If one deals with illustrations: they are such in which they make the most beautiful of figures. You see that I am already Japanizing! Oh if you listened to the homilies! But you do not know that there is not a Japanese composition in which they do not swoon at the lady moon, with the birds, with cherry blossom! In preaching about St. Francis and Don Bosco, as a good Japanese, I said that St. Francis was a small «samurai». I said: «Spring approaches - the plum tree flowers - your children are beautiful as flowers». Please do not laugh at it! I Japanize myself...”.

And on 10 March 1927, he renders an account of the situation of the Christians:

“As you see, the Lord blesses us: pray, my father, for you know that with this recklessness at the head there is little to bite... but really at the head there is Jesus, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco, and therefore...

What do we say to you about Oita? From the Father, of which it happens, one could know little or nothing, as for Nakatsu - therefore with the few data that there are, one will reconstruct and then one will see what is to be done. With the Parish Priest of Miyazaki some visit has been done to get acquainted with Christianity.

Many good, many unfortunately abandoned, many in true confusions (families in which the mother or the father is christian and the other pagan - or one or the other Christian and the children not baptized - or divorce ... or individuals which have begun and then...) The Lord help us! Here and there sheep in various places, sheep isolated in the midst of wolves, sheep abandoned - many sheep who have passed on to other pastures.

Why all this? Certainly many reasons; neither Fr. Cimatti know them all. Certainly the Fathers found themselves in great financial difficulty and ... of system: it seems to me that they do not move too much. Certainly there are no catechists also - when there are, there is the need to pay them dearly and then ... they serve only up to a certain point. There is the need therefore to form them ourselves: it is the first work.

First, that we can possess the language as theirs... then the foreigner is always a foreigner... then (it seems to me) the children have been put aside... In short, the heart cries in seeing this state of things... but it is so. That the good God may pardon me, for saying all these. In comparison with us, these fathers are giants of virtue, of untiring work. They have founded Christianity. However, the things are as I have said. They have left some houses; but all require great repairs, since for years they have been abandoned to themselves, they knew that they had to go away (and they did the same thing for the souls). They brought away the objects of personal property (they say thus). They left other things behind; but they demanded gracious recompense, which I gave (I ask forgiveness if I committed this mistake) inspiring me at the magnanimous heart of Don Bosco et pro bono pacis... On the other hand, I could not demand from the Superiors of Turin - the Provincial is far (for the responses) almost like Turin.

Program: the search for Christians - knowledge of the real situation of the missions in its various aspects (christian and pagan) - put ourselves salesianly at their disposition - care of children (finally in Miyazaki, a playground has been constructed where our naughty Christian children can run around; they are like our Italians when they play). Having done these well, we shall try the pagans. It is a delicate and difficult task.

In general, the Christians are very poor, dirty and poorly educated... The pagans are richer and well off, clean and apparently educated.

The Christians, in general, are looked down upon by the pagans. They (specially the elder Christians) still feel that sense of apprehension in which they have lived for centuries. They avoid the pagans. They prohibit their children to go with them, whom they call "*gentes*" (many Latin words have remained among the old Christians - «*confessio*», «*contrition*». etc.). On the other hand, they have learned from the pagans ostentatious, loose and dirty manners and words...".

Fr. Cimatti knew how to take advantage of every occasion to penetrate the pagan environment. He made friends with the local authorities, journalists, schools, participating in their feasts, organizing concert, inviting them to the feasts of the mission. He invited the journalists for lunch during the feast of Sr. Francis of Sales, explaining to them that he was protector of Catholic journalists. He even made to come to Miyazaki, the first to reach the North Pole, General Nobile, who came to Japan to bring a dirigible. For him, the whole city moved, which admired the faith of such a man. At the departure, he entrusted him the following letter for the Rector Major:

30 May 1927 - to Fr. Rinaldi:

"I entrust the present letter to Gen. Nobile who by person or by post will send it to you.

In his goodness and with his great effort, the illustrious and revered General

accepted the invitation and came to Miyazaki during the feast of Mary Help of Christians, of which he is an ardent devotee.

The Blessed Mother used him for the official presentation in Miyazaki. The Lord be thanked, and with the Lord, His Excellency, who wanted in this manner to honor and help the Sons of Don Bosco. Your Fr. Cimatti”.

5. The extraordinary visit of Fr. Ricaldone

Fr. Pietro Ricaldone, Prefect General of the Society and in-charge of the missions, made an extraordinary visit to the new mission. He arrived on 7 June 1927, accompanied by Fr. Canazei, who came to Japan for the last time. He was accompanied by Fr. Cimatti to Tokyo in order to pay his respects to the Apostolic Delegate and the other ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Then they visited the three works in Nakatsu, Oita and Miyazaki. In this last residence, all the confreres gathered together for the spiritual exercises. From 21 to 28 June, Fr. Pietro Ricaldone left the missionaries 11 dense pages, reproduced in paper A4 and distributed to all. In these, he wrote:

“Fr. Pietro Ricaldone of the Society, in a series of conversations he had with all the priests of the Mission gathered at Miyazaki, traces the key principles that our new-began Mission must follow: (1) in the religious observance, (2) in the studies, (3) in the missionary life, (4) in the administration, in order to be and to conserve themselves sincerely Salesian”.

We are impressed by the precision of the observations, which establish through example even the minimum particulars the entire schedule of the day.

The two Visitors departed on 30 June for China, where Fr. Ricaldone had an encounter with pirates. Of this visit, Fr. Cimatti wrote to Fr. Rinaldi:

10 July 1927

“Great benefits to souls came from this visit – firstly, to the souls of the confreres, then of the others. Deo gratias!...”

Fr. Ricaldone was received by the Japanese authorities and in general by the Japanese, as an important personage — by the Salesians like a father. The newspapers spoke of him, and this was propaganda. I tried to make him see all that was necessary to see the real situation in the missions. I also made him meet the missionaries who work together with us. Conclusion: he is enthusiastic about Japan. This will be seen from his letters. Deo gratias!”.

Fr. Canazie wrote in his notes: "By the decision of Fr. Ricaldone, Extraordinary Visitor, beginning from 1 August 1927, the mission of Japan, will be separated from the Province of China".

Fr. Ricaldone also wrote his observations to Turin:

18 June 1927

"As I have written you, the Apostolic Delegate is of the opinion that the Prefecture Apostolic be established soon... Fr. Cimatti can do well, even while continuing as Salesian Superior.

I believe it is useless, if not damaging, to let these houses of Japan continue to be part of China. I shall write later my impressions of Fr. Canazei; certainly he did not and will not do anything for these houses... I believe the moment has come to form this new Visitatoria: Fr. Cimatti can be Superior..."

The reasons for this decision were: the diversity of nations, with the differences of language and customs; the distance of the provincial house (Macau), in times when there were no airlines yet; the maturity of Fr. Cimatti whom the Superiors believe can be entrusted with this new assignment.

The date of erection of the Visitatoria for Fr. Canazei was 1 August 1927; but the nomination of Fr. Cimatti as Visitatore was dated from Turin 1 January 1928. It reached him only some months later. Moreover, the decree of canonical erection had the date 6 June 1929. It was for this that Fr. Cimatti continued to insist to the Superiors, that his superior was Fr. Canazei, to whom he continued to send letters. The latter, however, would send them back to him, telling him to send them himself to Turin.

The Visitatoria became a Province on 2 December 1937, and Fr. Cimatti became its first Provincial until 1 November 1949.

The Mission of Miyazaki-Oita was separated from the diocese of Nagasaki and became independent mission on 27 March 1928. Fr. Cimatti became its ecclesiastical superior. It was erected into a Prefecture Apostolic only in 1935. Fr. Cimatti became its first Prefect Apostolic until 1940, when the Japanese government, in an environment of extreme nationalism, gave order to all foreign superiors to resign. He was the first to resign, and for this he thanked the Lord.

6. The Formation of Personnel

The problem of personnel always bothered Fr. Cimatti for the development of the missions and of the province. Indeed, there was the need of missionaries from abroad; but the formation of local vocations was also urgent. He had spoken of this to Fr. Ricaldone, who had given him promises; but they were not immediately sustained. It is marvellous to note that when in 1928 the Salesian mission opened in Siam, it immediately began with 28 missionaries, while in Japan, there were only eight, one having gone back home. In 1929, there were 46 in Siam, and in Japan 11. Compared with other provinces of the East, the Province of Japan is that which has received less personnel.

After so much insistence, on 31 December 1928, three new missionaries arrived (but all three did not last long in Japan), and in January 1930, another 10 followed. Of these, some were 17 years old and have hardly finished the novitiate (five of these returned home after a few years). Years later, others aged 16 came to Japan to make the novitiate. To learn the language, it was thought opportune to send young personnel. Evidently, the problem of their formation was not an easy solved, since there was not the place and the personnel adapted. Because of this, one would understand the insistence of Fr. Cimatti to the Superiors of Turin that they send him the necessary personnel. We can read for example these passages of letters:

3 October 1927 — to Fr. Rinaldi:

“Our work is becoming known slowly, but surely. In January, I hope to publish a pamphlet on Don Bosco (as propaganda) in Japanese, and perhaps begin a newsletter. Oh, how much good can be done with the press... And how much there is need of it! Beloved Fr. Rinaldi, help us. You await Fr. Ricaldone, who will make concrete proposals for the novitiate, etc. But remember that if in this year or in January you do not send two or three, we lose a year, always for the difficulty of the language. I ask only two or three for every year, as St. Francis Xavier. Please think truly of this.... Be convinced that for Japan, to gain a year is a big thing – to lose is an immense loss”.

28 October 1927 — to Fr. Ricaldone:

“Please permit me to insist on the question of personnel. You know in what conditions we find ourselves with the language. I already have two Christians in formation; and indeed they are promising (one is 50, and the other 30).

And there is already the need of doubling for the religious service, at least monthly. Not sending even only two or three means a year lost. You are aware that in Japan we arrived 40 years after the first missionary expeditions, how long and rough has been the way. For this, please send by January at least some of those who have already been designated for Japan. I ask the same number that St. Francis Xavier asked (and I would like to have his holiness and courage to succeed as he succeeded to obtain it) – «send me three every year». Reflect, most beloved Fr. Ricaldone, and for the good which you demonstrated for Japan, come to the decision to content me at least in part. You can do it; you want it!

On Cimatti's future... Oh, beloved Fr. Pietro, it is not for me, but it is for my soul and for the beloved Congregation that I speak, and for souls. May they leave me tranquil to work with the broom in hand, and in the liberty to move myself, not at the service of obsequious etiquette, but with the poor legs and arms God has given me. But what you wish is to harness a donkey with flowers and blooms? (This, I was reading, in fact, this morning on St. Francis of Sales). He is always a donkey. I have thought that I should not find myself after all in this worse situation... *ipse fecit nos et non ipsi nos*. I have the firm conviction that Don Bosco and Don Rua would have done so, as Fr. Cimatti does. May they leave this Romagnolo in the freedom of the sons of God".

This last paragraph revealed an aspect of the soul of Fr. Cimatti: he had an innate adversity for offices. One would understand that the voice of Fr. Ricaldone had arrived to his ears, who was proposing him as future Prefect Apostolic. He protested repeatedly to the Superiors. He feared not to be Salesian anymore. At the end, when, in 1935 the nomination came, he accepted it, as always, he was accustomed to do in front of obedience. But when his past-pupils of Valsalice sent the clothes and the signs of the office, he sent them back, saying to them to sell them and send the money instead for his poor.

Another point which he held so much at heart were the native vocations. It was his conviction that «Japan must be converted by the Japanese». Thus, from the beginning, he set his eyes on some young people who showed some hope of becoming Salesians. After several failed attempts, in 1930, he decided to open a minor seminary or aspirantate, adapting provisionally some rooms of the residence of Nakatsu, until 1993 when he could construct the Minor Seminary of Miyazaki, which became the seedbed of vocations of the Apostolic Prefecture and of the Congregation.

The clerics who arrived, having finished their study of philosophy and practical training, had to start theology. And the Superiors, notwithstanding the contrary opinion of Fr. Cimatti, obliged him to send

them to the Salesian Seminary of Hong Kong. But this attempt failed. Half of them returned to Italy. Only four were ordained priests. Since then, they frequented the Diocesan Seminary of Tokyo. However, account of the war, it was necessary to open the Salesian Theological Seminary in Tokyo.

The Salesian novitiate began in 1935 in Tokyo, and in 1936, there were already the first Japanese Salesians. In the same year, the first three foreign priests formed in Japan and in Hong Kong were ordained. In 1939, the first diocesan priest, fruit of the Minor Seminary of Miyazaki, was ordained. Unfortunately, during the Second World War, almost all the Japanese seminarians and confreres were called to arms and lost their lives.

There were actually about 100 Japanese Salesians; almost all of them became Salesians after the war.

7. The Apostolate of the Press

One other point to which the first missionaries gave great importance was the press. It was extraordinary to see how already in 1928, after having been in Japan for only two years, they have been capable of translating and printing the life of the Venerable Don Bosco and of Dominic Savio written by Don Bosco. This was followed by Don Bosco Blessed, and then by Don Bosco Saint. Moreover in the same year, 1928, they published a monthly newsletter of eight pages entitled "Don Bosco", which is the actual monthly magazine entitled "Vita Cattolica". Moreover, for some years, every 15 days, they published a leaflet of religious and moral arguments, to distribute to Christians and pagans. Where the missionary did not arrive, the press did.

And this was the beginning of the Salesian publication "Don Bosco" which did so much good for the Japanese Church.

In 1930, the "Unified Gospel" came out in the spoken language (Holy Scriptures was always in the literary language). Then came the series "Catholic Readings - Katorikku Kowashu" which had more than 100 small volumes. But with the war, it had to be interrupted for lack of paper. One cannot count how many books were printed by Don Bosco Press before and after the war.

In 1930, a printing school was established, annexed to the church of Oita. This was transferred in 1935 to Tokyo near the technical school

“Ikuei”, so meritorious in this regard. With this, the Salesians of Japan continued the ideal of Don Bosco who wanted to be at the vanguard in this field.

8. 6,000 Letters to Superiors, Friends and Benefactors

Fr. Cimatti did everything to make known the mission. In his letters to the Superiors, it was usual that he attached articles for the Salesian Bulletin and the Gioventù Missionaria. His reports were much awaited. This encouraged his collaborators to do the same.

The financial necessity forced him also to do this. But his correspondence was not limited to the material aspect. It was full of faith and of spiritual teachings. For this, his past-pupils and friends were tied up with him. He gave counsels to sustain them in the faith. There were about 600 letters collected for his cause of beatification. Here are two examples:

19 October 1926 - to Fr. Carlo Braga:

“My Fr. Carlo, I wish to be among the first! Happy feastday! Which I do not foresee when this letter will arrive. To tell you that I remember you and that I will remember you is nothing... You know this.

Courage Don Carlo! Here is a commission for you from Him!

Don Carlo, I am happy for you! Continue, but with calm, sweetness, charity, not only towards the others, but also towards yourself, *corpo e anima!* - Did you understand?

Everything goes well here, even discussions using this ostrogothic language and writing. But «dan - dan, soro - soro, botsu - botsu» (in Japanese, it means «a little every time»), one proceeds. All well and cheerful, thanks to God.

Pray! I cannot offer you gifts; but only prayers for you and for your Chinese.... Long live Saint Carlo! Long live Fr. Braga! Long live Fr. Rector! Long live the Chinese Province! Long live all of us and... till we meet each other in Heaven. I bless you. Your Fr. V. Cimatti”.

20 October 1926 - to the cleric Franco Amerio:

“My good Amerio, Thank you for your letter!

It seems to me that there is still not in you (at least reading in between the lines of your letter) that state of complete calmness, an indispensable condition in order to act on a fixed plan. Therefore: (1) You must stay

tranquil where you are, because it is there where the Lord has put you. (2) Do everything that the Superiors tell you. (3) Frequent union with God with ejaculations, aspirations, etc. (4) In moments of pride, make yourself familiar with this ejaculation: "Jesus, for You!

It is wrong to aim at the summit of perfection. (a) You cannot see it. (b) You cannot reach it, *oca* (excuse...! you know its meaning) that you are.

I repeat: (a) the past is past, and water that has passed does not grind anymore; (b) the future...you do not know it: it is in the hands of God; (c) the present *moment* is yours: journey through it not watching neither up nor down; neither to the right nor to the left; *not looking* at the results (it is *obvious* that they are few or nothing); *not wanting them ascertained*, but acting in the present *moment* for *Him*, and with *Him*. It is the practice in order to be calm and to be pleasing to God; it is the asceticism of Don Bosco, who responds to the asceticism of St. Francis. But are you so *hard* not to understand the facility of this system? Therefore, actuate it with all your power".

But what will men say to you? *Mah!* They may say what they want. You do that which you must. And in moments of darkness, a little visit to Jesus, a breath of air from the tabernacle, a little music of five minutes, a little laughter, or a little rubbing of the hand or a little dance... and everything is finished".

9. The Music as Means of Apostolate

Finally, we mention one of the means of apostolate used by Fr. Cimatti was music. Aside from being a composer, he was a most able pianist and organist, with a beautiful baritone voice. Fr. Margiaria, then, was a good tenor, and Fr. Liviabella a good baritone. The three of them could do a concert. The first was performed, after only half a year of their arrival, for the 700 year anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi, upon the request of the Franciscans of Kagoshima. After this, the requests were so many, that they performed about 2,000 concerts. In 1934, they performed even in Manchuria, in North and South Korea. During the intermissions, they would put some religious pieces in which the related explanations served as a homily. With this, they could also enter where it would have been impossible for the missionary to put his feet. Everything served to make known and to attract the sympathies towards the Catholic Church. This he learned from his first concert.

8 October 1926 — to Fr. Rinaldi:

“17 September. Great musical concert in piano, harmonium and chant at Kagoshima. The Franciscan Fathers, to whom that province was entrusted, asked me to bring our contribution to honor our great Italian Saint and to make a little Catholic propaganda.

I agreed willingly, and thanking the Lord, everything went beyond our and their very expectation. With the help of the good Franciscan Fathers, it was a great success (*fece furore*, we would say in Italian). With Fr. Margiaria and Fr. Liviabella, we presented a musical program almost entirely in Italian, alternated with French and English music, accompanied by the piano or by organ, with two repeats.

At 15 p.m., for the students of the colleges (over 500), and at 19 p.m. for the public (over 2,000 persons) in a big Japanese theatre. Deo gratias!

Singing hymns to Jesus, to Mary, to St. Francis of Assisi, to Don Bosco, to Italy... I thought of the Saint of poverty who was called «minstrel of God», then to Don Bosco who did not disdain to do acrobatic acts.

Strange beginnings of the missions for us Salesians in the design of Providence! Each piece is listened to with religious attention and crowned by applause at the end. And even before beginning the act, the executor bowed before the public.

Deo gratias! Deo gratias! Also this music will be a great means, because the Japanese people likes and appreciates European music, diametrically opposed to its own kind of music, which is full of sentiment and serene melancholy”.

We have already mentioned the 31 songs composed from the books of the elementary schools. Of the musical compositions of Fr. Cimatti, about 400 are in Japanese. The first sang mass in the Japanese language was his. And it is dated 1940. And this, 25 years before Vatican Council II.

His greatest musical composition is the Grand Opera “Hosokawa Grazia” in three acts, on the libretto of the Jesuit Father Herman Heuvers. Performed for the first time in 1940 as lyrical theater, it was completed by him in 1959 when he was already 80 years, performed several times, of which the last time was in October 2004, in the Opera City Hall of Tokyo. There are 49 operettas, 18 sang masses, 83 Tantum ergos, etc.

All these materials, together with the letters, the collection of fossil, insects, shells, vegetables, photographs, and other historical relics are collected and ordered in the “Cimatti Museum” of Chofu, where there is the collection of the history of the Japanese Province. It is a sign of the untiring activity and dedication of the first missionaries for the Kingdom of God and for the salvation of souls.

Conclusion

On the occasion of the centenary of the Chinese Province, I wanted to emphasize the beginnings of the Japanese Province in its relations with China. After the separation, the relations between the two provinces did not weaken. The exchange of preachers for spiritual retreats, the collaboration in travels and in economics, the friendship between the confreres continued and still continue.

Speaking of Japan, the discourse is necessarily centered on Fr. Cimatti. He was the charismatic figure who managed to overcome and make others overcome the first difficulties, during and after the war. Even today, he is the example of the true Salesian. For this, he is called "the Don Bosco of Japan". His cause for beatification has been introduced; in 1991, he was declared Venerable.⁵

⁵ The originals of the letters of Fr. Cimatti to the Major Superiors cited in the text are found in the Salesian Central Archive (ASC) in Rome. There also is found a copy of his correspondence with the Holy See. For the letters addressed to private persons, the originals (when these are available) or their copies are found in the Cimatti Museum (CMT) of Tokyo. The transcriptions of the letters of Fr. Cimatti by Fr. Alfonso Crevacore in chronological order and in the alphabetical order according to the recipients are found in the Cimatti Museum of Tokyo. Moreover, there is a copy of the transcriptions in chronological order at the Salesian Pontifical University of Rome, and those in alphabetical order according to recipients at the Salesian Central Archive. At the Historical Institute of the Salesian Pontifical University, the letters of Fr. Cimatti are being computerized for a future critical edition.