

THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN THE NEW CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF SIAM IN THE FIRST 30 YEARS

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Introduction

This paper aims to present the situation prevailing in the Kingdom of Siam at the time of the arrival of the first Salesians and the unexpected turn of events which posed challenges to them. This will be followed by a description of how the Salesians responded to these in a simple practical way in accordance with their experience and the directives of the Superiors that helped them implant the Salesian Charism in a different cultural environment.

I. THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SITUATION IN THE KINGDOM OF SIAM IN THE PERIOD 1925-1960

1. Brief History of the Kingdom before 1932

The Kingdom of Siam, “The Land of the Free”, has never been a colony of any foreign power. It was established in the North¹ of Thailand in the XIII century; then with the foundation of the New Capital Ayuthaya² in 1350 it extended its sovereignty over Malaysia, Eastern Burma and part of Cambodia and became powerful and

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¹ In the XIII century groups of Thai people who escaped the conquest of Kunming in Yunnan by the Emperor Kublai Khan established the Kingdom of Lanchang in Laos, the Kingdom of Lanna and the Thai Kingdom of Sukhothai in the North of Thailand and the Shan State in Burma.

² Ayuthaya is nearly 50 km North of Bangkok along the river Chao Phraya.

wealthy through trade with the great Asian Countries. The Buddhist Religion of Theravada³ struck capillary roots in the social context of the Thai society and created a culture of national identity and unity. Thailand is also called, "The Land of the many and splendid Pagodas".

For nearly six centuries the Kingdom of Siam had no fear of colonization; it had problems with Burma. The Capital Ayuthaya was captured twice by the Burmese. In 1782 Chakree transferred the Capital to Bangkok and started the present Chakree dynasty. During the reigns of the Kings Rama I-III (1782-1850) the Kingdom enjoyed another period of prosperity with the influx of many Chinese, Vietnamese and Laotians in the Country, who gave energy to agriculture and trade.

But a critical period for the Kingdom of Siam arrived when the neighbouring countries Malaysia, Burma and Indochina became British and French colonies in the XIX century. So the learned and most foresighted King Rama IV (1850-1968)⁴, fearing the same fate, made treaties and opened the country to trade with the western countries. He also favoured education, especially for the royalty and civil servants.

His first son, the wise and creative Rama V (1868-1910) with some foreign expertise, started to modernize the Country on western patterns. First he reformed the central administration, the military apparatus, the judiciary and abolished slavery. He started the railway system, the Post and Telegraph. He gave great importance to education and health care; then he reformed the national administration by introducing the new system of Provinces and Districts

His Son Rama VI was educated in England. The learned King, with hired artists and architects, endowed the capital Bangkok with parks and bronze statues; he issued laws on compulsory education all over the country and instituted the first Thai university, Chulalongkorn.

³ Theravada is the small vehicle or Hynayana of more strict observance.

⁴ King Rama IV was a Buddhist monk for nearly 26 years; he spent this time to learn Buddhist doctrine, languages and science.

In the year 1919 the Kingdom of Siam gained a place of reputation and recognition at the international level. King Rama VI led an English life-style of luxury and splendour.

2. A Volatile Period (1932-1945)

In the XX century many of the elite, both royalty and civil servants, started to go abroad to further their education, from where they acquired new democratic ideas. All this had an impact on the Thai society and aroused in many people the desire for political changes in the Kingdom of Siam for greater efficiency.

The already creeping economic situation was worsened by the world crisis in 1929 which, combined with the inability of the ruling class to take courageous decisions, opened the way for a new political course during the reign of King Rama VII (1925-1935). In June 1932 the Promoters⁵ launched a coup and obtained the Constitution, which King Rama VII signed on 10 December 1932. This was the beginning of greater political, economic and social changes.

The two most outstanding and active Promoters, the lawyer Dr. Predee Panomyong⁶ a civilian socialist and army colonel Phiboon Songkhram⁷, started many democratic and social reforms at the national and local levels, in particular the land reform. They strove to limit the influence of the royalty in the Government. They also wanted to reverse the trend of favourable conditions accorded in the previous 80 years to foreigners and Chinese in the economy and education. The military faction aimed at building a strong military apparatus and police. The Royalty had a difficult period from 1933 to 1957.

⁵ A few hundred people, both civilians and officers, who had studied abroad and had absorbed democratic ideas and wanted to promote changes in the Kingdom of Siam were called Promoters.

⁶ Predee Panomyong, also named Luang Pradit was a famous socialist lawyer, who graduated in France at the same time as many other Thai civilian and military servicemen.

⁷ Luang Phiboon was a brilliant officer of the military academy, who also graduated in France.

After five years of calm and quiet preparation, in 1938 Luang Phiboon Songkhram became Prime Minister and then Field Marshal with absolute power. With swift moves he got a strong grip on the Government apparatus and issued nationalistic laws, which he enforced with a military muscle; he proceeded to limit the power of the Royalty and the influence of foreigners in all Government institutions and in education, and gave only to Thai-born citizens the right of ownership of landed property; he favoured all Thais to dress like westerners. He changed the name of the country from Siam to Thailand.

With a shrewd propaganda he convinced the common Thais that he was the right man at the right time to do the job and restore the rights of the Thai Kingdom against the colonial powers. In 1940 he first prepared and then waged a quick two months⁸ war against France in Indochina and quickly claimed some territories⁹ back with the mediation of Japan. This gave him great credit and political power. But the false and black propaganda against the French also aroused persecution against the Catholics, seen as friends of the French.

After the quick and successful military operation of Japan in the Pacific in December 1942 Luang Phiboon Songkhram, acting alone and against many pro-westerners, went to war against the Allies along with Japan, with the aim of getting back the other territories lost to England at the West and the South¹⁰ many years before. But at the end the country lost the war without achieving anything.

In July 1944 Marshal Phiboon had to resign and left the liberal Dr. Predee Panomyong as Regent to cancel all war treaties and to deal with the Allied Forces and try to get lenient conditions for peace.

⁸ The two months war: December 1940 and January 1941.

⁹ The Kingdom of Siam lost territories East of the River Mekong in Southern Laos to France in 1993 and also in Cambodia.

¹⁰ These territories are three Northern States of Malaysia and the Shan State in North East Burma.

3. Stability and Growth (1948-)

After three years of hardships and instability, Marshal Phiboon Songkhram returned to power again in 1948 through a military coup, but with a totally different attitude. He, however, retained some of his socialist ideas, like limiting the economic power of the Royalty. On the international scene with the Allies he took a stand against communism. So with the favour and aid of the West he ruled the Country until 1957¹¹.

The Country went into a period of good international relations, which never changed and a period of continued progress. The progress was more relevant in infrastructure and communications, modern agriculture, industry and business in Bangkok. In 1958 Marshal Phiboon Songkhram was toppled by the strongman Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who became Prime Minister and also took a decisive stand against the advance of communism; so he and his military successors also got strong support from the United States of America for more than 15 years.

In 1946 the present King Rama IX ascended the throne. In 2009 he is still reigning at the age of 82. He commands great respect among the people and all the institutions for His concern for the welfare of the people, his moral uprightness and wisdom, his many useful projects and undertakings; he is also the Patron of all Religions.

This was the political, social and economic situation during the first 32 years of Salesian work in Siam: 13 years of volatile situation, 7 years of war, persecution and post-war hardships and then 12 years of stability. Many Salesian confreres were not even aware of the secret decisions at the Government level for lack of real information, but they could experience the practical consequences in everyday life.

¹¹ The Allies saw the danger of communism in Asia and they saw that Thailand could be a firm bastion against the communists. So they aided Thailand to develop infrastructures and communications.

4. The Catholic Mission in Siam

The Catholic Mission in the Kingdom of Siam had never been easy because of the Buddhist culture of national identity and also because most Thais have always considered the Buddhist religion as part of the Thai identity. The Catholic Mission was started by the Portuguese in the XVI century; the Society of the Foreign Missions of Paris arrived in 1662; they carried on the Mission with great effort, both in number of missionaries and resources, but with little result, because of the many limitations for Christians and the frequent persecutions especially during the period of Ayuthaya. At the beginning of the XIX century the Catholics were only 2000 approximately.

In the XIX and XX centuries there was a great influx of Chinese, Laotian and Vietnamese people into the Kingdom¹². These people were not subject to the ancient limitations and easily converted to the Catholic religion. Besides the presence of wise Bishops, the opening of the country since 1855 to western science and technology by Kings Rama IV-VI helped the expansion of missionary activities; they brought greater stability and good reputation to the missionaries and opened up new frontiers to the work of the Mission – health care and education.

The Vicariate of Bangkok invited religious congregations to take care of education and health care: St. Gabriel Brothers for the Assumption College, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres for St. Louis Hospital and schools for girls and in 1924 the Sisters of St. Ursula (and Angela Merici), who opened the famous Mater Dei College.

Kings Rama V and VI issued laws about property documents and the Catholic churches could retain ownership of the lands they had previously bought and developed. Since 1918 the Government issued various laws for compulsory education in all the provinces. King Rama VI started also the Thai Scouts and other activities for the young; thus an important field opened to Salesian work.

¹² The many Chinese people looked for land to till around Bangkok and in the South. At that time the Kings promoted the digging of the many canals around Bangkok too.

After the First World War the Society of the MEP had fewer missionaries. At the same time the missionary field was expanding with new challenges; many large Chinese families usually split up and some migrated to find new lands to till along the rivers and the newly opened railway to the South.

II. SALESIANS IN THE KINGDOM OF SIAM

1. The Arrival of the Salesians

In the year 1925 the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith invited the Salesians to accept a Mission in the Kingdom of Siam. The Rector Major Fr Philip Rinaldi accepted the proposal, although he had just started new Missions in Japan, Africa and South America, and invited Fr Ignatius Canazei¹³ from Macao to survey the situation of the new mission in the Kingdom of Siam.

The description and views presented to the Rector Major by the Society of the Foreign Mission¹⁴ of Paris and by Fr Ignatius Canazei appeared good and inviting: the Kings of Siam in the past century had been allowing and were sympathetic to the Catholics, the Thai people were friendly and peaceful, the environment quiet and in steady progress, the financial status of the Mission rather good.¹⁵

With this report and a proposal of contract by the Society of the MEP at hand, Fr Peter Ricaldone arrived at Bangkok in April 1927 together with Msgr. Louis Matthias from India and Fr Ignatius Canazei from China to have a personal view of the new Mission and consider the possible canonical and religious status of the Salesians in Siam.

¹³ At that time he was Provincial of the Salesians in China.

¹⁴ This is the first document about the Mission in Siam. It contains some information about the country received by the Salesians from the Society of the MEP and sent to the Rector Major through Propaganda Fide: ASC A905 *Siam, Pro Memoria* 25 febbraio 1924.

¹⁵ ASC, A905 *Report of Fr. Ignazio Canazei about the new mission, dated 15/01/1926*

The Society of the MEP were ready to give to the Salesians the 19 Provinces West of Bangkok and to the South covering an area of nearly 118,000 sq. km with nearly 6,500 Catholics. The rather well established churches and other smaller communities were all along the valley of the Mekhlong River in the provinces of Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi and Samut Songkhram¹⁶; in the other 16 Provinces (Petchaburi down to Narathivat) there was not even a chapel.

Bangnokkhuek¹⁷ was the largest community and had already some facilities, so it was fit to be the Center of the new Mission for a few years. But the Mission took the name of Ratchaburi, because this was the name of the strong Principality of the whole area (5 provinces) in the past and also because this town¹⁸ is located both on the Southern railway line and the river Mekhlong; in the future it would prove a better location for the Center of the Mission. Fr Ricaldone assured the Fathers of the Society of MEP that about 7 to 8 Salesians would arrive that same year.

The first two Salesians arrived on the 27th of August 1927 to prepare the place. Fr Peter Ricaldone himself accompanied the official group of 20 confreres who arrived on the 25th of October of the same year. The experienced and zealous Fr Cajetan Pasotti was named Rector and Delegate of the Salesians in Siam. A third group of 6 confreres arrived in December the same year. In December 1928 another 20 young confreres arrived and 28 more in two groups in 1930. So by the end of 1930 the Salesians already numbered 75, one having already passed away and others repatriated or returned to China. Some more left a few years later while some arrived in the years 1935-1936.

¹⁶ These are three provincial towns from North to South along the River Mekhlong

¹⁷ Bangnokkhuek is a village half way down the river from Ratchaburi to the mouth of the river.

¹⁸ This town is nearly 100 km west of Bangkok.

2. Goals and Challenges

The goals were to keep things going, develop the whole Mission (19 provinces) into a Prefecture Apostolic and a full fledged Vicariate, to promote education and activities for the young with a Salesian imprint. But many things were not according to what was presented in the initial proposal and the contract; the situation was also changing fast:

- The changing political and economical situation was creating many difficulties to the Mission.
- The Salesians instead of sending a few confreres to work for a period of time alongside the MEP, due to the problems in China had sent a large number of young confreres still in the process of formation, with only 9 Priests.
- The Mission didn't have any indigenous priests or sisters to help in the mission stations.
- The formation process required many resources, professors and equipment, which were scarce.
- The nationalistic movements and the war also became a great challenge for the Salesians.

3. Mission towards full Vicariate

First of all the Salesians had to tackle the question of the formation of the young confreres. For this they opened the formation house at the Nativity in 1930; they studied the language and the Thai culture. In his reports to the Superiors in Turin Fr Cajetan Pasotti often lamented the lack of professors, the need of resources and the fact of so many confreres crammed in at the Nativity: "*Siamo come le acciughe in scatola*"¹⁹ (We are packed like sardines).

The Salesians accepted the Mission on 1 January 1929, which was canonically erected on 30 June 1930 with Fr Cajetan Pasotti as

¹⁹ Cf. *ASC Letters Pasotti (Siam) - Berruti 20.8.1934 and 22.8.1934* and especially 4 Jan 1935.

Administrator. The Salesians got to work in the parishes and in the schools with great zeal. But in their enthusiasm they forgot sometimes to take advantage of the long experience and difficult work of the MEP missionaries in the Mission and in some cases too quickly changed ancient traditions.

During the first 10 years all the Salesians worked for the Mission. In 12 years of work they developed the 9 existing churches, started other new small communities and furnished the schools of the Mission with new buildings; they repaired the Nativity church and built two new churches – one in Banpong²⁰ and the other in Bangtan. In 1934 the Ratchaburi Mission was erected as Prefecture Apostolic and Fr Cajetan Pasotti as Prefect Apostolic. But a few Salesian priests repatriated, either due to personal problems or on account of discouragement.

In 1930 the foresighted Fr Cajetan Pasotti started the seminary for indigenous vocations with the first 7 candidates. In 1931 they were already 14 and were settled in a small wooden house meant just for them; the brothers in practical training took turns to assist them especially for the teaching of Latin. In 1936 the candidates numbered 37 already.²¹

In 1932 Fr Cajetan Pasotti accepted too quickly some seminarians of the MEP, who asked to become Salesians or to work in the Mission. This was cause for some criticism by the MEP Fathers. Again in 1934 the long and difficult process to sign the agreement for buying the old seminary building of the MEP across the river opposite the Nativity Church when they transferred their candidates to Sriracha also caused more criticism.²² The Superior Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti felt

²⁰ Banpong is a District town nearly 80 km west of Bangkok in the province of Ratchaburi. At the arrival of the Salesians it had nearly 150 Catholics and there was a small chapel.

²¹ See Archivio Ispettoria Thailandia, Bangkok (AIT) *Chronicles of the Nativity Church in Bangnokkhuek*, 25.01.1936.

²² Cf. ASC Letter Pasotti - Fr. Peter Berruti, 20 August 1934.

embarrassed, because he always needed the cooperation of the MEP Fathers for many things. At the end he succeeded to convince the Superiors in Turin to buy it as a token of gratitude and good relations. In 1935 the place was used as the Salesian formation house and in 1941 became the indigenous seminary of the Vicariate.

In 1931 Fr Cajetan Pasotti invited the Salesian Sisters hoping that they would work in the parishes along with the Salesians. In 1935 he invited the Capuchin cloistered Nuns of St. Clare, who arrived in 1936 and were stationed in Banpong.

Since the Salesian Sisters, according to their Constitutions, could not work in the parishes far from their community, in 1937 Msgr. Pasotti decided to erect the indigenous Congregation of the Auxiliaries. He did all this to prepare the personnel for the stability of the Mission, which was on the way to being erected as a Vicariate Apostolic.

4. The Work in the South

On receiving the Mission in January 1929 Fr Cajetan Pasotti and Fr Joseph Pinaffo went for a quick ten-day survey of the South. Seeing the vast territories he was responsible for he felt helpless at being unable to start the work there because of the lack of priests and resources.

In 1933 six more Salesians were ordained priests and a year later the Mission of Ratchaburi was erected as Prefecture Apostolic; it was also the year when Don Bosco was declared a saint. So Msgr. Pasotti planned to start some work in the South. Fr Mario Ruzzeddu²³ was assigned first to open a chapel in the provincial town of Ratchaburi; then he started to visit the Catholic families living in Hua Hin, some 130 km down the peninsula; here the Mission soon bought a piece of land and the following year it opened a chapel and a vacation house.

²³ Fr Mario Ruzzeddu arrived in Siam in December 1927. He was young, outstanding; he had studied philosophy in England and knew English well and was fit to go to the South where there were quite a few English people working in the tin mines

In 1935 Fr Mario Ruzzeddu was only 25 years old, but he showed real missionary zeal. So in October 1935 Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti led him to the South to have a view of the Mission, and he assigned him the task of visiting the Catholic families, which were making a living in the Southern provinces. For 6 years Fr Mario Ruzzeddu made pastoral visits to the South twice a year; each time he spent between 30 to 45 days visiting all the provinces. Msgr. Pasotti and Fr Job Carnini took turns to visit the Chinese communities near the Malaysian border, in Sadao and Betong²⁴; both of them knew their Chinese language.

Fr Mario Ruzzeddu was enthusiastic about his pastoral visits to the South and had great hope for the future work there. He saw a good chance to start a stable work in the town of Hat Yai, where a wealthy Chinese offered a piece of land for a school. So in February 1941 the Provincial assigned him to go and stay in Hat Yai²⁵ and here he soon opened a house and the chapel of our Lady of Lourdes.

But the difficult years of the war doused the hopes of Fr Mario Ruzzeddu for a quick fruitful work; he was refused permission to open the school as he had wanted. But the Salesians did not give in to the many difficulties. The House in Hat Yai managed to remain open and in 1950 both the Salesians and the Salesian Sisters opened a College there and Hat Yai became the Catholic Center for the pastoral care of the South until the opening of Suratthani in 1959.

5. The Salesian Province of Siam

Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti was nominated the Administrator and then Prefect Apostolic of the Mission; he was also *Visitatore* of the Salesians in Siam since the beginning²⁶. But as the Mission developed

²⁴ Betong is the most Southern District in the hilly rubber plantations near the Malaysian border.

²⁵ Hat Yai is nearly 960 km South of Bangkok at the important railway junction for West or East Malaysia.

²⁶ Since 1927 he was Delegate and in January 1934 was nominated Superior (*Visitatore*) of the Vice-Province.

more and more the problems of the formation of personnel and plans for expansion took their toll on his physical health. So he wrote to the Superiors in Turin that he was available for a change²⁷.

In April and May 1937 the Superiors sent Fr Anton Candela for the Extraordinary Visitation to all the Salesian Missions in the Far East together with Fr Peter Berruti. As a result the Salesian Province in Siam was erected on 20 December 1937. Fr John Casetta was appointed Provincial on 30 January 1938.

It took nearly two years to assess the economic and canonical situation of the two entities: the properties, the expenses, the duties of the Salesians towards the Prefecture. But it took many more years to understand the role of the two different entities in the same place.

In February 1939 both the Province and the Prefecture approved the final assessment and they sent it to the Superiors, who approved it on 29 August 1939. Then on 5 December both the Provincial Fr John Casetta and Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti approved the "*Modus vivendi*" for the confreres working in each parish²⁸. But every now and then there were some causes of conflict²⁹.

In 1939 the Provincial made plans to open new works, because he had a number of priests and brothers packed in at St. Joseph College, Banpong. In April he opened the small house of Saladeng in Bangkok to survey the possibility of opening a vocational school for the orphans. The Superiors in Turin also approved the plan to open the house of Hua Hin and a school in the South³⁰.

The South was the first testing ground for the agreement made with the Ratchaburi Mission. In February 1941 the Provincial sent

²⁷ Cf. ASC *Letter Pasotti - Peter Berruti*, 19.12.1936.

²⁸ Cf. AIT *Contract between the province and the Apostolic Prefecture of Ratchaburi*

²⁹ See below the question of the property in Hat Yai in the chronicle of Hat Yai October 1941.

³⁰ Cf. AIT *Minutes of the provincial Council* 18.7.1939, approval by Fr Berruti 20.11.1939 and also *Minutes of* 30.12.1940.

Fr Mario Ruzzeddu to Hat Yai and in May approved the building of a Salesian house there. On 14 October 1941 Msgr. Pasotti blessed the house saying, "Well, good cooperation!" He was referring to the fact that the piece of land was first promised to the Mission.

The Salesians could not open a school in Hat Yai until 1950. The Providence of God did not allow the opening of any stable work there until the problem of the property was solved. The problem was settled when the diplomatic and good administrator Fr Peter Carretto became Provincial in 1948 and then Vicar Apostolic of Ratchaburi³¹ in 1951.

6. Ever-increasing Difficulties and Persecution

The coup that gave the Constitution to the country in June 1932 also started a process of restrictions on the Catholic missions all over the country. First there was some unrest and instability and then increase in taxes. The Government officials became ever more hesitant and somewhat hostile to the private schools and Catholic Churches due to the volatile socialist and nationalist trends. The chronicles of the parishes recorded various facts about this matter³².

The Salesians also had some problems regarding the personnel: in the first 12 years nearly 35 confreres left; of these 10 were priests. Luckily 28 young confreres were ordained priests in Siam and two diocesan priests joined the Mission.

Though the Superiors in Turin insisted on the opening of the vocational school in Bangkok and the transfer of the Salesian formation house to Hua Hin, due to the political and internal difficult situation the Salesians could not start any new stable work other than a chapel and a vacation house in Hua Hin, a house and a chapel in Hat Yai and

³¹ Cf. the problem of the property in Hat Yai in AIT "80 years of DB in Thailand" by Fr Henry Danieli (manuscripts)

³² Cf. *Chronicles of Banpong August - September 1934* in the house archives; see also AIT *Chronicles of Khok Mottanoi 1933-1934*.

Betong and a small house of procure in Bangkok; the Provincial and Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti felt that the time was not favourable.

| <i>Statistics</i> | | | | |
|-------------------|---------|------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Year | Entered | Left | Died in the Province | Still in the Province |
| 1947 | 116 | 55 | 3 | 58 |
| 1952 | 145 | 69 | 4 | 72 |
| 1977 | 281 | 166 | 18 | 97 |

The false and black propaganda made by Marshal Phiboon Songkhram to prepare the war against France in Indochina in 1940 also caused a three-year persecution by fanatic groups against the Catholics, seen as friends of the French. In November 1940 all the French personnel, priests, brothers and sisters, had to leave the country. Only the indigenous priests and sisters remained, but they were also under severe restrictions for nearly 6 months. Later when the Japanese declared war on the Allies and also occupied Thailand in 1941, once again the French could not attend to pastoral work.

Divine Providence had made plans already years before by calling the Salesians to the Kingdom of Siam in 1927 (the Italians were allied with the Thais). In 1940 the Salesians had about 35 priests. Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti was consecrated Bishop of the Vicariate of Ratchaburi; he also was named Delegate of the Holy See for one year.

The Pro-Vicars of the Vicariates of Bangkok and of the North East asked the Salesians to send priests to help the persecuted communities. They made an agreement with the Provincial and Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti, who took the responsibility for this work.

Starting from February 1941 ten Salesian priests were sent to take care of a few churches in the Vicariate of Bangkok and the North East and to stand by the indigenous priests and sisters. The authorities could not do anything to the Italian priests as long as they respected the laws. During the period of the war and persecution the Salesians did a wonderful work both in Bangkok and the North East.

7. The Post-War Period (1946-1960)

After the war once again the Salesians had an internal critical period of about 6 years. 15 foreign (senior priests) and 4 Thai confreres left; but 12 foreign and 15 Thai confreres came in. Even the Nuncio expressed his concern and wanted to refer the matter to Rome³³.

In January 1948 the Superiors called the young and capable confrere Fr Peter Carretto (aged 36) to Turin, named him Provincial and gave him directions for decisive changes to renew in due time the board of rectors and the confreres in key positions in the Vicariate. In December 1949 Fr Ernest Bellido arrived for a special visitation. The formation house was transferred to Hua Hin and every year few young Thai candidates and some from Europe arrived. So the Province took a new course with a renewed Salesian spirit; it started to grow both in the number of confreres and of presences.

The Catholic Mission all over the Country made rapid progress, both in terms of conversions, vocations and the development of schools. Other religious congregations joined the Mission. In December 1950 the sacred statue of the Virgin of Fatima arrived in Bangkok also. Many non-Catholics joined the event and the authorities gave full cooperation³⁴. The persecution was soon forgotten. The blood of the Martyrs had really been the seed for many conversions to the Catholic Church in Thailand, which in a few decades increased from approximately 40,000 to about 300,000.

The Vicariate of Ratchaburi also made rapid progress: it started to have a number of indigenous priests; it opened the new Diocesan Center in Ratchaburi and developed all the existing churches and schools; it started to open new mission stations in the South – the settlement in Ban Saeng Arun, the school in Phuket and Suratthani.

³³ Cf. ASC Carretto R 16/6 *Letter Carretto to Superiors* 16.5.1948.

³⁴ The Prime Minister was the same who caused the persecution. This time he gave full cooperation to tell the Catholics that he did not hate the Christian religion.

The Salesians too performed well. They started the Don Bosco vocational school for the poor and orphans in Bangkok; a school in Hua Hin and the formation house that helped to increase the number of new candidates and confreres. A school was opened in the South and another in the North East too. They also continued to work in the Vicariate of Ratchaburi until 1969.

In 1969 the Diocese of Ratchaburi had nearly 20 priests and a flourishing Seminary; so the Holy See erected the new Diocese of Suratthani. The Diocese of Ratchaburi remained with the 4 provinces, while the Diocese of Suratthani took the 15 Southern provinces with no indigenous priests but only the Salesians and the Stigmatine Fathers. Nowadays the Diocese has already 20 churches with other 25 smaller mission stations. The schools number 25, of which 13 are of the Diocese and 12 of the religious.

III. THE SALESIAN CHARISMA IN THE MISSION

1. **Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians**

As described above, the Salesians committed themselves with great enthusiasm to the work in the Mission in the parishes and schools and also for the Church in the whole country at the time of persecution. Though young and without much pastoral experience, they were filled with the zeal of Saint Francis de Sales and of Don Bosco; they were inspired by the Virgin Mother of God, Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians.

Fr Peter Ricaldone led the Salesians to the new Mission in Siam. They arrived at Bangnokkhuek on 27 October. Two forerunners had already prepared the place for them with the generous cooperation of the Pastor Fr Durand and the Vicar Fr Nicholas Boonkert Krit Bamroong³⁵, now a Blessed Martyr. Before leaving, Fr Peter

³⁵ Fr Nicholas Boonkert was transferred to the North of Thailand in 1930. During the persecution he was falsely charged, because he gathered the people to pray in the church, and declared guilty. After three years in prison he died of tuberculosis and was declared Blessed in 2000.

Ricaldone called all the confreres together on the 29th to pray and entrust themselves to Our Lady Help of Christians, thus starting the work in the new Mission with Her as the Leader and Teacher.

In January 1930 Fr Cajetan Pasotti erected the seminary for local candidates and the Salesian formation house, both dedicated to Mary Immaculate. Even today the seminary still bears the name "Immaculate Conception Seminary" and it has given more than 70 priests to the Diocese of Ratchaburi (of nearly 14,000 Catholics).

The feast of the Immaculate Conception has always been celebrated by the young confreres with Novena, solemn Mass and stage performances. When Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti erected the new Congregation of indigenous sisters, first he gave them the name "The Auxiliaries or The Maidens of Our Lady Help of Christians", which was later changed to "The Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary".

On 9 February 1941, while Fr Mario Ruzzeddu was gathering his belongings to go and stay in Hat Yai, Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti gave him a small Statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception telling him, "In your work think often of Mary Immaculate and you will see miracles..." It sounded a prophecy. On arriving at Hat Yai on 11 February after a long journey by train (nearly 20 hours), he found a man waiting in front of the house he had previously rented, saying to him, "The owner of the house has decided to repeal the contract, because you have come here to teach a religion that the Government does not like. Go find another place, or better go back to Ratchaburi".

That day Fr Mario Ruzzeddu walked around town for many hours; at last he could find a place to stay a few days in a house still under construction. The following day while celebrating Mass he prayed looking at the statue of Our Lady Mary Immaculate, "You have really to start to work miracles here"³⁶. After the war Hat Yai grew as the Catholic Center in the South. Our Lady Mary Immaculate prepared her important place in the Diocese of Suratthani.

³⁶ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of Hat Yai*.

One of the main churches that the Fathers of the Society of MEP had given to the Salesians was the church of Mary Help of Christians in Thava. While assigning Fr Felix Bosso as the first Parish Priest to this church in January 1931, Fr Cajetan Pasotti told him, "This church must be the shrine of Our Lady Help of Christians of the Mission". He soon procured a beautiful statue of Mary Help of Christians as a sign of the Salesian special attention to this church.

In January 1945, seeing the frequent bombing over Thailand Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti together with the Provincial³⁷ asked the special protection of Our Lady Help of Christians and of St. John Bosco for the Salesians, the people and the institutions of the Vicariate, vowing to spread her Devotion and that to St. John Bosco in the Vicariate and in the Salesian houses. Nobody suffered injuries and all the buildings were spared damage during the many months of bombing³⁸.

In 1947 the Mission of Ratchaburi opened another church (Vat Nai) in the name of Mary Help of Christians.

In 1939 the Salesians opened the first house in Bangkok – St. John Bosco Saladeng. In 1946 they also started the Don Bosco vocational school as part of the same house. When the Don Bosco vocational school was transferred to the present place and became a new Salesian presence, the Procure of Saladeng was restructured in 1952 and named "Auxilium". The Salesian Sisters, who bought the house of Saladeng in 1960³⁹, still have the church "Auxilium" which is the venue for an Italian Mass on Sundays in Bangkok.

In 1982 Bishop Peter Carretto built a solemn shrine in the Diocese of Suratthani to Mary Help of Christians in the new agricultural settlement of Phanom to mark the 50th anniversary of the Salesians in Thailand and 200 years of the Capital Bangkok.

³⁷ The Salesian Province of Siam was erected in December 1937 and the first Provincial was Fr John Casetta.

³⁸ Cf. AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity and the Chronicles of the Seminary* 18-20 Jan 1945.

³⁹ Cf AIT *Chronicles of Saladeng*.

The Salesians built in 2000 a new church dedicated to Our Lady Help of Christians in Bangkok at the Provincial house.

2. St. John Bosco

With the arrival of the Salesians in the Mission of Ratchaburi the Catholics there started to know about Don Bosco and the works of his sons and daughters around the world. Following the joy and celebrations in Turin, in Rome and around the world the Salesians in the Kingdom of Siam braced themselves to do something to celebrate Don Bosco Saint in 1934. All the Catholics of the Mission of Ratchaburi joined in the celebrations⁴⁰:

- The Salesians in Siam rejoiced very much at the news that the King of Siam Rama VII, at that time a special guest of the Italian Government, assisted at the celebrations in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome on the 1 April 1934.
- In all the Catholic communities in the Mission of Ratchaburi the life of Don Bosco was narrated to the people in simple ways.
- The Church also gave a special gift to the Salesians this great year by establishing the Ratchaburi Prefecture and Fr Cajetan Pasotti as the Prefect Apostolic.
- The best of all the celebrations was organized at the Church of the Nativity in Bangnokkhuek. During the first two weeks of September some confreres visited all the Catholic families for animation; this brought back to the Church many lost sheep. On the 14th a long procession of 150 boats full of people floated down from the church of the Nativity to the church of Vat Phleng, a distance of about 12 km along the canal dug by the Missionaries 54 years before. On the 15th there was the solemn Mass with the choirs of the young

⁴⁰ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of the Nativity, September*; also ASC "25 years of Salesian work in Siam" by Fr Cesare Castellino, p. 103.

confreres, the sisters and many boys and girls of the school, followed by the open doors lunch for all. Also the Governor of the province honored the Salesians with a precious visit on that day. In the evening was the joyful show on the stage. Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti presided over the celebration as the living Don Bosco among his sons in Siam at that time.

- In April 1934 the Mission opened a small chapel and youth center, named “Don Bosco”, in the town of Ratchaburi⁴¹, but the people here had to wait for further development until 1957 when Msgr. Peter Carretto built the prestigious Daruna Ratchaburi School, the Church and the new mission center, all in the name of Don Bosco.
- The best institutions of the Salesians in Thailand are the Don Bosco Homes and vocational schools for the orphans and the poor, because the alumni of these schools are those who still call Don Bosco “Father and Teacher...” with great gratitude all their life.

3. Activities for the young

Everywhere in the world the Church has always given attention to the young. But St. John Bosco had a preferential love for the young, especially the poor and disadvantaged. He cared for their material and spiritual good. He always wanted the schools and Salesian centers for the young to have sufficient space and allot time to recreation and various sports according to their culture. That is why St. John Bosco is revered in the Church as the “Father and Teacher of the Young”.

In the new Mission in Siam the people very soon noticed the difference around the churches when the Salesians took over, especially the attention and space given to the young for different sports. The Confreres themselves being rather young, actively

⁴¹ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of Ratchaburi* 26 April; also AIT “80 years of the Salesians in Thailand” by Fr Henry Danieli, part 2, chapter 9.

participated in the various activities with the young – sports, drama, music, scout movement:

- *Youth center, sports*: first the Salesians opened the youth center with various sports at the Church of the Nativity, Bangnokkhuek⁴²; then they opened others at Banpong and Ratchaburi⁴³. The young confreres themselves were active in preparing shows, which the young soon liked and later did by themselves.
- *Music: church singing and brass band*. The young were prepared to take part in the singing during solemn celebrations⁴⁴. Though quite common nowadays, it was really a new initiative in those days as most of the singing was in Latin.
- *The brass band* was also a means to get the boys of the school, whether Catholics or Buddhists, involved in external celebrations. The brass band at Bangnokkhuek was established as early as 1930. The Catholic Times on 4 September 1931 published photos and an article, saying, “The brass band of the Salesian school at Bangnokkhuek, Siam, a convincing proof that the God of these youngsters can be served in joy and gladness, was brought to the provincial town of Mekhlong for the closing celebrations of the school exposition held on the occasion of the King’s feast. Our illustration shows the band in the care of the Salesian Fathers travelling down the river for the celebrations”⁴⁵.

Later in Banpong the band was started in 1933. The brass band of St. Joseph College played an important part in all the civil celebrations of the District and activities of the school.

⁴² AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity*, 16.8.1931.

⁴³ AIT *Chronicles of Ratchaburi*, 26 April 1934.

⁴⁴ AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity*, 15 October 1934

⁴⁵ AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity* 31.10.1931

On the 7 November 1940 the band of the Nativity led the solemn march of the representative of the catholic schools of the Mission in the provincial town of Ratchaburi to offer 301.15 baht to the provincial authorities, as the Government had asked⁴⁶.

After the Second World War not only the Salesian schools, but also all the schools of some importance set up their own band.

- *The scouts*

The Salesians were ready to cooperate with other groups in all the activities for the young even if they were not Catholic initiatives. In the schools they set up groups of young friends of St. Louis Gonzaga or of Mary Immaculate. King Rama VI had established the Corps of the Scouts in Siam and some Scout camps around Bangkok. Later the Promoters ordered that all schools have a section of scouts. All the schools of the Mission gave special attention to the scouts.

On 31 December 1933 the chronicles of the Nativity record a special gathering of scouts from the various schools of the province and of the Mission. The gathering lasted a few days and the instructors showed great ability in the scout activities. The Governor of the province came for the closing day on 7 January 1934. The national newspapers reported the news, because it was the first time that clerics and priests took part in these activities⁴⁷. The gathering of scouts took place many other times either at Ratchaburi or Banpong or Bangtan where the schools of the Mission were especially active in this.

⁴⁶ Cf. AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity*, 7 November 1940

⁴⁷ Cf. AIT *Chronicles of the Nativity*, 31 Dec. 1933 - 7 January 1934; also ASC "25 years of Salesian work in Siam" by Fr Cesare Castellino.

The scout activities continued in the schools also after the War up to our days. The Salesians set an outstanding example by giving special attention to these activities from the beginning.

4. The Printing Press

The printing press was another means through which the Salesians expressed their charism in Siam.

In 1932 the fourth group of young confreres who arrived in Siam (*the group of John Ulliana and Peter Carretto*), still in the first year of their practical training, started the printing press in a simple way and without any plans for the future or buying expensive tools.

With the expertise of Gabriel Prachum for the Thai language, they typed 4 copies of a pamphlet named “*Wai Num*” (the young age) and on 7 August 1932 they presented it as a gift to Fr Cajetan Pasotti. To encourage the editors the Superior soon bought a duplicator machine “Gestetner”. With this tool, at the end of August they printed 200 copies of the manuscript with a new name “*Machimawai*” (the golden age)⁴⁸.

While the pamphlet continued its edition every month, other books were printed for the use of the Thai seminarians: the Latin text of “*Cornelius*” with some Thai notes and vocabulary.

The Mission obtained the legal license for the printing press on 10 February 1933; the cleric Gabriel Prachum Minprapha was the press in charge. In June 1933 the pamphlet reached 600 copies and was distributed to some Catholic schools in Bangkok.

The printing press made further progress in 1936 when a printing machine “*Saroglia*” arrived from Italy. With this quick tool Bro. Gabriel

⁴⁸ Cf. *AIT Chronicles of the Nativity, 8 August* and ASC “25 years of Salesian work in Siam” by Fr Cesare Castellino, p. 328, or AIT “80 years of Don Bosco in Thailand” by Fr Henry Danieli, part 3 chapter 8.

Prachum edited the Thai translation of "Pinocchio". But then he had to leave for Italy for his theology course.

In 1937 the Mission got the license to publish the fortnightly magazine "*Udomphan*" (the abundant seed). The first edition appeared on 7 August 1937, the feast of St. Cajetan. They printed 1000 copies of this first edition and they were really appreciated by the Catholic schools in Bangkok. Fr John Ulliana used all his spare time and ability to publish interesting articles in the best possible Thai language⁴⁹.

In the year 1937 the pamphlet "Golden age" also changed name to "*Jaovasan*" (Teens' Message). On the 15th of February the printing press had the gracious visit of the Apostolic Delegate Msgr. Anthony Drapier, who was visiting the Catholic communities in the Kingdom of Siam⁵⁰.

Since the printing press was working full time the Mission bought another printing machine, a "Joda" from Japan. But the chronicle reports: "The devil was so envious as to whirl its long tail and overturn the boat on which the machine was loaded on its way to Bangnokkhuek along the canals. The load of paper was lost completely but the machine was recovered the day after, repaired and set to work".

The young cleric John Ulliana while studying theology (1936-1939), in his spare time gave the best of himself to the work of printing, which reached the best possible standard at that time.

In July 1939 the young King Anantha Mahidon came back from Switzerland for a short summer visit. "*Jaowasan*" printed a special color edition and when the Christian leaders had a special audience with the young King, Msgr. Cajetan Pasotti presented a copy to him. Every year the King sent his subscription from Switzerland⁵¹.

The period 1940-1943 was a difficult time for the Catholics in Thailand. Those who wanted to remain faithful to their Christian faith

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ At that time the Papal Delegate was stationed in Hue (Vietnam)

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

had to endure many hardships. While all the other Catholic literature remained silent, *Udomphan* continued its issues regularly, and Fr John Ulliana courageously dared to print articles of the Constitution about the equality, freedom and dignity of every Thai citizen. *Udomphan* printed the article 13 of the Constitution on religious freedom with brief but appropriate comments⁵². Those who could read the magazine *Udomphan* were encouraged and acquired spiritual strength to bear all kinds of difficulties with the hope of a quick and happy ending of the persecution. The journal also helped the persecutors to understand the rights and wrongs of their doing.

Some later issues were in the form of questions and answers or dialogues, always careful not to speak of politics and with respect to people with different ideas. At the time of war it was also difficult to get printing materials; so the creative editors had always to invent new methods to continue the precious work.

In 1947 the Salesians opened the Don Bosco vocational school in Bangkok; so the printing press was moved from the Vicariate of Ratchaburi to the Salesian school⁵³. In Bangkok the simple printing press upgraded its tools and skill to respond to the ever-growing quality required by the modern companies. In the following years the printing department of the Don Bosco School had a lot of work from the various companies and shops.

But the best service the press could give to the Catholics was always printing the weekly journal *Udomphan* with much news about the Catholic church and about books on Religion⁵⁴.

In 1952 Fr John Ulliana too was transferred to Bangkok with the task of looking after the translation and printing of Salesian literature for the good of the young confreres, the young and the people in general.

⁵² Cf. *AIT Notes on the persecution* by Fr Joseph Pinaffo (manuscripts)

⁵³ Cf. *Chronicle of Don Bosco Bangkok* in the house archives.

⁵⁴ The Salesian *Udomphant* was later merged with the Bangkok journal *Sarasat* and became the actual *Udomsarn*.

5. The Schools

Even if the Catholics in Thailand are a small minority (0.4%), the Catholic schools are a quality-brand in the academic as well as in the educative and disciplinary field. The Ministry of Education as well as people of every walk of life know them very well. They know that the religious are not there for their own profit or advancement, but are in the school compound day and night for the good of their children and the safety of the school. Also the staff in the Catholic schools know this and willingly lend their cooperation to attain the proposed goals.

The present situation is the fruit of a long journey begun from the arrival of the Catholic missionaries of the Society of the Foreign Missions of Paris in the Kingdom of Siam in 1662. With their experience in France they soon started the Constantine College in the Capital Ayutthaya in 1668. This College served the purpose of the Seminary, but was opened to all people who could afford to attend. But unfortunately due to the various persecutions the College was destroyed and had to be rebuilt many times. With the new Capital of Bangkok (1769-1782) the Mission continued the important task of education.

In 1772 the first parish school of Calvary church (Rosary) was opened. In 1785 another was opened at the Assumption church. In the year 1796 the parish school of Holy Cross was opened and in 1834 the parish school of St. Xavier Samsen. But all these schools were of small size. The great Bishop Jean B. Pallegoix (1845-1862) gave much attention and encouragement to education.

There was no compulsory education for the people in the Kingdom of Siam until the year 1868; those who wanted to have some education usually went to the Pagodas and some monks would teach them how to read and write in the Thai language.

School education became compulsory in Bangkok in 1868 and in the provinces in 1922. The great King Rama V established the Ministry of Education in 1890.

In 1877 the MEP Fathers opened the famous Assumption College in Bangkok; in 1901 it was entrusted to the Brothers of St. Gabriel, under whose management the College became very prestigious. At the same time the Bishop of Bangkok invited other Religious Congregations to take care of the education of girls – the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres and of St. Ursula. These Congregations established schools of a high standard in Bangkok, which are renowned even today. The King and the Queen of Thailand also studied in these schools.

Upcountry the parish schools were started in the XX century, usually for the Catholics and for the teaching of Catechism. The Congregation of the Lovers of the Holy Cross, an older indigenous Congregation, helped the missionaries in this work.

The parish schools of the Vicariate of Bangkok were 98 in 1929 with a total of 6155 students⁵⁵, an average of 62 students per school. The Catholics at that time were approximately 30,000.

When the Salesians arrived, the Mission of Ratchaburi had already some small schools for the Catholics, mostly in the rural areas; only two of them were registered in accordance with the law⁵⁶.

5.1. *The Existing Schools*

- 1) The school of the Nativity Church: It was registered as the school of the community of Bangnokkhuek. It was the best in the whole Mission; consisted of two wooden buildings, one for the boys and one for the girls.
- 2) The school at the Sacred Heart Church, Vat Phleng. It had a small wooden building apart from the church, with two classrooms and two teachers. The school was not registered.

⁵⁵ Cf. Education commission of the Diocese of Bangkok, *336 years of the Catholic Mission in education in Siam* [Thai], Bangkok, Diocesan Education commission 2005, p. 37.

⁵⁶ Cf. ASC “25 years of Salesian work in Thailand” by Fr Castellino or AIT “80 years of Don Bosco in Thailand” by Fr Henry Danieli.

- 3) The private school Uea Darun at Bangtan was registered; had a wooden building and two teachers.
- 4) The small parish school at Don Krabueang in an old wooden building with two classrooms.
- 5) The Saint Joseph School in Banpong was using the chapel as classroom and it had only one teacher.
- 6) The parish school at Thava had a wooden building apart from the church with only a spacious room.
- 7) The parish church at Thamuang with a wooden building apart from the church, with just one classroom and one teacher.
- 8) The parish school in Khok Mottanoi was opened in 1925. It had a wooden building with classrooms and two teachers⁵⁷.

5.2. Salesian Work in the Schools

The Salesians gave attention to all the schools, but took special care of the school in Banpong, which initially was the least of all.

On 12 May 1929 the Minister of Education Prince Thani Nivat went to visit all the schools in Ratchaburi. At the very small St. Joseph school the Prince asked Fr Joseph Pinaffo whether he intended to provide some more decent classrooms for the students in a growing town like Banpong. He answered that it was surely the intention of the Mission to do so in due time.

In the same year the Mission approved a plan for a new building for St. Joseph school and with the special care of Fr Joseph Pinaffo in two years the new solemn building was opened in December 1932.

⁵⁷ Cf. ASC “25 years of the Salesians in Siam” by Fr Cesare Castellino, who was an eyewitness. As a cleric in practical training he taught in Bangtan and Banpong from the beginning.

We have these statistics from March 1931, beginning of the third year of the Salesian work in the schools⁵⁸:

| N | School | Boys | Girls |
|---|---------------|------|-------|
| 1 | Bangnokkhuek | 186 | 202 |
| 2 | Vat Phleng | 62 | 61 |
| 3 | Khok Mottanoi | 56 | 72 |
| 4 | Mekhleng | 15 | 10 |
| 5 | Don Krabueng | 115 | 54 |
| 6 | Banpong | 99 | 29 |
| 7 | Thamuang | 18 | 42 |
| 8 | Thava | 50 | 30 |
| 9 | Bangtan | 82 | 58 |
| | Total | 683 | 558 |

5.3. *Other Achievements of the Salesians:*

- 1) They registered all the schools in accordance with the law and developed the necessary structures.
- 2) They opened the schools to the non-Christian students in order to reach out and extend Catholic education to non-Catholic families too.
- 3) They opened hostels for boarders from distant places.
- 4) They opened a Teachers Training Course to have qualified teachers in the schools.
- 5) They prepared qualified religious and lay personnel for the direction of schools.
- 6) They opened technical schools for orphans, poor and disadvantaged, when the Ministry of Education did not yet have programs in that sector.

⁵⁸ Cf. *AIT Chronicle of the Nativity Bangnokkhuek, March 1931.*

- 7) They favoured all youth activities: sports, music, art and drama, scouts, seminars and camping.
- 8) The Salesian educative system was outstanding and appreciated by students, the parents, other religious congregations and the authorities.

In the period 1929-1940 the Salesians could open only one parish school at Mekhlong in 1931.

In 1939 the nationalistic Government proclaimed the policy that elementary education was the duty of the State and the Government tried to close the private elementary schools whenever it was possible; so five schools of the Mission were closed to the regret of the parents and students. But just after the war the closed schools were reopened.

5.4. Schools Opened in the Period 1946-1960

Salesian schools:

- 1) The Don Bosco Technical School in Bangkok for the orphans and poor students (Jan. 1947).
- 2) The school in Hua Hin (May 1947).
- 3) The school in Hat Yai in the South (May 1950).
- 4) The Salesians developed St. Joseph College in Banpong "Sarasit Phitthayalai" as the main Salesian Center.
- 5) The school in Udonthani in the North East (May 1957).

Mission schools:

The Mission upgraded the standard of all the schools.

- 1) The Mission opened the parish school in the agricultural settlement of Ban Saeng Arun in the year 1953.
- 2) It opened the very important school at Ratchaburi, "The Daruna Ratchaburi school" (1957)
- 3) It opened the parish school in Suratthani, "Thep Mittr Sueksa School" (1959).

Note: On seeing the success of the school in Banpong the new schools were all oriented to Bangkok or other towns.

The schools with the boarding section have served as a means to reach out to many people, to take in as many Catholic youths as possible and to educate the young through the Salesian charism. They have been also a means to support other Salesian activities for the poor.

Conclusion

The various activities for the young that the Salesians used in education were at the beginning brand new for the country, but later got absorbed into the educational system in all the schools: scout activities, music and band, stage shows and especially sports. Later on spiritual retreats were introduced at the beginning and end of the academic year for each class to help the young reflect on their experience and give directions for their future life. The Salesians are still the leaders in the education of the young in Thailand.