

THE FIRST SALESIANS IN EAST TIMOR: 1927 - 1929

*Amador Anjos SDB**

Introduction

The purpose of this work is to show the process of the first presence of the Salesians in East Timor, between 1927 and 1929.

It is a meteoric presence for it did not last two whole years and it is also intriguing due to questions that rose. In fact, how is it possible that the Salesians decided to abandon the Island shortly after a year and a half, when the Salesians had accepted the administration of a school of arts and crafts existing already in Dili (capital of the territory) – after having celebrated a contract with the Bishop of Macau, José da Costa Nunes, for a sexennium – what important reasons led the Major Superiors to take such a decision before the bilateral contract celebrated in January 1927 come to an end?

Such questions we tried to answer based on existing documents, mostly in the Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Rome) and in the Archive of the Portuguese Salesian Province (Lisbon), to try to dissipate the heavy cloud of mystery that wondered the island and in the range of the Provinces of the Salesians in Portugal and China.

Our investigation was based upon the following documents:

- Letters (the ones that were possible to consult) by Fr. Pietro Ricaldone, Prefect-General and afterwards Superior-General of the Salesian Society; Ignazio Canazei, Superior of the houses of the Salesians in China; Erminio Rossetti, Superior of the Salesian Mission in Dili – 1927-29; Calisto Caravario, E. Rossetti's fellow worker in the Mission; José da Costa Nunes, Bishop of Macau;
- Diary by Calisto Caravario;
- Report by Pietro Ricaldone, on the extraordinary visit to the Far East in 1927 (Relazione...);
- Report on the first presence of the Salesians in Timor, by Erminio Rossetti ("Note sul Vicariato di Timor-Dili", 9.12.1935);
- Proceedings of the Superior Chapter [Council] ("Verbali delle Riunioni dei Capitolari").

* Fr. Amador Anjos is a Salesian historian based in the Provincial House of Lisbon in Portugal.

It is also fitting to mention the book by Teófilo Duarte on Timor (Timor-Antecâmara do Inferno, Famalicão, 1930), whose mandate as Governor of the aforesaid colony (1927-28) occurred at the same time as the first presence of the Salesians in the Island.

We believe that any other documents that might appear besides our archive research will not change substantially the conclusions we take.

1. Antecedents (background)

Based on what we achieved, the perspective of the Salesians entering in Timor to collaborate in the missionary work of that afar land in Southeast Asia, which depended on Portugal until 1975, goes back to the last decade of the 19th century. And it was due, firstly, to the Jesuit priest Francesco Saverio Rondina.

1.1. Mediation of Francesco Saverio Rondina

This Italian Jesuit was very acquainted to the Portuguese overseas action in the Far East due to having worked in Macau. He came to Lisbon in 1859 – the start of the restoration of the religious order Society of Jesus in Portugal – where he exercised the professorship for a brief period of time in the school Colégio de Campolide. In 1862, he arrived in Macau, where he still teaches in the famous school Colégio-Seminário de S. José administered by the Jesuits. His influence in this new field of action was remarkable given his vast culture. Nine years gone by, he had to leave Macau and returned to Italy to become part of the editorial body of the magazine “Civiltà Cattolica”. Through his contacts with the Salesians, he came to know that they were in a way interested about the missions in China, a thought that continued since the Founder.

In his vast correspondence with Arturo Conelli, he tried to show him that the better way to enter the Chinese Empire was through the city of Macau, in which was advisable to set an advanced post. At the same time, he offered to be the mediator between the Salesians and the Bishop of that territory and to mobilize his local friends, as to realise such a project. In a letter dated September 1890, Rondina makes a significant reference to the chances of the Salesians to also set foot (and even before) in Timor, which was part of the diocese of Macau:

"I have just received from Macau a letter from Fr. Nunes, my confrere, written in the name of the Bishop, in which he tells me that His Most Reverend Excellency has gladly accepted my project on introducing the Salesians there. In his recent visit to the Island of Timor [...], he understood the great need of evangelic workers [...]. Therefore, see if your Superior would be willing to send some missionaries to Macau, as to follow the Bishop's requests in that colony, with the purpose of evangelizing Timor and then having also a house in Macau, which would be equivalent to setting a foot in China, as the venerable Don Bosco passionately desired".¹

Less than a month after, the Superior General of the Salesians, Fr. Michele Rua, wrote to the Bishop of Macau, António J. Medeiros, showing himself willing to uphold the wish to have the Salesians in Macau and Timor.

"Reverend Excellency [...]. The eminent Fr. Rondina explained the contents of the letters addressed to him from Macau, on behalf of Your Excellency, showing the desire to have the children of Don Bosco in your diocese [...], which means that it would be our intention to establish ourselves permanently in Macau [...]. After establishing this mission in Macau, we would gladly take charge of evangelising Timor".²

In another letter written two years later, Rondina points out Timor again as an eventual first missionary goal:

"As far the Chinese mission is concerned, I have received letter from our confreres in Macau, which tell me that for now it is impossible to found [here] a school [due to an economic recession in the territory]. An attempt by the Portuguese Government might be well succeeded if the Salesian Congregation [firstly] accepts the mission in Timor, dependent on Macau".³

1.2. *Priority of Macau*

According to Fr. Michele Rua's letter, we know that the missionary perspective in Timor provoked enthusiasm; however, the proposal of Macau was seen as a priority. Actually, everything led to the goal of opening here the first presence of the Salesians in the Far East.

¹ Letter *Rondina-Conelli*, Rome, 10.9.1890, quote by A. KIRSCHNER, in *Don Bosco and China*. Macau 1970, pages 97-98.

² Letter *Rua -Medeiros*, 3.10.1890, in A. KIRSCHNER, in *Don Bosco and China*, page 99.

³ Letter *Rondina-Conelli*, 3.12.1892, *ibid.*, page 124.

Several difficulties delayed such a realisation and we distinguish the following: (a) the disease of Fr. Conelli chosen to lead the group of missionaries going to Macau; (b) the refusal, at a given time, of the government of Lisbon in paying the respective travel fares.

Finally, in February 1906 – after several requests from Bishop João Paulino de Azevedo e Castro – the group entered Macau commanded not by Fr. Arturo Conelli, weakened due to the disease, but by Fr. Luís Versiglia, who later became bishop and martyr in China. The work that awaited the Salesian missionaries in Macau was the Orphanage Imaculada Conceição (an institution dependant on the diocese), in other words, a boarding school of arts and crafts for poor Chinese children and young people.

1.3. Mediation of Bishop José da Costa Nunes

Only in 1927 – in line with the wish of Rondina and the Superior-General Fr. Michele Rua did the Salesians entered Timor. For this purpose, contributed the effective persistency of José da Costa Nunes, Bishop of Macau between 1919 and 1940, and a close and dedicated friend of the Salesians. He had visited the territory both in 1924 and 1926, realising its religious state.

He verified particularly, on his second visit, the precarious state of an existing school of arts and crafts in Dili, while remembering that the Salesians would be the right people to take care of it, having in consideration the success obtained in Macau and in many other places. When returning to Macau (January 1927), where at that time resided the Superior of the Chinese province of the Salesians (Ignazio Canazei), José da Costa Nunes tried straight away to arrange a meeting to expose to him the problems of the mission in Timor.

Ignazio Canazei, an Italian, approved the proposal after obtaining assent of the Provincial Council and the Major Superiors. The proposal covered the administration of the above mentioned school and the responsibility of the parish of Dili.

2. Covenant

Both parties agreed to sign an agreement for six years, which ensured the rights and obligations of each party during this period, at the end of which, the situation would be reevaluated.

The ASC has a declaration by Canazei, which displays the terms in which the situation occurred:

“Last January, the Bishop of Macau asked us instantly that we accepted the small professional school in Dili. The Provincial immediately after the agreement of his Council, regarding that the means for the maintenance of the new house and the Salesian staff were assured by means of a contract and that it was easily possible to find the necessary people to erect the new house (at least six confreres), sent a telegram right away to [Don] Filippo Rinaldi [Superior-General], asking for his approval. [Don Filippo Rinaldi [also] answered with a telegram on 21 January: “Accept opening Timor”.⁴ Meanwhile it was established between ourselves and the Bishop a contract (covenant) to regulate the new house of Dili(Timor) for a period of six years. Macau, 31st of January 1927. P. J. Canazei”.⁵

We transcribe only the following articles of the contract:

1- The School of Arts and Crafts of Dili (Timor) is trusted to the Pious Salesian Society, which agrees to give to its boarding students a professional, civil, moral and religious education according to its teaching methods.

3- The power to enroll or to expel students belongs to the Administration of the school, giving preference in the admission to those recommended by the Mission.

4- The Administration is free [regarding] the discipline and the running of the school

9- The director will be paid 70 patacas⁶ monthly; the priests 50; the students/clerics 30 and the masters 40.

12- All improvements introduced in the school belong to the Mission...

18- The validity of this covenant will be six years. When one of the parties wishes to change it, it must notify the other party, at least six months in advance. Macau, January 1927.⁷

3. The Island of Timor

Timor is an island off Southeast Asia in the archipelago of Sonda, 430 miles off Australia. It has around 34,000 km². A Portuguese colony

⁴ Cf ASC (Archivio Salesiano Centrale [Roma]) D 873, Verbal V.

⁵ AIC (Archivio dell’Ispettorato Cinese [Hong Kong]).

⁶ The ancient *pataca* corresponded to 9.50 liras, as it said in the Italian text (note).

⁷ ASC F 437.

since the 16th century, its domain was divided between Portugal (eastern half) and Holland (western half) from the middle of the 17th century onwards.

Together with the western side of Timor the islands of Solor and Flores continued to depend on Portugal until the middle of the 19th century, when they were given to Holland. The Dutch half accompanied the formation of the present Republic of Indonesia (1945). The other half, East Timor, with around 19,000 km² was kept under Portuguese domain until 1975, when it was invaded and occupied by Indonesia. We will only be concern about this eastern half.⁸

The christian mission of Timor in the Islands of Solor and Flores, from the second half of the 16th century until the beginning of the 18th century, was mostly work of the Dominicans whom, for over a century, had the government of the island in their hands under the double religious and civil direction. With the expulsion of religious institutes of the Portuguese domain in 1834, the missions were abandoned almost completely. In Timor, due to the religious people backing away, the Portuguese presence also became insignificant, for they were the ones that gave religious and civil consistence. In fact, the engagement they put in building churches and organising catechesis centres also corresponded to the engagement they possessed in building and feeding schools and assistance centres.

After a long period of missionary decline, that lasted almost half a century, came a period of revival with the clairvoyant and promised work of Fr. António Joaquim Medeiros – member of the Missionary Society of Cernache and later Bishop of Macau – initiated in 1875. It was mainly after his second visit to Timor (1877), being a General-Vicar and accompanied by seven missionaries of the same society who worked there, that their dynamic and organised action was felt at the levels of evangelisation and culture. As a Bishop, he introduced on the Island the religious order of the Canossians and opened the way to the Jesuits that started in 1899

⁸ The takeover of East Timor lasted until August 1999, the year in which, under the protection of the United Nations, the people of East Timor were allowed to express through a referendum, their will to be an independent country. Before and mostly right after the referendum, the territory suffered horrible atrocities provoked or supported by the Indonesian forces that were against the independence movement, atrocities which terrified the civilised world. Regarding the Japanese invasion between 1942 and 1945, during the Second World War, it left the island in ruins and took thousands of lives. And after thirty years, the price of the subjugation of East Timor by Indonesia, translated into more than 150,000 deaths. Meanwhile the independence would be proclaimed and worldwide acknowledged on 20 May 2002.

(two years after the death of the Bishop), their missionary work in Soibada, where they founded a secondary school which stood out due to having educated many leaders of Timor.⁹

Unfortunately, this evangelic and promotional impulse in favour of the people of Timor was stopped by a new strike by the republican regime (1910) against the Church and its missionary activity.

After a decade of turbulence, the Church managed to restore and recompose itself and to reassume the missionary activity with the support of the State. It was in this climate of slow and fragmentary recovery that the entry of the Salesians in Timor in 1927 fitted in.

4. The long-last realisation of the dream

Thirty-seven years passed between the time in which Fr. Rondina presented the Salesians the proposal to launch a missionary work in Timor (1890) and the moment when the realisation came true (1927). The people chosen for this work were the following: Fr. Erminio Rossetti (superior), Fr. António Carvalho (parish priest), Calisto Caravario (student of Theology)¹⁰ and two lay Salesians: Luigi Venturelli (locksmith master) and Roberto Verona (carpenter master). Six or seven months later another lay Salesian would join them: Antonio Narciso (factotum). They were all Italians except António Carvalho, who was a Portuguese.

4.1. The journey

The journey of the five missionaries from Macau to Timor lasted twenty days: from 17 March to 6 April. As the young Calisto Caravario wrote in his diary on board the ship *Tjimanoeck* – which received them on the 7th in Hong Kong – was a merchant ship and on top of that carried “more than 2,200 Chinese [immigrants accommodated in any way on the deck and giving] a truly sad spectacle”. This would be enough for us to imagine how uncomfortable the passengers were, at least until the island of Samatra and Java, where most of them were dumped, including three dead people.

⁹ It was also this Bishop that opened the Salesians (as we saw) the path to Macau and Timor.

¹⁰ Calisto Caravario would suffer, a few years later, the martyrdom in China together with the Salesian Bishop Luigi Versiglia (1930). Both were canonised on 1 October 2000.

However, it is noticeable that the narrator of the journey does not stop with unpleasant references related to the life on board the ship. He prefers to call the attention to the exotic curiosities and beauties of the many places where the ship passed, some of which can be seen closely such as: Padang, Batavia (Jakarta), Samarang, Macassar, Waingapu, Savu, Roti, Kupang and Atapupu (the last two harbours are close to the Dutch Timor). In Kupang, capital of the Dutch half, they descended and visited the city, enhancing its beauty. Referring to this moment of first contact with the island of Timor, Caravario writes: "We have reached the land of our mission, the land which [will be the object] of our love and perhaps our permanent dwelling".

4.2. *Arrival in East-Timor: first impressions*

They arrived in Dili, the capital of East Timor, around three o'clock on 6 April. "I thank the Lord from the bottom of my heart – adds Caravario – for helping us and calling us here". The superior of the Mission, Fr. Manuel Patrício Mendes, was expecting them together with some priests that offered them a most cordial welcome. What followed was the visit to the parish and the house that awaited them and where they would develop their activity in favour of a youth that needed everything. Before the picture that was presented to him, Caravario exclaimed: "Hooray for poverty!" Then, he suspended the diary to start again only in February 1929, after the closing of the Salesian work in Dili was ordered, as someone who writes his memories and refers to a parenthesis in life.¹¹

In this part of the diary, Caravario introduced, besides other aspects, the physiognomy of the territory comparing its climate to an everlasting spring, the backwardness of the population of the city, its great poverty and insufficient source of food, its almost abandonment by the central administration and its almost lack of missionaries, consequence of the expulsion of the religious orders in 1910. At the time, the only remaining institute working in Timor was the institute of the Canossians, which after the expulsion in 1910, returned in 1923.¹²

¹¹ C. CARAVARIO, *Diary*, page 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, page 20. The Jesuits, also expelled in 1910, would return in 1958 (and stable in 1961) after the Salesians, which entered again in 1946.

A small group of secular priests (nine or ten) attended in a way, to the pastoral needs of these poor people. One of the most negative aspects the missionaries had, were the bad examples and the radical ideas of the Portuguese workers serving the State, some of which were “sons of the revolution”.¹³

On the other hand – warns Caravario - the native population, having in consideration their good nature and the fact that they depended on no organized religion, showed itself receptive to the evangelic message: “The field is very wide and presents less difficulties compared to other places”.¹⁴

4.3. *First steps*

A letter from the Superior of the mission, Fr. Erminio Rossetti, addressed to the Superior General and published in *Bolletino Salesiano* (August 1927), explained how it all happened in the beginning. It started by presenting a flattering perspective regarding the missionary work:

“With suited means and staff, we could rapidly extend ourselves to the whole territory of [East] Timor where close to 200,000 natives are still pagan and we would like to see them, in a future not far away, as sons of the Church”.¹⁵

Led by the desire to know the reality of the Island in its chorographic and human aspects, a few days after the arrival in Dili, he went on a journey of 15 days to the innermost territory, cohabiting with the veteran of the Portuguese missionaries and visiting the main centers of the Mission. During this journey he would admire the “wonderful vegetation” and contacting with all native population, he felt impressed by their “great simplicity of habits” and with no knowledge “of a world different from theirs”.

A special reference to the School of Arts and Crafts in Dili was made, for it was this activity that determined the coming of the Salesians to this place:

“We have opened within a week the three workshops for locksmiths, carpenters and shoemakers; the students are 25 at the moment; they give hope and demonstrate good will. We hope to be able to have more students, as

¹³ *Ibid.*, page 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, page 20.

¹⁵ BS, August 1927, pages 241-242. The total population of East-Timor, according to the letter, was 500,000 inhabitants.

soon as we can find the means that allow us a better organisation and a better coverage. The house has a completely Salesian orientation. We have started with a few basic exercises for a band of music and singing. They already learned almost some of our chants and part of the «Mass of the Angels» and we feel happy about continuing with enthusiasm this education that became a very functional and effective mean of christian education, especially regarding the missions”.¹⁶

Before ending the letter, the author referred to the needs, some of which regarding the most basic and necessary things, such as nocturnal lighting. He therefore appealed to benefactors, to allow the acquisition of “a small dynamo with a small oil engine or another system [that] allowed them to lengthen the day for a few hours, giving life to this poor house and becoming the source of well being to all the mission”.¹⁷ Caravario gave us an identical testimony of extreme poverty in Timor in his diary, right after visiting the school and the parish.¹⁸

The initial enthusiasm of the new missionaries in carrying out the endeavoured work, soon found some internal problems. The shoemaking workshop stopped working in June 1927, due to the quitting of the (non-Salesian) master. The same happened to the locksmith workshop, in April of the following year, due to the fact that the Salesian master had to return to Italy because of his bad character.¹⁹ Misunderstandings between the parish priest António Carvalho and the Superior aggravated the situation. Despite these unexpected internal obstacles, the relationship between the Salesians and the external environment (the civil authorities, secular priests and the people in general) were always excellent.

5. Broken perspectives

Although the material conditions were not the best, the perspective of the future was still hopeful: “a very wide field” and “less difficulties compared to other places” to the evangelisation action, as the young Caravario writes; the possibility to quickly reach all of East Timor and to effectively contribute to turn “the 200,000 natives” into christians, as Erminio Rossetti says. This would be possible in a short or medium term,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ C. CARAVARIO, *Diary*, page 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, page 21. The carpenter workshop was the only one continuing to work.

if the staff would come to support the aspirations and to concretize and organize action.

Before this scenery of needs, on one hand and optimism on the other, how do you explain that after less than a year and a half, an order from superior in the centre of the congregation determined the immediate exit of the newly arrived missionaries to the island of Timor? We were presented with a new matter, as the Salesian Bishop in Timor Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo says, that was kept secret and surrounded by mystery and that needed to be cleared. And that is what we would try to accomplish in the following pages.

6. Pietro Ricaldone and the Salesians in Timor

Believing the declarations Fr. Erminio Rossetti had given in an interview with the Provincial Armando Monteiro in 1962 (Lisbon), Fr. Ricaldone would have been the only one or at least the main responsible for the closing of the Salesian work in Timor.²⁰ After taking notice of the acceptance of this work, the Prefect General of the Salesian Society, according to Rossetti, directed a serious accusation more or less in these terms: "The Holy See offers important and promising missions and you decide to open here such an insignificant school with no future! You'd better close it down!".

One must realise that Fr. Ricaldone, when visiting the Far East in 1927,²¹ he had included in his diary/journal, a journey to Timor to understand the viability or impracticability of the work, but the Superior General discouraged him given the great distance of the island and the need for him to return as fast as he could to Turin. However, it was settled that the visit – not made by him – would be carried out by Canazei as soon as he could. Meanwhile, after little more than a month journeying to the Far East, Fr. Ricaldone wrote two letters, one in January and the other in February, to Canazei clearly expressing what he thinks about Timor:

²⁰ At the end of the 1920s, Fr. Pietro Ricaldone was the strong man of the Salesian Society, regarding not only his function in the Congregation – Prefect General or Vicar of the Superior General – but also the age and fragile health of the latter. The weight of his authority was felt for thirty years: from 1922 to 1932, as Prefect General and from 1932 to 1951 as Superior General.

²¹ Shortly after his departure from Turin, the Superior General authorised the opening of the house in Timor.

"If you find a way to retrieve the Brothers in an honourable way (coll' onore delle armi), do it (fallo pure): we would be extremely pleased. You can base yourself on the fact that, the conditions proposed by the Bishop are no longer sustainable".²²

"Here, we are worried about that institution. When they think it suitable, they will expel us from [Timor] also. Further more, the distance and isolation frightens us. We would not think it wrong if, in a polite manner, we would become free of that weight, about to turn into a nightmare [Noi non vedremmo male che, in bel modo, ci liberassimo da quel peso che risulta un incubo]."²³

Ricaldone's thought would definitely weigh on the judgment that Canazei himself would lay down regarding the Salesian work in Timor, by visiting the island shortly after.

7. The determinant opinion of Provincial Ignazio Canazei

The visit of the Provincial Ignazio Canazei to East Timor, lasted for almost a month: from 19 April to 15 May 1928. Thus, Canazei had enough time to calmly reflect and analyze the Salesian work in Dili, as well as the conditions for future development, offered by the context of the island.

As it says right at the beginning of the letter, he rode on horseback the whole territory of the mission, to have the most exact idea of the whole. In his appreciation, the negative aspect were dominant over the positive ones, but one cannot deny the main purpose of his ideas regarding the conditions of the territory and the Salesian work.²⁴ On one hand, if the very modest people showed receptivity, if the missionary work itself and in perspective promised to be fruitful, if the government saw with good eyes the Salesian works and was willing to support them and help them financially, in case they would project beyond the school and to work amidst the people needing the evangelisation and promotion;²⁵ on the other hand, the following aspects were weighed negatively, besides the cultural delay of the population, the isolation of the Dili community, it was too far away from any other Salesian house, troubled and aggrieved religious life; difficulties of communication; sparse popula-

²² ASC, B 0790561, letter *Ricaldone-Canazei*, 21 (?).1.1928.

²³ ASC, B 0790562, letter *Ricaldone-Canazei*, 21.2.1928 (uncertain date).

²⁴ However the precariousness of the Salesian work in Timor was mainly due to having a much reduced staff.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, page 1.

tion; misunderstandings between the secular clergy and the government of the Colony... Considering all these and other facts, Canazei declared not to feel enthusiastic at all to accept such a mission.²⁶

The other facts refer mainly to the Salesian work itself,²⁷ which he thought insignificant and without possibility (or will?) to wind it, by reinforcing the staff. It was an "insignificant school of 20 students", reduced to a carpenter workshop with little application in the island. Before such a situation and with no will to assume evangelic responsibilities outside the school, there was nothing left for the Salesians to do, but to pack their bags and leave.²⁸

The following passage of the letter-report leaves us perplexed and raises several questions:

"[If] we were to remain here, we would have to take into our account at least a part of the mission, which would imply increasing the staff considerably [...]. But [as one understand] from his last (or the last but one), I clearly understand that the desired solution from his Superiors is to leave this place. We shall go within weeks of course, but if we must go I would say: let us go right now. The Bishop will say that we are little serious: you accepted a school and after a year, you leave it without accomplishing any program! But we shall answer him: there is no signed contract that binds us. He might add: accepting the school means signing the contract at least for six years. No doubt that at the moment of presenting the request to [open] the house in Timor to the Superior [General], the Provincial Council had in view the extension of our action, as the Bishop himself had once suggested. But if that extension is not approved by the Superior Chapter [General Council], our only solution is to leave".²⁹

Our perplexity before with what is stated above, is due to several incongruities that are quite visible, some of which Canazei himself expresses in the form of an imaginary dialogue with the Bishop of Macau. Amongst the interrogations that arose, we explain the following ones. If the Provincial Council thought of a future extension of the work, why not provide the necessary and capable Salesian staff for that purpose?³⁰ If a formal agreement between Canazei and the Bishop of Macau had been

²⁶ ASC, F 156, letter *Canazei-Ricaldone*, Dili, 1.5.1928, page 1.

²⁷ That is, the School of Arts and Crafts. The parish is practically ignored: perhaps because, according to declarations of the Fr. Rossetti, the parish priest (António Carvalho) maintained a weak connection with the community as he leads the pastoral activity.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pages 1,2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, page 3.

³⁰ The initial group soon lost an element whose spirit shown irreconcilable with the religious life (Venturelli). And the case of Fr. António Carvalho complicated the situation.

established (abovementioned), which was implied from the Salesians the acceptance of a work for six years, how does Canazei asserts that there was no written contract that bounded the Congregation? Unless, it was an informal agreement that an internal problem of the Salesian Province in China has to settle regarding the missionaries who worked there, as Canazei himself says in a letter to the Superior General, alluding to the opening of the work in Timor as a providential opportunity to clear the overload of missionaries in China.³¹ In this case, and considering the repetitive complains of the Superiors for lack of staff, we would think that by referring to the excess of missionaries in China, Canazei had in mind that the presence of some elements was dead weight and embarrassing. Which, in the context of the letter-report, would be little ensuring of the quality of the group chosen to Timor. The hypothesis of Canazei being too fast and sudden about accepting the proposal of Timor in 1927, could be confirmed by the severe way Fr. Ricaldone reprimanded him:

“Here, is also visible the little sense of the Provincial. While Monsignor Versiglia [Salesian Bishop ahead of the vicariate of Shiu Chow, China] often requested staff, he [Canazei] sends a telegram to the Superiors telling them to accept the house in Timor to occupy the staff. Without knowing neither the place nor the conditions, he throws the Brothers on a little island [located] at 20 days or more travelling by boat, where there is no possibility of development and jumping into the dark: we must add that it is a work of the Patronage, to which I already referred to [...]. Not forgetting we had already accepted the house in Hong-Kong; the visitor was arriving; and institutions of that type are not arranged by telegram”.³²

As we have seen above, in an important quote from his letter-report from 1928, Canazei says that in the end, his point of view coincided with the desire of the Major Superiors, or at least the Prefect General to whom the report was written, to abandon Timor: “But [as one understand] from his last (or the last but one).³³ I clearly see, that the desired solution by the Superiors is to leave this place”.³⁴

³¹ “Questo sbocco di personale per Timor fu per una parte molto provvidenziale, perché al momento in Cina ne avremmo troppo. Anzi di chierici ne abbiamo ancora troppi” (ASC F 156, letter *Canazei-Ricaldone*, Macau, 25.1.1927).

³² ASC FIS 8, “Relazione visita straordinaria. 7. Timor”. We must not deny the pertinence of this observation by the Prefect General. The visit of Canazei to Timor in 1928 should have been made before accepting the work. The problem of the Ecclesiastical/Royal Patronage will be approached next.

³³ Reference to the letter or letters of Ricaldone aforementioned.

³⁴ ASC F 156, letter-report *Canazei-Ricaldone*, page 2.

When later, in the middle of the 1930s, the perspective of Timor was opened again to the Salesians, Fr. Ricaldone already as Superior General, clearly expressed what his personal position was in 1928, being still the same in 1934.

Here is how he expressed himself to Fr. Carlo Braga, Provincial in China through a letter:

“As you know, the matter regarding Timor is very difficult. You must remember that it was I myself, who proposed the closing of that house and I confess to you that, I don’t feel willing to open it in the same conditions”³⁵.

After referring several difficulties aforementioned (isolation, distance, complicated accessibility), he gave great importance to the difficulties coming from the Portuguese Patronage. So being it, it seems the right time to dedicate an expanded space to this matter.

8. The shadow of the Patronage

It would be wise to remember, in a short summary, what this right or privilege represented in the beginning and throughout history. This right or privilege, was granted by the Apostolic See, in the middle of the 15th century, to the Portuguese Crown and extinguished with the independence of the colonies from the 1960-70s onward.

Thus, the right of the Patronage constituted, as Nicola Kwalsky writes, “the only effective means to initiate and develop the missionary work [throughout the discovered lands]. [Such institution] is connected to its time and must be regarded in consonance with the time’s criteria”.³⁶ Such institution implied a group of rights (such as the presentation of the bishops and the submission of the missionaries to the Portuguese State) and obligations (such as building churches and other ecclesiastic support facilities, encouraging the missionary vocation and a financial help to the workers of the Gospel). While the just balance between rights and obligations was kept,³⁷ that is, until the middle of the 18th century – the Patron-

³⁵ AIC, letter *Ricaldone-Braga*, 20.11.1934.

³⁶ Nicola Kowalsky, *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, vol. IX, col.528, 1952. The right of the Patronage granted to the Spanish Crown (Patronate).

³⁷ A relative and unstable balance, that is, in accordance with the needs of the human institutions, mainly, as it happened, when expansionist and political intentions interfered with spiritual or religious motivations.

age had sense and contributed to the propagation of the faith, although with undeniable shadows, limitations and abuses.

When the Jesuits were expelled in 1759 by the Marquis of Pombal, the decline of the missions depending on the Portuguese State started, because he took from them the main source of missionaries, the order Society of Jesus. The Patronage had no longer meaning when, in 1834, all the religious institutes, fundamental to the overseas missions, were expelled by the liberal regime. And hence, the plain validation of the measures adopted by the Propaganda Fide, so as to fill in the gaps rising every year.

The Apostolic Nuncio, Vincenzo Vannuteli, had reason to blame the Portuguese government, in 1887, on one hand for persisting in reclaiming a historic right and on the other for equally betraying historic compromises, by setting the greatest obstacles to the evangelisation and continuing to oppose the religious congregations. This happened with already tangible signs of change at the time.³⁸ This change, in a sense of reopening the religious congregations and consequent missionary recovery was however, contrasted by a new expulsion of the same congregations in 1910 by the founders of the Republic.

When the Salesians entered Timor by the end of the 1920s, several congregations were already established – including the Salesian Congregation that had started again the activities in our country in 1920 – and with them, the slow awakening of the missionary work sheltered by the Patronage. It must be said, confirming the truth, that the support given to the missions was many times defended by the governors of the colonies regardless of the sectarianism of the central government.

One of the Salesians, who showed himself more critical towards the Portuguese Patronage, was undoubtedly Fr. Ricaldone. Amongst his declarations, we can mention the ones that can be found in the aforesaid letter to the Superior of the Salesian Province in China (Carlo Braga) in 1934, when the chance of the Salesians returning to Timor was suggested:

“The Superiors might be willing to study the possibility of [going to Timor again], as long as it was possible to carry out a true mission with several centres, to be able to form a Visitatoria.³⁹ But how can that happen, if, as you know, they are works of the Patronage, in which soon there will be

³⁸ According to Nuno da Silva GONÇALVES, “Padroado”, in *Dicionário de História Religiosa de Portugal*, vol. III (IP), Círculo de Leitores, 2001, page 366.

³⁹ *Visitatoria*, in the Salesian terminology refers to an almost-province.

pressure from the government and the Bishop demanding Portuguese staff, which we do not possess now nor will in many years to come? This is the main matter, to which you must maintain firm. Unfortunately, every time we must deal with the Patronage, things always end badly".⁴⁰

In the report on his extraordinary visit to the East (1927), Fr. Ricaldone had already showed his thought on this matter:

"A mission that does not depend on us but on a Bishop, furthermore being a Bishop of the Patronage, will never develop completely according to our criteria, but will have to follow the policy of the Bishop and in this case as well, indirectly from the [Portuguese] Government".⁴¹

We add two more witnesses about the matter. There is in the ASC a memorandum (pro memoria) in Italian dated of 1 April 1941,⁴² and saying "riservato all'Ispettore",⁴³ containing in his seven-numbered statement of the case, the following affirmation: "For now, the Patronage will accept any [missionary] staff, but afterwards will demand national staff and will send us away, as it happened before".

After regretting the order of closing the house in Timor, as we have seen, Calisto Caravario added in his diary, consonant with the decision of the Superiors:

"However, I can not dismiss the accuracy of the thought of the Superiors, in abandoning works dependent on patronages and strange missions, due to the fact that they can never reach the desirable flourish [floridezza] of the Salesian life".⁴⁴

About leaving Timor, Caravario wrote a letter to Fr. Ricaldone repeating more or less what was in the diary, stressing and deploring the situation of dependence on a contract:

"When I heard about a possible abandonment of this work, it seemed to me that such should not happen but, after seeing the course of the events, I got more and more convinced that obedience is always the best. In fact, the

⁴⁰ AIC, letter Ricaldone-Braga, Turin, 20.11.1934.

⁴¹ ASC F 156, *Relazione...*, page 20.

⁴² To the date follows 5.319 (466) Port(ogallo).

⁴³ The word *inspector* meaning *provincial* comes from the Founder of the Salesians and is still used in several countries, such as: Italy, Spain and countries from Latin America.

⁴⁴ C. CARAVARIO, *Diary*, page 22. How to explain then, the flourish/might that the Salesian work would have in Macau?

conditions we would have, connected by contacts and little more than ex-ecutors of the will of others, there was nothing Salesian we could do, while there are many other places of true Salesian work that await us and reclaim the help of our beloved Congregation".⁴⁵

These critics towards the Patronage, deserve a few observations. First of all – we must admit – everyone including the Salesians, were right to criticise it regarding what could be criticised. However, we think that these particular critics – and so to say dated – do not correspond to the historical reality as we can see next.

Fr. Ricaldone affirms that every time the Salesians had to deal with the Patronage, things always ended up badly and suggested that the national feeling of the governmental and ecclesiastic authorities, would lead it to do away with the foreign missionaries, as soon as they could find national staff. This feeling was also referred to by the aforementioned memorandum, which stated that the foreign Salesians were already being removed from the territories under the Portuguese domain.⁴⁶

However, similar accusations were done heedlessly and kept general: no concrete fact was introduced. On the contrary – for what we know of the history of the Salesians in Portugal and his domains – things did not go badly at all. In the several places of the Patronage that they were received in (Macau, Millipore-India, island of Mozambique, Timor and Goa), the Salesians always found a climate of cordial welcome and could do, except for Timor for the already known reasons, a successful and lasting work mainly in Macau.⁴⁷ And there weren't traces of suspicions or hindrances or any expulsion by the civil or ecclesiastic authorities, although almost all of them were foreigners. In 1913, the expulsion of the Salesians established in the island of Mozambique, did not depend on the

⁴⁵ ASC A 3490813, letter *Caravario-Ricaldone*, Timor-Dili, 2.4.1929.

⁴⁶ Verify abovementioned letter *Ricaldone-Braga*, 20.11.1934. The undeniable national feeling present in the Portuguese colonisation, was actually common to all the countries in the expansionist Europe, particularly stressed in the middle of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. An interesting case – that has similarities to the Portuguese Patronage – is the one of the *Associazione Nazionale per soccorrere i missionari cattolici italiani*, founded by Ernesto Schiaparelli in 1887 in Florence. He was engaged to support moral and economically the Italian catholic missionaries abroad, his final purpose, – in accordance and articulation with the Italian government – being to make the same missionaries, cultural agents and deep down, politicians of Italy. The case of the Salesian missionary Luigi Versiglia, who – also contrary to the Patronage – tried to get close to this institution, is quite clear.

⁴⁷ And in Timor, an identical success would happen with the re-entry of the Salesians in 1946.

fact of them being foreigners (two were actually Portuguese), but on the persecution against the Church in 1910, which affected all the missionaries, both foreign and national.⁴⁸

On the other hand, we must honestly recognise that, subject to the critics from Ricaldone and others, there was fear of an intromission by the civil authorities in the Church's affairs. And this was a grounded fear. What we find strange about Ricaldone is not criticising the Patronage, but the fact that he only saw in it hindrances and misdeeds.

Regarding the presence of the foreign missionaries side by side with the Portuguese ones, it would be good to remember that it is constant in the Lusitanian missions. Actually, without their cooperation and given the limitations of our country, it would be impossible to satisfy even the minimum apostolic needs of such large overseas territories. In these territories, men as famous and important as Xavier, Valignano, Ricci, Nobili, Schall and Anchietta, were able to develop freely their extraordinary mission action. Sometimes the number of permanent foreigners was higher than the national. Close to our time, between 1942 and 1950 (we were still in the period of the excessive national feelings), of the 354 missionaries connected to the Patronage, 172 were Portuguese and 182 were foreigners and mostly Italians.⁴⁹

As for Caravario, let us stick to some of his declarations in a letter to Fr. Ricaldone, in which he pointed out his problem regarding "contracts": considering the concrete case, the contract or covenant related to the house of Timor. It appears that the young missionary should not be very convinced about what he now wrote the Prefect General, after the enthusiasm so little ago demonstrated regarding the field of work assumed by the Salesians. These could move at their will ("The direction is completely free when it comes to [conducting] the school" – Article 4 covenant) and it corresponded perfectly to the charisma of the Salesians, which privileged the schools of arts and crafts for poor boys. What sense was there, in telling that in this matter the Salesians were or would be nothing but executors of the will of others, connected to a contract (as it

⁴⁸ The Salesians had the same luck in Macau in 1910, but they would return after only two years. Contrary to the affirmation of Ricaldone – "a mission [depending] on a Bishop and furthermore, a Bishop of the Patronage, would never completely develop according to our criteria" – the Salesian experience in this territory is an example of true success.

⁴⁹ Distribution of foreign missionaries: 83 Italian, 56 Dutch, 21 Swiss, 11 German and 6 French. Verify Luís F. THOMAZ, "*Missões*", in *Dicionário de História Religiosa de Portugal*, vol. III (IP), page 219.

is obvious, any contract binds in a bilateral way, implying obligations and rights from both parties) and that the activity of the school, the Salesians had nothing in it? It seems that our young missionary only started to see the work in Dili with hazy eyes, after knowing that his Superiors thought it impracticable: "...we had the most warm and beautiful hopes...[but], when I heard about a possible abandon of this work [decreed by the superiors] I got convinced...".

Contrary to this wavering position, Fr. Erminio Rossetti, Superior of the mission, kept thinking that this would have a future and always considered its closing hasty and ill-timed. Also contrary to those condemning together the Patronage, Ignacio Canazei recognises that not everything represented disadvantages by living in their shadow. Writing to Fr. Ricaldone a few days after he concluded his extraordinary visit to the Far East, he told him:

"Certainly we cannot forget that the Portuguese Mission helps us economically in a large scale, keeping the staff, seeing to the costs of [our work] and leaving a good margin. If abandoned completely the missions of the Patronage, we would be deprived of all these benefits".⁵⁰

The last paragraph of this passage seems to imply that the Prefect General of the Congregation would be inclined to closing all the works of the Salesians regarding the Portuguese Patronage. Fortunately, such a measure did not occur.

9. The decision and its repercussions

Pietro Ricaldone, the consignee of the letter-report of Canazei about Timor (1 May 1928), answered in the name of the General Council on 2 August 1928, agreeing with his presented reasons regarding leaving Timor. The letter starts by resuming the report of Canazei:

"Your thought is this: 'It is not possible to continue in the present conditions; thus, the religious spirit suffers and the work cannot develop. It is only possible to continue in Timor, if a mission area or territory, that multiplies the works and the staff, can be accepted. Since it is not possible to accept this proposal, closing the house would be a better option'".⁵¹

⁵⁰ ASC F 156, letter *Canazei-Ricaldone*, Macau, 19.12.1927.

⁵¹ ASC F 156, letter *Ricaldone-Canazei*, Turin, 2.8.1928.

And he introduced right after, the thought of the Superiors and added others to the ones indicated by Canazei, mainly the several missionary engagements with the Holy See, which absorbed all the available staff.

Regarding the whole, the following conclusion was made: "It is better to retire before assuming engagements we could not keep".⁵² The assumed engagements to the great missions, to which all the staff was insufficient, would justify the closing of the small and "insignificant" mission in Timor. It seemed to us that we have a fact that can be explained, considering its own sensibility of the historic moment through which the Salesian Society went, in the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. As a matter of fact, the Salesian Society then lived in a climate of intoxicating euphoria. Actually, it grew for every one to see, through out the several continents and was prepared to celebrate the beatification of the Founder.⁵³

Furthermore, it felt highly prestigious with the attitude of the Holy See, when they were trusted with vast and important mission territory, mainly in Latin America, India and the Far East. Well, no one besides Fr. Ricaldone lived this moment of excitement more intensely. And it was precisely then, that he made, by order of the Superior General, his extraordinary visit to the missions in India and the Far East: a visit made throughout the whole of 1927.

To the eyes of the Prefect General, marveled by the reality and perspectives of the great missions in India and China, what meaning could have such meagre mission hidden in the Insulindia?⁵⁴ It is understandable, through this point of view, that the small mission in Timor had to be sacrificed in the name of more prestigious missions. Following, we shall see the repercussions of the decision taken by Turin.

We shall start by the reaction of the Salesians who worked on the scene and were disregarded in the process. In his extraordinary visit to the Portuguese Province in December 1935, Fr. Antonio Candela (member of the General Council) asked Fr. Erminio Rossetti a report on the circumstances of the first presence of the Salesians in Timor and on the hypothesis of restarting the interrupted missionary experience on that ter-

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ The beatification of John Bosco would be in 1929 and his canonisation in 1934.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that, the thoughts of Ricaldone on Timor, were the same ones as Luigi Versiglia's on Macau, at least for a few years (from 1908 onwards). Afterwards (from 1912 onwards), this pessimist vision seemed to change.

ritory. The old Superior of the extinguished mission made a quite complete exposure, following a scheme previously presented to him.⁵⁵

Regarding the motif or motives that led the Major Superiors to abandon Timor, Rossetti has only this bitter ease:

“[Leaving Timor] was always something of unknown [to us]. In 1927, the Superior [Council] of Turin authorised the acceptance of the house of Dili and the Salesians went there. In December 1928 they received, all of a sudden as a lightning [improvviso come fulmine], the order to set aside the contract and to leave. This provoked displeasure and annoyance [in and out of the community], complaints and protests from the Bishop, the Governor and the missionaries in the island. However, the Salesians obeyed and in the Easter of 1929, abandoned Timor amongst tears of the students and the grief of friends and admirers”.⁵⁶

In his book *L'opera Salesiana in China*, Fr. Mario Rassiga wrote that Ignacio Canazei, on 18 March, “communicated to his Council that not only was he authorised to close the house of Timor, but was also ordered to do it. Naturally, this matter caused many astonished commentaries”.⁵⁷

Regarding the situation and conditions of the Salesians in the house of Timor, referred to as very badly by some of the responsible Salesians, especially by Fr. Ricaldone, the report of Rossetti in 1935 expresses itself in a non-sombre way:

“[There was] plain freedom of action, having only to render account to the vicar [of the Bishop of Macau] once a year, about the financial situation of the school and the religious movement of the parish, since it depended on him. The authority, whether religious or civil, never interfered with the internal life of the Salesians and always shown itself more than respectful towards them and was always willing to favour them; and would be willing to accept any condition if they did not leave. The [Salesian] staff was paid in proportion to the number, not as much as the Government [paid] the missionaries of the Patronage, but more than sufficiently to cover all the expenses and to economise. The Salesians remained very little time in Timor to realise the inconvenience of the convention could cause. On the other hand, the ecclesiastic authority did everything in their power to satisfy the Salesians to the point, where they did not paid too much attention to the more arguable part of the convention”.⁵⁸

The testimony of Rossetti joins the one of Caravario:

⁵⁵ *Note sul Vicariato di Timor* (Lisbon, 9.12.1935).

⁵⁶ ASC F 437, *Note sul Vicariato di Timor*.

⁵⁷ Part I, page 93.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

"[Before leaving to Timor,] the hopes we had in Macau were a lot and many could have been realised, but the Superiors did not think the work should continue. The students [corresponded] and the work would be extremely useful to the colony, since there were no other native workers. The work for the four projected workshops would not lack and the school [with the right material] could live on its own.⁵⁹ United to the school, the parish would complete the work and would enlarge the field [of action]. With the fitting staff, the festive Oratory would have excellent results [...]. The work started to feel as if paralysed [little after it started], when, the Major Superiors decreed its closing, moved by the will of the Salesians to work in an independent territory [that is, independent from other entities]. Personally, I was very displeased, for I had before me a new and large field with the possibility to [successfully] exercise the firstlings of the sacerdotal ministry".⁶⁰

The way these two Salesians talked of their brief missionary experience in the far flung Timor, was far from connecting to the petty terms, found in several other documents referring to the same geographical and human context.

Particularly shocked with the decision, the Bishop of Macau, José da Costa Nunes, manifested his grief as soon as he found out about the matter. In a letter directed to the Provincial Ignazio Canazei, with whom he had established the covenant, he underlines the imprecise way the responsible Salesians resolved the matter, setting at risk their own honour before the Portuguese Government, to which they had also assumed their compromises, counting with the loyal and lasting cooperation of the Salesians:

"[With the authorisation to open the house of Timor, given by the Major Superiors] I had the right, I believe, to think that the compromise towards me could not easily be unmade [...]. In reality, it was because I believed the staying of the Salesians in Timor would last, that I unorganised that school, working in any condition, fired the masters and part of the students and made a few compromises with the Portuguese Government [...]. Will I now start the suspended work? How to justify myself before the Government of Timor? In which moral situation will the Prelate of Macau find itself, knowing of the efficiency [of the action of the Salesians], officially declaring that it would take charge in solving the problem of the professional schools in Timor?"⁶¹

⁵⁹ This appreciation opposes the one from Canazei: "Here in Timor, the school of arts and crafts would not work out very well. Certainly, [the workshops] would always maintain very modest proportions. We only feel the need of limited number of joiners (or rather carpenters) and agriculturists or, more precisely, coffee, coconut and rice agriculturists" (letter-report *Canazei-Ricaldone*, Dili, 1.5.1928, pages 1-2).

⁶⁰ C. CARAVARIO, *Diary*, pages 21-22.

⁶¹ AIC, letter *Nunes-Canazei*, Macau, 23.9.1928.

Amongst those that grieved the departure of the Salesians from Timor, Rossetti mentioned Teófilo Duarte,⁶² who was Governor of the territory at that time. He expresses his grief in the book he published in 1930, "Timor - Antecâmara do Inferno". In this book, he showers the Salesians and their teaching methods with compliments and at the same time, strangely pointing out the secular clergy as the reason for his departure: "It was a shame that the secular clergy did not think they were valuable help, but as undesired competition, thus forcing them to abandon the workshops they had built a year before".⁶³ Besides being poorly informed, the Governor shows the displeasure against the priests of the diocese.

Contrary to what T. Duarte says, they would always see the Salesians with good eyes and also condemned the departure of the Salesians from Timor, as Rossetti himself implicitly declared by including them in the expression "the missionaries of the island", since apart from the Salesians, the only missionaries in East Timor, at the time, were the secular priests and the Canossians. Furthermore: what Rossetti wrote to Fr. Ricaldone before leaving Timor, was the strongest contradiction of the accusations against the clergy of the island:

"Throughout the last year, the rumour that the Salesians and the mission priests lived in conflict has been heard: it has been implied that the reason the Salesians were leaving was due to the intrigues of the abovementioned priests. [One or another problem that appeared was due only to certain imprudent positions taken by the Salesian Parish Priest António Carvalho]. Those of us working in [the school of] Dili [...] live in perfect harmony, not only with the ecclesiastic authority but also with each and every one of the fine Portuguese priests, working to properly serve the mission, for over more than twenty years".⁶⁴

10. The retreat

After officially receiving the order of departure from Timor on November 1928, the Salesians missionaries could not do it immediately, since they had not enough money for the journeys, as Canazei says to Fr. Ricaldone: "The best would be to leave [Timor] as soon as possible. But

⁶² Teófilo Duarte was Governor of Timor between 1927 and 1928, exactly when the Salesians were also in the island.

⁶³ Teófilo DUARTE, *Timor-Antecâmara do Inferno*. Famalicão, Tip. Moderna, 1930, page 373.

⁶⁴ ASC F 437, letter Rossetti-Ricaldone, Deli, 9.1.1929.

Fr. Rossetti as just wrote to me saying that it is not possible to leave the island due to lack of money. And I do not have it as well [...]. For that matter, it will be necessary to wait [a while longer]”.⁶⁵ And they had to wait until the beginnings of April, as Calisto Caravario wrote in his diary: “After delaying the departure, at least five times, the day finally arrived”.⁶⁶ The farewell was filled with emotion: “The boys accompanied us till we reached the ship and when the moment of the departure came, they started crying in such a way that we could only feel pity. One might think that under that semi-savage appearance, there was little sensibility but on the contrary delicate feeling emerged!”.⁶⁷

And by adding that “all were deeply sorry for our departure and that they hoped the Salesians would return to Timor”, it seems to regard not only the boarding students but also the whole population of the town. It is actually what Erminio Rossetti clearly manifests: “...the Salesians [...] abandoned Timor amongst the tears of his students and the sorrow of their friends and admirers”.⁶⁸

As Erminio Rossetti himself said in the interview in 1962, “he thought to convince the authorities, the priests and the people” that the Salesians would later return to Timor and, as proof that they did not wish to break ties with the island, they had decided to take with them, to Turin, six young boys from Timor. These boys would continue their education and return someday to their people, prepared to give them qualified help and, who knows, even one of them as a Salesian!

Actually, the missionaries went on board the ship with the following young boys from Timor: António Custódio Carvalho, Carlos Marques, Faculto José Madeira, Joaquim Alves Pereira, Luís António Nunes, Manuel Freitas da Silva. Two of them, Carlos Marques and Joaquim Pereira, professed in the Salesian Society and became a carpenter and a tailor, respectively.

Yes, the Salesians returned to Timor, but only after the Second World War, in 1946 and this time the work of the Salesians would gain deep roots and would reach an unusual development, opposing the pessimistic prophecies of Canazei and Ricaldone.

⁶⁵ ASC F 156, letter *Canazei-Ricaldone*, Hong-Kong, 16.10.1928.

⁶⁶ C. CARAVARIO, *Diary*, page 22.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, page 22.

⁶⁸ ASC F 437, *Note sul vicariato di Timor*.

Conclusion

It is quite curious that some of the reasons that originated the closing of the first Salesian work founded in Timor, were also invoked regarding the equally Salesian work in Macau and both integrated in the Portuguese Patronage on the East since 1906.

The way both Fr. Ricaldone and Canazei talked about the work in Timor, considering it meagre and with no future, fitted into a mediocre environment and dependance on the Patronage, coincided more or less with the terms used by Fr. Luigi Versiglia, Superior of the Orphanage "Imaculada Conceição" of Macau, while corresponding with the mother-house in Turin, from 1908 on. However, it is noticeable that a great difference regarding the way the Major Superiors acted in both cases.

Concerning Timor, the Superiors did not hesitate in regarding the contract established with the Bishop of the diocese about the field of work in Dili, as inexistent. Concerning Macau, before the insistence from Versiglia to draw the attention to what seemed to be an environment with no future and to the advantage of looking for another one with larger and safer perspectives, the Major Superiors thought it preferable to comply with the exact seven-year deadline of the contract. Behind the efforts of the General Council in moderating the emotional states of Versiglia, one can detect the prudent and pondered attitude of the blessed Superior General Miguel Rua with whom the process of accepting the aforesaid work actually started.

Irony of history! The two unappreciated mentioned environments, when the work of the Salesians gave its first steps, would become two of the most remarkable centres of projection of the Salesians in the Far East. The Orphanage "Imaculada Conceição", at first however, was modest an institution in Macau, became the mother-house of the Salesians in the Far East spreading the charisma of the Founder all around and to far lands. In moments of persecution in China, it also worked as a school of education (novices and students of philosophy and theology). Apart from the Orphanage "Imaculada Conceição", later turned into a Salesian Institute, other great schools would appear in Macau under the administration of the Salesians priests and sisters. After the territory returned to the Chinese administration, these schools continue presently, to develop their important educational role in favour of the local youth.

In Timor, after the return of the Salesians in 1946, the retaking of the activities retook a rhythm of development that, under certain aspects, is

even more meaningful than the case of Macau. It is enough to say that, nevertheless the tragic events that happened in the territory with the Indonesian invasion after the Second World War, today's picture (end of 2004) is the following: eight houses with great variety of activities; more than 70 native Salesians; a Bishop, Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, Nobel Prize and presently, missionary in Mozambique together with two more compatriots, also Salesians, and 15 novices. This reality has allowed the constitution of a "Visitatoria" or quasi-province (1998), including the Salesians of big Indonesia, whose number is, however, inferior to the natives of small East Timor.

We could still add the case of Goa. Here, some of the Italian Salesians – expelled from India after the Second World War and sheltered by the local Bishop, José da Costa Nunes (transferred from Macau to Goa) in 1946 – started a work, whose development, recently translated into the creation of a quasi-province.

The process of the Salesian work in Timor, as well as in Macau and Goa, leads us spontaneously to think about the evangelic image of the little grain of mustard, which germinated and transformed into a dense plant.