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1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

**“YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH...
YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”**

(Mt 5,13-14)

Presentation of the East Asia - Oceania Region

1. Brief general presentation of the Region. Social situation. – Cultural context. – Presence of the Catholic Church. – Consecrated life. **2. How Don Bosco arrived and his charism has grown.** Don Bosco's missionary inclination was first towards Asia. – Some historical items, starting from Don Bosco's missionary dreams. – Don Bosco was there before the Salesians. – A missionary region. **3. Presentation of the Region from a Salesian standpoint.** The Salesians. – Community life. – Kinds of Salesian works and activity: *Youth ministry - Formation - Missionary commitment and inculturation of the charism - Social communication - Salesian Family - Financial solidarity - Salesian holiness.* **4. Charismatic experiences of greater significance (in the various Provinces).** **5. Some challenges.** **6. Conclusion - “I am always with you”.**

Rome, 25 February 2007

Feast of the Holy Martyrs, Sts Luigi Versiglia and Callistus Caravario

My dear Confreres,

After my letter presenting the South Asia Region, it now gives me great pleasure to speak to you about that of East Asia and Oceania. More than in other parts of the world, this is where Christians in general and Religious in particular are called upon to be the “*salt of the earth*” and the “*light of the world*”. In the face of people with very ancient and venerable religious traditions that permeate their culture to a great extent, it is only natural that Christianity is seen as a western religion and hence something external and foreign. And so followers of Jesus must demonstrate that Christianity, as well as being able to live amicably with other forms of religion strongly rooted in those people, is a religion that can harmonise with every culture in the world, but without becoming identified with any of them, because they must all be purified and raised up by Christ. Hence the need for a competent and sustained effort at inculturation, which demands in the first place that Christianity have a clear identity. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us that being his disciple is a matter of being, not of doing. And this is always an expression of the extent to which

he is “salt” and “light” or, in other words, authentic disciples of Jesus, who does not hesitate to tell his followers how they will finish up if they lose their identity, the same fate as salt that loses its savour: “It can only be thrown away and people will trample on it”.

Our life must be outstanding for its high spiritual quality and be permeated by charity so that both aspects, the experience of God and mission, make of us a transfiguring presence of Christ, who gives light to all who are in the house. That is what Christ hopes for, and I make it my own desire: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (*Mt* 5,16). Speaking of the Christian life as a proclamation, John Paul II wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*: “This proclamation is a mission needing holy men and women who will make the Saviour known and loved through their lives. A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire” (n. 23). For us Salesians these images of salt and fire find their expression in the spiritual and apostolic zeal of *Da mihi animas*, which every confrere is called upon to reawaken in his heart.

In this part of the world, of the Church and of the Congregation there could be no greater contradiction than a Salesian Christian and religious presence that had become secularised, without a clear and appealing experience of God, a bourgeois presence without any solid commitment for the poor that would be an efficacious sign of the Kingdom.

The Region of East Asia - Oceania includes twenty countries, and though it was the final Region to be set up by the last General Chapter, it recently celebrated the centenary of the arrival of its first missionaries. These reached Macao in China on 13 February 1906 to begin the first and oldest – practically uninterrupted – foundation of the whole Region. Rightly can it be considered the cradle of Salesian work in East Asia. Salesian activity in the Region is a tree with already a hundred years of life with no lack of vitality and future promise. It can in fact boast of a considerable number of recent new foundations. Because it is a Region so

diversified in its make up, it includes areas in which the Congregation is flourishing with growing strength, and others to which the Congregation looks with interest and hope. It is a complex and dynamic reality, so much so that in the last 40 years the Provinces and Vice-Provinces that make it up have belonged successively to four different regional circumscriptions. The decision of the GC25 to create a Region on its own seemed the best response to the circumstances and needs of the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Delegations that it now includes.

The Region embraces the following countries: Australia, Cambodia, China (Hong Kong and Macao), the Fijian Islands, Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Laos, Mongolia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Taiwan, Thailand, East Timor, and Vietnam.

It is made up of the following Circumscriptions: the Provinces of China, Australia, Japan, Thailand, North Philippines, South Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, the Vice-Province of Indonesia - East Timor, and finally the Delegation of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

The first five years of the existence of this new Region have revealed many advantages in the possibility of following up the individual circumscriptions more closely and in coordinating them with each other. The Team Visit of 2005, which took place at Hua Hin, Thailand, reinforced the sense of being a Region, which had been the subject of discussion and experimentation as regards various sectors (Provincials, Departments, activities) for at least 18 years.¹ At Hua Hin, however, a true sense of Region was achieved, together with a growth of collaboration and a clear purpose of coordination, expressed in the Document "*Vision-Mission*".

Looking at the situation of the various realities of East Asia - Oceania, where Christianity is no more than an authentic mi-

¹ Cf. *Missionary Animation: First Meeting of the Provincial delegates of Missionary Animation for Asia and Australia*, Bangalore - India, 7-11 October 1992, p. 103.

nority, one is immediately aware of how the Salesians are called to be 'salt' and 'light', of the requirement they have of living the consecrated life as missionaries '*inter gentes*', and of their task of being 'missionaries of the young'. The Catholic Church, and within it consecrated life and the Salesian Congregation, live in an ocean of different peoples, of ancient religions and cultures with deep religious roots which however are not Christian.

This makes a commitment to inculturation all the more pressing, in order to root Salesian life firmly in the different contexts, making it relevant and fruitful, fostering its Christian and charismatic identity with due attention to cultural diversity. At the same time, the fact of being in the minority among the peoples demands of us that in this Region we ***commit ourselves decisively to the development of the missionary dimension of the Salesian vocation, foster a missionary outlook of confreres and communities, and give priority to evangelisation***. It is a matter of a long-term commitment which demands of the Salesian the painstaking acquiring of the ability to dialogue with local cultures and religions.²

1. Brief general presentation of the Region

The Region is very extensive in area. The most outstanding trait is the variety of contexts and situations in which our confreres live the religious life and carry out the Salesian mission. It is not a simple matter to give a brief description of so variegated a social, political and religious situation. I will try to give a broad outline.

The social situation

Among the countries making up the Region there are some which only recently emerged from situations of war, of a struggle for autonomy, sometimes from civil or ideological wars with

² Cf. LUCIANO ODORICO, *Evangelisation and Interreligious Dialogue*, in *Evangelisation and Interreligious Dialogue. Batulao (Philippines)* March 12-18, 1994, p. 47-64.

horrifying attempts at genocide. It can be said that the Region is now peaceful and making great efforts at economic, social and civil development, even though there still exist some areas of struggle and tension prompted by racial, religious or political considerations (East Timor, Aceh, the Fijian Islands, the Solomon Islands, South Thailand, and the Philippines).

In the area covered by the Region live almost a third part of the entire world population, and they are said to speak a third of the world's languages. 60% of the population are not yet 21 years of age. China alone, with its 1 billion 300 million inhabitants, has a specific demographic, economic and political influence superior not only to that of other countries, but even of entire continents. Its adoption of a market economy since 1979, and its recent entry into the realm of international politics make of China an element which naturally influences and will continue to influence even more the social, economic and political life of the entire world. The Region as a whole is very much involved, not to say a ring-leader, in widespread rapid and deep changes which are creating contrasting situations of light and shade, life and death, wealth and poverty, social progress and recession, conquests and defeats. In fact the Region is made up of two continents, with different cultures and religions.

In the Region live almost 40% of the world's non-Christians. Catholics are only 100 million, corresponding to 5% of the population. There is on the one hand a religious reawakening and on the other a growing subordination of religious values to economic development, especially in the big cities. One wonders whether one can really speak of "secularisation" in Asian society, since the term signifies a process developed essentially in the western Christian cultural environment. Reflecting on what has emerged from our meetings concerning missionary animation in Asia we cannot say that secularisation exists, but should speak rather of the "subordination or subjection of religious values to economic development". It could be called *practical atheism* with a smattering of social religious sentiment.

There are also pockets of fundamentalism of greater or lesser activity, as a reaction to the massive social and cultural changes that the people are unable to cope with. The financial crisis of East Asia that was overcome only in the period 1997-1998 gave rise to many questions concerning the economic model underlying the so-called "Asian miracle" and its correlation with cultural values, imbalance, increasing environmental deterioration, social disparity and exploitation of the workforce, growing demands for energy and basic materials, tensions and weaknesses laid bare by the terrible tsunami of 2004 and the terrorist attacks at Bali in 2002-2004.

Widely differing forms of government exist or are evolving: alongside ancient and new democracies (Japan, Philippines, Australia) are found socialist systems, traditional monarchies (Thailand, Cambodia, Japan), and military dictatorships. In particular China and Vietnam, with North Korea and Laos, represent the last great block of Marxist ideology and totalitarianism. All of them have to confront the common phenomena already referred to and which are still growing; the gap between rich and poor, the flight from the countryside and the increase in urbanisation with the consequent cultural dislocation, an industrialisation that pays little attention to the environment, and growing social injustice which risks upending long-time balances. A political democratic awareness is growing and is beginning to be of concern even, to some extent, to countries with a communist regime.

The cultural context

Four basic systems of cultural values can be distinguished.

The first and most solidly established is the East-Asia system with its Confucian and Buddhist roots; its influence extends to much of the Region. This system relies on family and community values; it acknowledges the priority for the individual of his duty towards his family, forbears or clan and, on the other hand, to those who are governing. Study and diligent work are considered important.

The Islamic system, as practised in Asia, is in general more moderate and tolerant than the Arabic type, and is mixed in with some values of popular animism. There is also a mixed environment in the Philippines, where the culture of the Malay majority bears the marks of a long process of Spanish colonisation.

The Pacific system of Melanesia and Polynesia is centred on animism, the family and tribal nucleus, and on the sharing of goods.

Finally there is the western rationalist and libertarian system which is emerging in the Region and which bears with it the roots of the Christian vision and of the rational reaction to it. As is noted in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* (cf. n. 6), this system, at present typical of Australia, is focused on happiness and success, with a growing individualism and strong secularisation.

While we identify the presence of these various systems of values and cultural contexts, we see at the same time that strong local and international migration fosters the blending of these basic cultural and religious elements.

The presence of the Catholic Church

The majority of the Catholics of the East Asia Region are concentrated in the Philippines, a country with a high percentage of Catholics (81% of the 84 million inhabitants), though not without tensions. Two other countries with a sizable percentage of Catholics are East Timor (90%) and South Korea (11%), who together have 30% of the Catholics. For the remaining countries Catholicism is very much a diaspora phenomenon with a percentage of Catholics ranging from 0.4% (Thailand, China, Japan) to 6% (Vietnam).

It is a young Church, with a vitality and courage that is sometimes quite extraordinary, as in South Korea and Vietnam. Though in some places the Church is still considered a western and foreign religion, it is usually seen in a very positive light. Despite the fact that evangelisation in many parts of the Region is relatively recent, the Church has put down deep roots, thanks

also to the very large numbers of martyrs in the last three centuries, many of whom have been already canonised or at least beatified (120 from China, including our own Sts Luigi Versiglia and Callistus Caravario, 117 from Vietnam, 103 from Korea, 247 from Japan, 8 from Thailand, 2 from the Philippines and 1 from Papua New Guinea).

In line with the project of the Federation of the Episcopal Conferences of Asia (FABC) in the past thirty years, much credit is due to the commitment to deepening the guidelines for the integral evangelisation of the Asian environment. One of the main values of these cultures – harmony and accord – suggests as an inescapable requirement of missionary activity a fourfold dialogue (*dialogue of life, of action, of theological exchange of views, and of the sharing of religious experiences*), by means of which the Gospel is shared and communicated to fellow citizens of the ancient non-Christian religions. A historic event was the 1st Asian Missionary Congress organized by the FABC at Chiang Mai (Thailand) in October 2006 with the theme “Telling the story of Jesus in Asia” Recounting the story of Jesus as the best way of proclaiming the Gospel in Asian Countries had been suggested by John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (n. 20).

In the countries of *Oceania* Catholics form a quarter of the population, but live in two situations completely different one from the other. On the one hand there is Australia (with 27% Catholics), a country with a hard culture characterised by a far from indifferent presence of immigrants from Italy and from Europe in general after the second world war, and also Vietnam after the Vietnamese war, where a solid work of evangelisation is needed; and on the other hand there are the Islands of the Pacific, an area of recent evangelisation where the need is to deepen the roots and face the difficulties inherent in the formation of sound local vocations both to the priesthood and to consecrated life.

In all this area the Church is facing the challenge of fostering and inculturating a true and integral missionary spirituality, to

make of the faithful credible witnesses in the midst of the various religions and cultures. Only in this way can the Church overcome the dichotomy between life and faith, between a life centred on prayer and the sacraments and a life engaged entirely in the social area, between a Christian life closed in on itself and a life open to dialogue with non-Christians. The new converts from animist religions like the polytheists of Oceania, or those from Buddhism or from Confucianism of East Asia, have embraced the Gospel sometimes with depth and enthusiasm but sometimes only superficially. There is still a long way to go before the Catholic faith becomes deeply rooted in the soil of the ancient cultures.

Consecrated life

For the majority of the Churches of East Asia the present is like a new springtime with all its promises: the foundation of new local Churches (e.g. in Mongolia, with 450 local Catholics after the first 15 years of missionary work), the birth of new local missionary institutes (Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia), a fresh proclamation of the Gospel and the flourishing of vocations despite the diaspora-like situation (Vietnam, South Korea). Within the Church of East Asia we are witnessing an impressive growth. The last 15 years has seen a fourfold increase in the number of priests, men religious have increased by 40% and women religious by 30%. Hundreds of missionaries “ad gentes” and “ad vitam” have gone out from the local Churches.

In the Pacific part of the Region many religious Congregations are still looking for expressions of consecrated life in local cultures shared by missionary members from abroad and by indigenous members. In Australia on the other hand the efforts of consecrated persons are directed towards pastoral work for vocations and the formation of lay collaborators in line with the various charisms of the Congregations concerned.

I think we can identify four main challenges for Consecrated Life in the Region:

- *mysticism*: in a Region which is in general deeply religious, it is essential to ensure in the consecrated members a strong personal experience of God;
- *prophecy*: religious communities are called upon to be courageous in living the Gospel as an alternative model for living;
- *inculturation* of the Consecrated life, which ensures that the religious do not feel themselves to be like fish out of water nor seem as foreigners in the eyes of their fellow citizens;
- *service* for the benefit of the poor, and those marginalised for economic, sexual, racial or religious reasons.

2. How Don Bosco arrived and his charism has grown

Don Bosco's missionary inclination was first towards Asia

Don Bosco lived the extraordinary missionary springtime of the Church of his day, and originally fostered a missionary vocation with his thoughts on Asia, in particular on China, and more generally on English-speaking countries, Australia among them. This was the missionary world he first approached as he sought his true vocation, making contact at one time with the Reformed Franciscans and at another with the Oblates of Mary, or when he read missionary magazines then beginning to circulate in Piedmont (*Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* or the *Museum of Catholic Missions*). Images conjured up in his mind of the missionary world were predominantly of Asia and especially of the persecutions in China and Vietnam, of the heroism of missionaries and martyrs, of the new era that was opening for the Church and for evangelisation in the wake of the British and French armies. The *Annals*, that Don Bosco began to read from a time soon after his ordination, gave an account almost week by week of the strength and political activity of the West, which made it possible for missionary penetration and the work of evangelisation to be resumed. In consequence, even inhabitants of the Celestial Empire, whose immense number staggered Don Bosco,

could attain salvation. He was particularly impressed by the martyrdom of the courageous young priest Gabriele Perboyre, whose picture he kept in his room and of whom he would later write in the first edition of his *Ecclesiastical History*. In this book, his first serious work which would run into several editions, he wrote about the relaunching of the missions, but especially of the events taking place in those years in China and Japan.

As the fame of Don Bosco grew, the great missionaries of Africa, Lavigerie and Comboni, came knocking at his door in search of help and collaboration. During the First Vatican Council various bishops of China too came to Valdocco seeking personnel. With Timoleone Raimondi, a missionary from the Seminary of Milan and then Prefect Apostolic of Hong Kong, Don Bosco negotiated over several months between 1873 and 1874 about the opening of a house in Hong Kong. The negotiations were unsuccessful and the draft contract remained a dead letter because – though Don Bosco was unaware of this at the time – of a veto imposed by the Superior of the Milanese Seminary. It was in this climate of uncertainty left by the suspended discussions that Don Bosco, convinced by now that it was time for his Congregation to expand to foreign parts, turned his gaze to Argentina, an environment less remote from a cultural and linguistic standpoint, and soon decided to send his first missionaries to work among the Italian emigrants in Buenos Aires and among the Indians around San Nicolás de los Arroyos (11 November 1875). Nevertheless he never stopped thinking about Asia, as witness the fact that he gave Fr John Cagliero less than two years to organise the works in Argentina before leaving for India where he had accepted a Vicariate Apostolic. But South America was to absorb energies and personnel to such an extent that Don Bosco was able to think about China again only in 1885, after obtaining the Vicariate Apostolic of Patagonia. He accepted the fact that it was now too late for him to do anything concrete about China. Later his sons would see what could be done, but for him Asia would have to remain a goal, a dream, a field of work for the future.

In the Barcelona dream Don Bosco was later to see, from the top of the hill of his earlier dream at the age of 9, that in the future a work would be opened at Peking as a fulfilment of his mission to the young that would embrace the world: just as at Valdocco so throughout the world, from Valparaiso to Peking. The vision became a constant preoccupation, an aim and prophecy which would lead him to write in his spiritual testament: "In due course our missions will reach China, and precisely Peking"³ and on his deathbed he astonished Bishop Cagliero by saying to him repeatedly: "Don't forget Asia!"

Some historical items, starting from Don Bosco's missionary dreams

Reading over again our Father's five missionary dreams, and especially the final two, we find that his missionary zeal was directed explicitly towards the people of China, of Mongolia (Tartaria) and of Australia;⁴ this, together with the conclusion already quoted from his spiritual testament, indicates a fervent desire in his heart for the salvation of the young people of Asia. Generations of Salesian missionaries have grown up with the encouraging awareness that Don Bosco had dreamt about them, seen them in his missionary dreams.

The dream of 1886, his spiritual testament and his frequent references in conversations to China, had created a marked sense of anticipation in Salesian circles. Fr Arthur Conelli, to whom Don Bosco had confided his desires with regard to going to China, to such an extent that he was generally considered as the intended leader of an expedition to that country, lost no time after the Founder's death in making contact with the ecclesiastical authorities of Macao. Negotiations took place in three phases and continued until 1905 when the Salesians and the Bishop of Macao

³ Cf. P. BRAIDO (a cura di), *Don Bosco Educatore, scritti e testimonianze*, LAS Rome 1992, p. 438.

⁴ Cfr. MB X,53; MB XV, 91; MB XVI,385; MB XVII,643-7; MB XVIII,72-74.

finally reached an agreement. The first six Salesians, three priests and three brothers (two of them still novices) with Fr Luigi Versiglia at their head, reached Macao on 13 February 1906 and took over the small *Oratory of the Immaculate Conception* entrusted to them by the Bishop. The six set to work at once by opening a school of arts and trades. The first years were difficult and apparently without future prospects. In 1910 in fact the Salesians were expelled from Macao after being caught up in the republican revolution. The set back proved to be only a brief one and led to new fields of work: the first mission in mainland China (at Heungshan, now Zhongshan, 1911-1928) and a return to the Orphanage with a broader contract and new confreres that enabled the Salesians to set up a true and proper school.

In the meantime the Chinese Empire fell and the Republic was born (1911); the new China was anxious to learn from the West, and the school of arts and trades was in a good position to serve as a model for similar institutions to be set up all over the vast territory. The school continued to develop, but expansion took place in another direction when in 1917 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide entrusted to the Salesians a mission in the northern part of the province of Guangdong, detaching it from the Apostolic Vicariate of Canton (now Guangzhou). After a two-year period of preparation the new Apostolic Vicariate of Shiuchow (now Shaoguan) was erected, with Fr Luigi Versiglia as its first Vicar Apostolic. It was the least developed and most difficult of the three territories the Salesians could have hoped for: the Lord was preparing for them a road bristling with sacrifices, but one which the first missionaries, with the First World War only just behind them, were able to face with courage and self-denial. In 1918 Fr Versiglia, on receiving the gift of a chalice from Don Albera, recalled that in Don Bosco's dream of China he had seen two chalices, one filled with the sweat and fatigue of the missionaries and the other brimming over with blood.

Meanwhile efforts made to strengthen and improve the school at Macao were bearing fruit: the government of Hong Kong and

some philanthropists wanted something similar for the youngsters of the British colony, and for it to be entrusted to the Salesians; and from Shanghai insistent requests were coming for the acceptance of an orphanage. Furthermore the first missionary novices from abroad were beginning to arrive, an innovation that led to a good deal of discussion. In 1934 a considerably large group of young confreres set out for Shanghai led by Fr Sante Garelli, a veteran of China. Among them was the cleric Callistus Caravario. They settled in the Chinese quarter among the poor. In 1923 the Chinese Vice-Province came into existence, but found it difficult to take on the new commitments: a good house of formation was needed for the young confreres who continued to arrive from abroad and for the first local vocations, but there was a lack of suitable personnel, as also of financial resources.

Requests were also coming from the Holy See to accept a mission at Kyushu in Japan (1925) and one in Thailand (1925). In this way the first missionaries destined for Japan arrived, led by Fr Vincent Cimatti. With the increasing commitments, in 1926 the Vice-Province was erected as the Sino-Japanese Province. The Provincial had to look after the vast area stretching from Thailand to Japan.

Unfortunately it was not all plain sailing: civil war broke out in China, followed by Bolshevik activity. It was no longer wise to keep the house of formation at Shiuchow, and the novices and philosophy students had to make the risky journey to Macao. The Nationalist and Communist Parties, aided by Russia, joined forces to overcome the resistance of the warlords and unify the country. From Guangdong the army advanced northwards, reaching Wuhan and Shanghai. At Nanking there were violent episodes also against missionaries. The alliance was broken and the Nationalists launched a great purge of the forces of the left. The Salesian school at Shanghai was occupied by the troops and transformed into a hospital for those with infectious diseases. The Superiors decided to evacuate the Institute and send the confreres elsewhere, beginning with the youngest. In this way it was possible to begin Salesian work in Hong Kong ("St. Louis Industrial School"), in

Timor (Dili, where among others the cleric Callistus Caravario was sent) and in Thailand, to which country the Extraordinary Visitor, Fr Peter Ricaldone, transferred the novitiate with the novices, Novice Master (Fr Gaetano Pasotti) and some confreres, 28 in all! Challenges, trials and difficulties served only to foster development: it seemed almost like a return to the experience of the primitive Church, compelled by wars and persecutions to swarm in all directions. In this way two new independent missions came into existence: Japan, which was to have as its Prefect Apostolic (1935) and later its Provincial (1937) Fr Vincent Cimatti, and Siam with Fr Gaetano Pasotti first as Prefect Apostolic (1934), then Provincial (1937) and eventually Vicar Apostolic (1941).

The greatest trial, a real moment of darkness and light, was the martyrdom of Bishop Luigi Versiglia and Fr Callistus Caravario. They would not be the only ones to give their lives in the course of the mission to their flock. Three other missionaries would follow them. Various others died before they had reached 50 years of age, cut down by illness and fatigue.

In the thirties the missions of Thailand and Japan became consolidated, amidst further difficulties and challenges: personnel never sufficient, large numbers of young people to be formed and inculturated, native vocations to be fostered. For 22 years China was led by Fr Charles Braga (1930-1952), the "little Don Bosco of China", formed in Turin under Fr Cimatti and matured in Shiu-chow in the shadow of Bishop Versiglia. He became the Father of the Salesians of China. With him, and prompted by new missionary strategies China became enriched with new satellite foundations. Local vocations began to appear, at first tentatively as though from an arid soil, and then vigorously, especially during the war years when the entire studentate had to move to Shanghai soon after the completion of its residence at Hong Kong. Fr Braga it was who gave life to this period of great poverty, but of even greater Salesian fraternity and communion; he was everything to everyone, This was the golden age in the history of the Chinese Province.

The Province emerged from the war with a strong band of well-motivated confreres and of young people who promised well for the future. In 1946 the house of Peking was opened, the "House of the Madonna", as it used to be called by its first Rector, Fr Mario Acquistapace: the poorest house in the Province! Don Bosco's prophecy had been fulfilled. The Superiors thought it was time to divide the works into two Provinces, one in the north with headquarters at Shanghai, and the other in the south centred on Macao. Japan, on the other hand found that all its local vocations had been swallowed up by the war and they were compelled to begin again from scratch. Thailand, impoverished in personnel because of numerous losses was to find in new foundations the spirit of renewal.

But in fact it was China itself that bore the brunt of the storm. With the advent of Mao and the proclamation of the Peoples' Republic, the Chinese people rose up. Foreigners, imperialists and missionaries were all expelled and their property confiscated: the people reclaimed the right to manage the education of the country by themselves. Some Chinese confreres remained in the country to stay with the youngsters if possible, but before long they found themselves in prison where a number would die, sacrificing their lives through fidelity to the Pope. But also from this tragedy new life was to come. Not only did Salesian works for refugees develop in Hong Kong, Macau and subsequently also in Taiwan (1963), but new foundations were made in other countries of the East.⁵

In 1951 Salesian work began in the Philippines with two schools: at Victorias (Negros) in the south and at Tarlac (Luzon) in the north. In 1958 the foundations in the Philippines were detached from the Chinese Province, to form a Vice-Province which was later erected as a Province in 1963. A great increase in vocations in the seventies and eighties led in 1992 to the Province being divided into two with headquarters at Manila in the north

⁵ On the development of Salesian work in China, see the recent study of Charles SOCOL, *Don Bosco's Missionary call and China*, in RSS n. 49, July-December 2006, pp. 215-294.

and Cebu in the south respectively. To the Philippines were entrusted also the works in East Timor (1975-1998) and in Indonesia (1985-1998). Finally the mission in Pakistan was entrusted to the southern Philippines Province (1998).

Since 1952 the mission had been growing also in Vietnam. After a first foundation at Hanoi with Fr Francis Dupont, who was killed in the war (†1945), the work was taken up again in 1952 with Fr Andrej Majcen. In 1974 a Delegation was set up, which in 1984 became a Vice-Province. The confreres followed the exodus to the south after the population split into two parts, and lived 15 years of isolation (1975-1990) from which they emerged impoverished but highly motivated. In 1999 the Vice-Province became a Province and in 2001 was entrusted with responsibility for the new mission in Mongolia.

Salesian work in South Korea began in 1954, when Fr Archimedes Martelli was sent from Japan to Korea and made a first foundation at Kwangju. In 1972 a Delegation was formed, which in 1984 was erected as a Vice-Province and in 1999 became a Province.

Salesian work in East Timor, after a first tentative attempt at foundation from Macao in the years 1927-1929 was relaunched from Portugal in 1946. Subsequently, during the difficult period of the Indonesian invasion (1975-1999), the work was entrusted to the Philippines Province, passing later to the Province of Cebu in 1992 when the subdivision of the Philippines Province took place. With the increasing number of confreres and foundations, the Vice-Province of Indonesia-East Timor was erected in 1998.

In still more recent years new foundations continued to increase with youthful vigour, spreading in various directions with the ingrafting of Don Bosco's charism in new environments and prompted by a newly found missionary vocation.

The initiative for work in Cambodia came from Thailand and began with the help given to the Khmer people in the refugee

camps. The first foundation at Phnom Penh was opened in 1991. The first Salesian work in Laos began in a similar way in 2004, managed entirely by our Laotian past-pupils, with the assistance of confreres from Bangkok.

Meanwhile Japan opened a difficult mission at Tetere in the Solomon Islands in 1995. Since April 2005 this mission has been part of the new Delegation of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

In the Pacific the Salesians arrived in Australia in 1922, and it is from the Province of Australia that two courageous initiatives have taken their origin. The first of these took the Salesian charism to Samoa in 1978 where it has given rise to many vocations, linked with the formation of local catechists; the second launched the Salesians in the Fijian Islands in 1999.

Don Bosco was there before the Salesians

From the historical details it is clear that some 30 years were to pass between the first request to go to China and the arrival in that country (1874-1906). In the case of the Philippines it took 60 years (1891-1951), and in that of Korea 45 years (1909-1954). For Vietnam it took 26 years (1926-1952), and for East Timor 20 years before the definitive arrival. These delays were due in part to political and social vicissitudes, to prejudice on the part of some ecclesiastical authorities, and to the difficulty of communications between friends of Don Bosco present in local parts of the Region and the Superiors in Turin. In fact from the time of his canonisation in 1934, the holy educator was venerated by local clergy in many places before our arrival.

As is the case in other Regions, it must be said that Don Bosco was known in many countries before the arrival of the first Salesians: the first Salesian Cooperators were there and ADMA, the Association of Don Bosco Boys and schools with Don Bosco's name (Philippines). There were biographies of him in local languages (Korea - Seoul: Review *Kyoh Hyang*, 1934; Vietnam - Phat Diem:

Luk Ly, 1937), there were his statues in local churches and seminaries founded in his name (for example in Vietnam, the Trung Linh Seminary - 1939), there were Catholic schools and junior seminaries founded in Don Bosco's name (as in Indonesia starting from the '40s).

In recent times the response of the Congregation to requests for foundations has become much faster, and the time between the first invitation and the arrival of the Salesians has become much shorter: 3 years for Samoa (1978), 4 years for Pakistan (1998), 3 years for Mongolia (2001). Indeed, in some countries the beginning of the Salesian mission preceded our initiative, as in the case of Indonesia (from the Philippines to East Timor in 1985), in Cambodia (by Thailand in 1991), for Laos (by Thailand in 2004), and for Fiji (by Australia in 1999).

A Missionary Region

The Region has been blessed by the presence of great missionaries, pioneers in some countries: Bishop Luigi Versiglia (1881-1930), Bishop Ignazio Canazei (†1946), Fr. Charles Braga (†1972), Fr. Mario Acquistapace (1916-2002) in China; Mgr. Vincent Cimatti (1883-1965) in Japan; Fr. Andrej Majcen (1905-1999) in Vietnam; Fr. Archimedes Martelli (1916-1984) in South Korea; Bishop Ernest Coppo, Bro. Celestine Acerni (the first Salesian to set foot on Australian soil at Kimberley in 1923) and Fr Joseph Ciantar (1893-1967) in Australia, and many other outstanding confreres.

I would also like to mention some pioneers in more recent years, 'founders' in the respective countries of the Region: Fr Joseph Carbonell in Indonesia, Fr Valerian Barbero in Papua New Guinea; Bro. Joseph Ribeiro in East Timor (1946); Bro. Robert Panetto and Fr. Walter Brigolin in Cambodia (Phnom Penh, 1991); Fr Peter Balcazar and Bro. Francis Tanaka in the Solomon Islands (Tetere, 1995); Fr. Peter Zago and Fr. Hans Dopheide in Pakistan (Lahore and Quetta, 1998); Fr Julian Fox in Fiji (1999); Fr Charles Villegas in Mongolia (Ulaanbatar, 2001).

3. The Region from a Salesian standpoint

The Salesians

The Confreres present in the Region at the moment⁶ are 1,257, with 60 novices and 9 Salesian Bishops. Over the last 20 years the number of confreres has risen substantially by 340 Salesians, with new foundations in more than seven countries with 50 new communities. Some Provinces show a regular growth (North and South Philippines, Korea): others are growing quite quickly (Vietnam and East Timor): still others show a reduced number of confreres as compared with twenty years ago (Australia, China, Japan, Thailand). Today missionaries from abroad form only 15% of the confreres and their average is 65 years. In the same period up to 2006 some 80 confreres born in the Region had left for the missions *ad gentes*. Vocational perseverance is in line with the world average with 46% leaving after profession; although Vietnam has something of a record in this regard with only 5% leaving the Congregation after profession. The majority of the confreres live and work in major cities, and this has an influence on their style of life, on the economy, on the kind of people they are working for and the kind of work they do. No fewer than 353 confreres, almost a third of the total, are in various phases of initial formation. The number of Brothers is increasing thanks to the commitment to vocational promotion in all the Provinces: at present the Region has 201 lay confreres, of whom 47 are in temporary vows.

Community life

Most of the Region's communities, as I have said, are situated in major towns and cities, and in some Provinces there are a considerable number that are linked with various stages of formation, all of which has an influence on the quality of life. Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong confirms that the most important contribution

⁶ Statistics 31 December 2006.

made by the Salesian charism to the cultures of the Region has been its witness to the family spirit which makes both the person of Don Bosco and our Congregation very attractive. There is an ever-greater awareness of the importance of the community and of its witness for evangelisation and vocational growth.

The number of Salesian communities has shown a notable increase over the last twenty years. In 1986 there were in the Region 76 canonically erected communities; in 1996 the number had risen to 106 and in 2006 it had reached 130. And there are also 30 other foundations not yet canonically erected, mainly in mission areas (Pakistan, Mongolia, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam).

Kinds of Salesian works and activity

Youth ministry

As everywhere in the Church of Asia and Oceania strategic importance is given to formal educational structures (academic schools and centres for vocational training). In some areas there is an emphasis on works of a social character which represent a very important help for poor youngsters.

This is one reason why the majority of the confreres are involved in the **school sector**. There are 282 schools with 100,900 pupils, 350 Salesians and 4,200 lay collaborators, the majority of the latter non-Christians. From the small parish schools of East Timor to the big Institutes with thousands of students in Thailand, formal education is a field that is given priority because of the great opportunities it presents in the world of culture in a society still far from the Gospel. In the last ten years also Salesian University Institutes have grown up in the Philippines, in Papua New Guinea, not to speak of the first polytechnic at Tokyo-Ikuei (now known as the "Salesian Polytechnical Institute").

The 106 parishes, with numerous mission stations and a Catholic population of some 876,000, are served by 200 confreres.

From the huge parishes in Catholic locations, with dozens of stations and thousands of Catholics to parishes and mission stations in places of first evangelisation with only a handful of the faithful, we are contributing our specific style of evangelisation to the local Churches.

There are 39 **centres of vocational training**, with 10,262 pupils and animated by 151 confreres. This is a matter of a privileged field in the process of development and in areas of first evangelisation, because it provides a direct response to the needs of poor youngsters, launching them into the world of employment through a solid human, Christian and professional education and training.

Various educational works are flanked by **boarding establishments** or **hostels**, a total of 38 with 3,168 youngsters who live with us 24 hours a day. Such places provide outstanding opportunities for deepening the life of faith of young Catholics, and at the same time give us a gradual and vital way of approaching young non-Catholics in matters of faith. We need only recall that it is from this kind of setting that the most affectionate of our past-pupils emerge and those committed to our mission and to the Salesian Family.

There are 60 Oratories or Youth Centres attended by 16,000 boys and girls, looked after full-time by 68 Salesians. Hundreds of youngsters in developing areas frequent our sports facilities, content with the games provided and motivated by the serene educative atmosphere they find there; there are extra-scholastic activities in developed countries in the area of media education, groups of social service and groups committed to a journey of faith.

The **Salesian Youth Movement** exists in all the Provinces in widely diverse forms, beginning from organised groups in our schools and extending to the voluntary missionary movement developed recently in some Provinces. In the mainly Catholic countries, like the Philippines and East Timor, thousands of youngsters are involved in the movement at national level; in other coun-

tries the commitment is expressed in the projects of groups which meet together for certain Salesian feasts, especially at school or parish level. The finest fruit is undoubtedly the missionary volunteer movement: the "Don Bosco Volunteer Group" in Japan (1991), the "Torch Movement" in Hong Kong (1995), the International Youth Volunteer Movement in Korea (2002), The Missionary Volunteer Movement in Manila (2003), and the early stages of the International Volunteer Movement in Australia (2006). Hundreds of young people, non-Christians among them, have taken part in the Salesian mission; some have also started on the path of Christian initiation and even that of vocational initiation. These movements, with common initiatives around the Region, form a natural link among young people from the different countries.

The Region has examples of 31 different kinds of **social work**, for the benefit of 3,378 youngsters. We are in close contact with street-children, youngsters in reformatories, children of lepers, and children without families, with a variety of educational responses. There are many house-families (Korea, Japan), entire 'Boys Towns' ("Youth off the streets" in Engadine, Australia; "Boys Town" in Taiwan, "Tuloy sa Don Bosco" at Manila, "Don Bosco Boys Town" at Cebu, "Bangsak" in Thailand founded near the island of Phuket after the terrible *tsunami* of 2004); there is also a regular service for delinquent youngsters (Provinces of Korea and South Philippines) and provision for young workers, especially for immigrants from within the country concerned or from outside it (Korea, North Philippines, Japan, Vietnam).

For **vocational promotion** there are 23 aspirantates of various kinds, with some 1,057 young people in a process of discernment. Concern for vocations is a specific trait of our pastoral work in many Provinces, where we have to face many challenges of the Church, with its shortage of clergy and strong diocesan emphasis, and where it is difficult to make male religious life clearly visible. Praiseworthy efforts are being made for this purpose in several Provinces (Korea, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam). A good number of our confreres are from mixed families, Catholic-Protestant, Bud-

dhist, Moslem, and there are indeed some confreres who asked to be baptised so that they could follow Don Bosco.

Formation

In the area of **initial formation**, in addition to the above-mentioned 23 major and minor aspirantates, there are in the Region 6 novitiates, 11 postnovitiates, 7 houses for the specific formation of priests and a house for the specific formation of Brothers. The three houses of formation in the Philippines (novitiate of Cebu-Lawaan, postnovitiate of Canlubang, specific formation for priests and brothers at Manila-Parañaque) are inter-provincial. There are only two Salesian study centres for the postnovitiate: Dalat (Vietnam) and Canlubang (North Philippines), and two for theology: Xuan Hiep (Vietnam) and Manila-Parañaque (FIN). The others in formation attend interreligious or diocesan study centres with Salesians among the teachers. At present some 70 young confreres among the 353 in initial formation are doing their studies or practical training outside their Provinces of origin.

As regards **ongoing formation**, there has been progress at a personal level in responsibility for one's own vocational growth, expressed also in the commitment to draw up a personal life-plan and put it into practice.

In the local communities greater importance continues to be given to the 'community day.' Since the GC25 neighbouring communities have frequently been coming together for the monthly or quarterly day of recollection. For the formation of Rectors some Provinces have produced monthly leaflets (North Philippines, Korea), and all the Provinces try to include this element during their meetings at provincial level. The Rectors are growing in their ability to animate the community from both spiritual and pastoral points of view. Since the '90s the opportunity of formation courses has been offered every three years with the participation of all the Provinces.

The four Regional Congresses of the East Asia - Oceania Region that have taken place since 1986, have increased sensitivity concerning the promotion and fostering of the vocation of the Salesian Brother. The recent Seminar on this theme in Cambodia (2006) was a further step forward, involving all the Provincial Councils, all the vocation promoters and all engaged in formation guidance, for a whole year.

Missionary commitment and inculturation of the Salesian Charism

Over the last hundred years the Region has received about a thousand missionaries from other countries. In the '20s of the last century there was a huge surge of young missionaries, formed in the missionary territories. Working in the Region at the present day there are still some 150 missionaries from abroad. From the '60s of the last century local confreres began to take over the management of the Provinces. Nowadays we have local confreres going into missions *ad gentes*, both within and outside the Region. So far there have been about a hundred of them. The greater number of these have gone out from the Philippines (75), then from Vietnam (25), from Korea (9), from East Timor (6), from Japan (5), and from Australia (4).

Since nearly all the confreres come from backgrounds with a Christian minority, their missionary spirit in general, and in particular the conviction of being missionaries of the young, is of great importance. We have already said that many of the families from which our confreres come, and the majority of the young people we encounter in our surroundings are of other religions. And so in the words of the FABC we can speak of the growth of missionary awareness '*inter gentes*', which well expresses the real situation of the majority of the Salesians. There are five countries still in need of a strengthening of Salesian personnel: Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Mongolia, Pakistan and Cambodia.⁷

⁷ Cfr. AGC 395, *Missionary commitment of the Salesians of Don Bosco today*, p. 64.

The Congregation looks at China with the heart and faith of Don Bosco, but at present must limit itself to continuing to offer services of assistance to the poor and the sick, services compatible with the laws and policies of the country which do not allow the presence and activity of Religious Institutes, especially in the fields of religion and education.

Social communication

From the humble beginnings of the Salesian Bulletin in the individual countries, the commitment in this field has increased to the extent that we now have several publishing houses (*Don Bosco Sha* in Tokyo, *Salesiana Publishers* in Manila, *Vox Amica* in Hong Kong, *Don Bosco Media* in Seoul), which contribute to the growth of the Salesian Family and to evangelisation. Commitment is also growing in the world of audiovisuals, of the internet, of media education in our Oratories and Youth Centres. Recently also two radio transmitters have begun to function, in Thailand and at Tetera in the Solomon Islands.

Nowadays in almost every Province the Salesian Bulletin can be found in the vernacular, and all nine Provinces have their Provincial Newsletter, some of them in digital form. Among the confreres the SMS is used for quick and economic communication.

Particularly significant is the decision by all Provinces to adopt English as the language of communication, which implies the obligation on the part of all the confreres to gradually acquire a working knowledge of the language. The Region also has a network of Salesian news, *AustraLasias Link*, begun in 1997 after a meeting of the Delegates for Social Communication. The editor resides in Rome, and is linked with dozens of correspondents in all the Provinces, and provides a daily service of news of all the Salesian Family. The network was strengthened, after the Team Visit of 2005, by the launching of the new BOSCONET website (www.bosconet.aust.com), which provides resources of Salesianity in English.

The Salesian Family

Animation of the Salesian Family and synergy between its various groups is one of the strong points of the Region. As well as the 1,150 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, there are four other Congregations of Women, all of them born in a missionary context: 1,040 "Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki", founded by Mgr. Vincent Cimatti and Fr Antonio Cavoli; 96 "Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary" founded by Bishop Gaetano Pasotti; 25 "Sisters Announcers of the Lord", a Congregation born in the mind and heart of Bishop Luigi Versiglia and founded by Bishop Ignazio Canazei; and 65 "Daughters of the Queenship of Mary Immaculate", founded by Fr. Carlo della Torre.

Among other consecrated groups of the Salesian Family is the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel (6 members in Australia and Papua New Guinea), and two Secular Institutes: the Don Bosco Volunteers (VDB) with 132 members, launched in 1969 at Macao and now present in all the Provinces; and the Volunteers with Don Bosco (CDB) with 3 members, begun in 2000 in Korea.

Outstanding among the lay groups is the Association of Salesians Cooperators, which is growing in both quantity and quality, thanks to the regular Regional Congresses begun in 1993. Today there are 2,035 Cooperators in 120 Centres, with many young aspirants; they are accompanied by SDB and FMA Delegates. The Don Bosco Past-Pupils are organised in all the Provinces and meet at regional level every four years. Their contribution to the Salesian mission varies from one place to another. They are present in large numbers among our lay collaborators in schools and parishes; they are committed workers in the local Churches, and are also found among the diocesan clergy and in posts of responsibility in the social and political spheres.

Also functioning well in every Province is the Consulting Group of the Salesian Family, and the resulting synergy produces considerable apostolic fruits and growth of the Salesian spirit.

The days of spirituality in all Provinces and the family retreats (North Philippines) are occasions for becoming better acquainted with each other and more effective in working for the young.

There are also some works that are wholly or partly entrusted to particular groups of the Family such as the VDB, the Salesian Women's Association, and the Cooperators (social works in Thailand, retreat houses for young people in the Philippines, the after-school centre at Hong Kong, and the direction of some Salesian schools).

Financial solidarity

With the variety of different situations in mind, we make strong appeals to benefactors and local authorities to ensure the sound functioning of our works, even in non-Christian environments. There are many places in need of external help to which our modest missionary, planning and development offices (stationed in the Provinces of Australia, China, Japan, Korea and North Philippines) do their best to respond.

Provincial solidarity is everywhere on the increase, as also is a professional approach to administration with the regular use of budgeting and balance sheets. Regional solidarity is also growing, and not only when it is a question of meeting emergencies following natural disasters (as, for instance, in 1995 in the Philippines at Bacolor, when the eruption of a volcano buried one of our schools and the associated aspirantate, or the *tsunami* of 2004 in southern Thailand), but also for the development of certain works (e.g. the building of the new novitiate in Vietnam in 2006) or for the support of those Provinces that have many vocations but few financial resources.

Salesian holiness

In some places the Salesian charism has been implanted by great Salesians of whom the holiness or heroicity of virtues has already been officially recognised: Saints Luigi Versiglia and

Callistus Caravario, protomartyrs of the Congregation in China; the Venerable Vincent Cimatti in Japan; Fr Carlo della Torre in Thailand and Fr Andrej Majcen in Vietnam, and those of whom the Causes for beatification and canonisation have been recently introduced. Among the martyrs in China following the advent of communism we recall Cleric Peter Yeh, Frs Joseph Fu and Simon Leung, and Bro Jerome Yip, who died a martyr of charity in a concentration camp. The Salesian missionary spirituality of these confreres was expressed in a deep and attractive simplicity. We may recall the motto of Peter Yeh (†1953): *All for Jesus, Jesus for all!*

I do not hesitate to mention particularly the figure of the Venerable Vincent Cimatti (1879-1965). Fr Renato Ziggiotti, 5th Successor of Don Bosco, who had been a pupil of Fr Cimatti, left us this testimony: "For me Mgr. Cimatti is the most complete Salesian I have ever known for piety, ability, fraternal spirit, fatherliness, and skill in winning over souls. More than a most versatile and likeable teacher of pedagogy, he was a real educator and a true copy of St John Bosco". Any visitor to the Cimatti Museum at Tokyo-Chofu, is immediately impressed by the rich charismatic qualities of the "Don Bosco of Japan": gathered there are more than 900 of his musical compositions, 6,150 letters, more than 10,000 original photographs, hundreds of books and articles dealing with philosophy, spirituality, agriculture and the natural sciences. All this was for spreading the Gospel in places where evangelisation was most difficult. His zeal for the application of the preventive system in schools, in seeking vocations, in personal presence among young Salesians at the times of work and recreation, has been passed on to new generations of local Salesians and lay people. The name of Jesus Christ, with that of Don Bosco, has been spread far and wide through the hundreds of musical concerts he gave in Japan, Korea and China. Whether as a formation guide in Turin, or leader of a missionary expedition, or as Rector of a house of formation or Provincial or Vicar Apostolic, he was always outstanding for his Salesian gentleness and kindness.

4. Charismatic experiences of greater significance

To implant, and make the Salesian charism take root and become inculturated in the young Churches of Asia or Oceania, a great deal of patience is needed if our spirit and activity is to be faithfully expressed in local cultures. This is a great challenge that demands knowledge and love from both the standpoint of the culture concerned and that of Don Bosco and the Congregation. In this important work, carried out with courage and optimism, efforts have been made to make available all the Salesian sources and to translate the letters of the Rector Major in the seven main languages of the Region: Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Tetum. There is the first abbreviated translation of the Biographical Memoirs in 5 volumes (Hong Kong, 2005). But the most important thing is that all the Provinces are making a special effort to get to know Don Bosco better and bring him to life in their particular environment. Some Provinces publish Salesian spirituality reviews in the vernacular (Japan, Thailand), or send confreres for courses of Salesianity in Rome or Berkeley, USA. The movement for a return to Don Bosco, to which we are invited by the letter of convocation of the GC26, was received with great enthusiasm and has given rise to interesting initiatives, such as Provincial or Regional seminars and retreats based on the theme.

Dialogue between the cultures from which our confreres come and those in which they are working, together with the witness of a Salesian living of the Gospel of Christ, is producing good results. There is no doubt that our closeness to the people, our presence among the young, and our educative and pastoral style, with its welcoming friendliness and family spirit, its religious and spiritual quality, draw people to us and make us in general esteemed by the local Church.

It is very encouraging to find expressions of “Valdocco” finding their place in local culture in various parts of the Region. Beginning from China-Macao, Salesian Institute (1906) to Thailand-Banpong

(1927) and Bangkok - Don Bosco (1946), to Japan - Tokyo, Sugina-mi (1934), and then China - Beijing (1946-1954), Australia - Sydney, Engadine (1947), Philippines - Manila, Mandaluyong (1954), Philip-pines - Visayas, Victorias (1952), Est Timor - Fatumaca (1964), South Korea - Seoul, Dae Rim Dong (1963), Vietnam - Saigon, GoVap (1963-1976), Papua New Guinea - Araithiri (1980), Samoa - Alafua (1980), Indonesia - Jakarta, Sunter (1992) and others.

I would now like to present some significant experiences and ways chosen to express the charism, which could provide inspira-tion also for confreres of other Regions.

In **Australia** our confreres with a large number of lay people have been animating eight secondary schools since 1998 through a "Salesian Schools' Charter" based on the Oratory criteria (c. 40). All planning, animation and evaluation are standardised in line with this joint vision adopted and shared effectively by all teach-ers in our schools. In their training process they have studied more deeply what they understand by the statement that the educational environment resembles "a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelises, a school that prepares for life and a play-ground where friends can meet and enjoy themselves" (C. 40).

In the **Chinese** Province the preparation for the centenary of Salesian work (2001-2006) was guided by a movement towards Salesian holiness, to rediscover Don Bosco with the 20,000 pupils and teachers of our schools. Around this animating nucleus the synergy of the Salesian Family was developed which was able to reach poor youngsters. During the centenary celebrations I was able to visit, among other places, the "Don Bosco Discovery Centre" at Hong Kong, Tang King Po College, where young people can meet Don Bosco in an interactive exhibition. And among the many works of this Province I cannot fail to mention "Youth Outreach", a great Youth Centre open 24 hours a day, especially for youngsters exposed to dangers on the streets of Hong Kong.

In the **Philippines** the golden jubilee of Salesian work in 2001 led to the courageous decision to commit ourselves to a greater ex-

tent to young people who are very poor, of whom the majority live in country areas. For this reason many rural foundations were made, especially with vocational training centres designed to meet the local needs. From 1994 the consulting body of the Salesian Family of Manila can serve as a model for other Provinces for its style of animation. Its leadership rotates among the different groups for the organisation of meetings for spiritual or formative purposes, for celebrations or for particular apostolic activities. Since 2002 in the Province of Cebu the *CLAY Don Bosco Institute* has been developed, which is still the only example in the Region of a project of Salesian formation carried out by lay people for the laity and the young. Our novices of Lawaan are also involved in weekly discussion sessions on the Memoirs of the Oratory with the formation guides and members of *Don Bosco CLAY*.

According to its recent Provincial Operational Plan, the Province of Japan is directing its activities towards young people at risk and to the working classes that Japanese society finds it difficult to assimilate. It is a question of young and migrant workers, not limited to Catholics though the latter form the majority. The two parishes of Yamato and Hamamatsu are models of a multicultural approach within the Japanese Catholic Church. In the same setting, services are offered to immigrants of no less than eight different linguistic groups. Meanwhile the zealous vocational campaign continues in the Province: this is quite exceptional in the whole of the Japanese Church when it is remembered that Christians form less than 1% of the population. Biblical school camps, introduced in 1973 at Nojiriko, have become a real focus of attention for our three aspirantates. At present we have about 50 aspirantates at Yokohama, Yokkaichi and Chofu, of whom a large number came through the experience of biblical camps.

The only Vice-Province of the Region, *Indonesia-East Timor*, has enjoyed an almost miraculous vocational growth in the last two decades, during which it has grown from 19 to 170 confreres, with the opening of many formation centres. In fact after twenty years work in Indonesia we now have more than 50 native confr-

eres, who are carrying out a delicate work in the largest Islamic country in the world. In East Timor, the poorest country in Asia and despite the very difficult situation it is experiencing, the charism is growing, thanks to the closeness and generous dedication of the confreres to the suffering people in their commitment to re-evangelisation and human advancement.

South Korea is a Province that since the '70s has concentrated very much on the mission to poor and abandoned youngsters, with numerous house-families, commitment to young delinquents, and some Centres for Vocational Training. Despite the very rapid social and cultural changes that are taking place in the country, the Salesians manage to adapt successfully to the new situation and carry out an effective mission for this section of poor and marginalised youngsters. All the phases of initial formation take place alongside these young people who were the objects of Don Bosco's special care, so as to be make it possible to live consecrated life in interaction with them. The Korean Salesian confreres have developed a particular method of evangelisation through Youth Centres attended by thousands of pupils from state schools during the year and by others coming from diocesan parishes of the dynamic Korean Church. Remarkable too is the vitality of the Salesians Cooperators, due to their good and inculcated formation and the apostolate they carry out alongside the Salesians in works for young people in difficulty. The Province, moreover, carries out a missionary commitment in North East Asia at the explicit request of Fr Egidio Viganò; in the last decade, 10 missionaries *ad gentes* have left Korea for different parts of the world.

The Province of **Thailand** is numerically the smallest in the Region. Despite this the Salesians are the first religious Congregation in the country. One of the best opportunities for being present among Buddhist young people are our numerous schools in which we offer an education to 21,000 students. These schools are very much appreciated and our Buddhist Past-Pupils take their affection for Don Bosco with them into society. Thanks to the

Past-Pupils the great Salesian Family is also united and well animated. The expansion that has taken place into the neighbouring countries of Laos and Cambodia is evidence of the Salesian missionary spirit with the valuable help of our past-pupils who are teachers and educators.

Vietnam is the most numerous and dynamic Province of the Region, with an ardent missionary spirit as regards both its own people and those of foreign countries. In the last four years the Province has sent out some 30 confreres as missionaries *ad gentes*, and is distinguished for the painstaking zeal of its vocational promotion, with well prepared weekly meetings and especially the follow up of university students in their growth in faith. The promoting of the Salesian Brother also finds its highpoint in Vietnam. Special mention is due to the exceptional testimony after 1975 to revive the Salesian charism despite the loss of all the educational institutions. In addition to the 25 parishes which have helped us to survive in the years of difficulty, there have grown up recently various vocational training centres that are highly regarded by both the government and the people. All this goes to make of this Province one of the Salesian Provinces in the world with the most charismatic vitality.

Finally there is the Delegation of ***Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands***. The mission is carried out in poor areas among a population of which the majority is Christian, but in need of evangelisation and education for its young people, as well as social development.

5. Some challenges

In the light of the multicultural and multireligious context of Salesian life in the Region and of the specific contribution our charism and mission are called upon to offer to the countries in which we are working, the following are challenges we have to confront:

A. In the spiritual and charismatic area we may identify three main challenges:

- **at cultural level:** the risk of secularism and materialism in an environment which is sensitive to the religious aspect of life and requires not only social service but also the witness of a deep experience of God;

- **at personal level:** the temptation to seek social status which gives priority to a professional approach, reducing Salesian life rather to a 'state of life' than a 'project of evangelical life';

- **at institutional level:** a somewhat weak and merely formal sense of belonging to the Congregation and the fulfilment of its guidelines, which, among other things, is manifested in the weakness of initial formation as a result of precarious formation conditions and the shortage of Salesian study centres, and in the unsatisfactory adoption and application of the pastoral model of the Congregation.

What these challenges tell us is that we need a Salesian life of greater *MYSTICAL* intensity.

B. In the evangelising and pastoral area there are three main challenges:

- **at cultural level:** the tendency to individualism, expressed in the lack of courage in facing difficulties arising from the fact of being a minority among non-Christians, especially against the background of Confucianism and Buddhism.

- **at personal level:** exaggerated activism, which can turn us into secular professionals rather than consecrated persons, and poor preparation for interreligious and intercultural dialogue;

- **at institutional level:** resistance in responding to changes of lifestyle and of work so as to be more meaningful and effective, and come closer to poor youngsters in our service to them.

These challenges are faced through a Salesian mission lived as *SERVICE*.

C. *In the area of religious and community life* we may note three main challenges:

- **at cultural level:** the absence of an inculturated commonly shared model of the consecrated life, and the difficulty of expressing our religious consecration by a more visible and credible witness to the Gospel, in the awareness of being called to help the Christian faith have a strong cultural impact;

- **at personal level:** the temptation to live in a way that conceals our Christian and consecrated identity, by accepting cultural elements that have nothing to do with the project of Salesian life;

- **at institutional level:** the urgent need for reshaping the works in every Province, to ensure the experience of community life and give quality to the pastoral educative project.

These challenges tell us of the need to recover a Salesian life permeated by *PROPHECY*.

D. *In the functioning of the Region* we may identify two main challenges:

- **at the level of regional coordination:** the isolated nature of some works, physical distances, languages, differences of a social, cultural, ecclesial and vocational nature that make it difficult to reach a more effective, deep and practical level of sharing;

- **at the level of regional animation:** the lack of a regional centre as a contribution to the integration, coordination and boosting of the Provinces in the different areas of the Salesian life and mission: formation, youth ministry, Salesian family, social communication, missions and economy.

These are challenges that prompt us to believe in the value of *SYNERGY*.

We can sum up all the challenges in the need to build and live a Salesian spirituality that is truly missionary and inculturated, which can help us

- to avoid the danger of activism, of the seeking of a soft and easy life, and of the lack of charismatic identity;
- to overcome the dichotomy between life and faith, between being and doing, between the evangelical counsels - mission - community life;
- to make the living presence of Don Bosco more apparent in the Region of East Asia - Oceania.

At this point I feel I must mention, among the many confreres of outstanding qualities, two Salesians who have been able to bring Don Bosco to life again by accompanying their people and giving them sure guidance in moments of great difficulty. I am referring to Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun, Bishop of Hong Kong, who was named a Cardinal at the time the centenary of Salesian work in the East Asia – Oceania Region was being celebrated, and Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his role on behalf of his sorely tried country of East Timor. The fact that God has given to the Congregation saints, martyrs, founders, wonderful educators and great bishops is the best guarantee that Don Bosco can be given an ever more Asian countenance.

Conclusion – “I am with you always”

From a geographical point of view the place most distant from Rome is somewhere in the Region of East Asia – Oceania. I was able to verify this for myself during my journey to Australia and Samoa in 2004. It was the first Samoan Rector, who was absent at the time of my visit, who in May 2006 expressed as his dream: “I would like to visit the holy places of Don Bosco, and at least once in my life meet the Rector Major personally.”

Some confreres of the Region have been able to make a pilgrimage to the Salesian holy places, and others have made the effort to come close to Don Bosco in local cultures and languages.

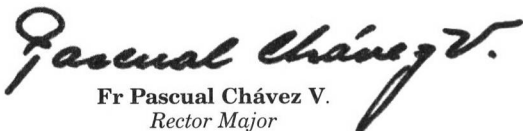
As Successor of Don Bosco I have been able to visit all the Provinces of the Region, (the last one Vietnam in April), and now I have personal knowledge of so many confreres and works. For some Provinces their last visit from a Rector Major had been as much as 24 years ago. There were also some places where no Rector Major had ever been at all, like the Solomon Islands, Pakistan, Mongolia, Laos, and Fiji. Well then, by this letter I want to express my closeness to all of you, but I also want to make each of you feel that he is close to all the Salesians throughout the world.

“Without Mary Help of Christians we Salesians are nothing” was one of the five pieces of advice given to missionaries in China by the first Salesian, Bishop Luigi Versiglia, in far off 1920.

Many local Churches in East Asia and Oceania venerate the Mother of Jesus and of the Church as the Help of Christians – she is the Patroness of Australia, of China, of Vietnam and of the Churches of Oceania. So as not to exclude anyone, many Salesian communities of the Region pray each day with the ejaculation: “Mary, our help, pray for us!” Her living presence is deeply felt. I entrust to her the future of this Region of ours, the most distant from Rome in terms of time, distance and culture, but not on that account any less loved by Don Bosco and identified with the Congregation.

May Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco’s Teacher, bless and guide the generations of confreres growing up in this Region.

Affectionately in Don Bosco,


Fr Pascual Chávez V.
Rector Major