

STATE OF SALESIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY IN INDIA – PROBLEMS, AND A SUCCESS STORY: A HISTORY OF THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO IN INDIA FROM THE BEGINNING UP TO 1951-52 BY JOSEPH THEKKEDATH SDB

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Introduction

The Salesian efforts at preserving documents through the proper maintenance of archives, ordering of libraries and engaging in historical research has already been pointed out in my earlier paper titled *The Relevance of History and Salesian Historiography – A Philosophical Approach*. It must be admitted however that these have been primarily due to the interest that the Superiors and the General Chapters evinced in preserving the Salesian patrimony and passing it on in a relevant and critical manner to future generations. The final act in this ongoing effort was the setting up of the *Istituto Storico Salesiano* (ISS) and the later establishment of the *Associazione Cultori di Storia Salesiana* (ACSSA) at the Generalate in Rome.

However in the case of India no national or regional historical institute has been set up to help document the multifarious activities the Congregation has been involved in the various parts of the country. Although in the hundred and seven years of the presence of Salesians in India there have been a number of works which are more hagiographical than historical in the critical sense, celebrating individuals and events than critical. Nevertheless there has been one great exception to this and that is the methodically researched and competently written work of Joseph Thekkedath titled *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India from the beginning up to 1951-52*.

The present paper in keeping with its title will dwell in a general manner on the state of Salesian historiography in India indicating some of the more important problems linked to it before proceeding on to an analytical presentation of the above-mentioned book of Dr. Joseph Thekkedath.

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1. The State of Salesian Historiography in India

With the exception of the work of Fr. Thekkedath, which will be studied analytically in the later part of this paper, there does not exist a history of the Salesians in India as a whole. What does exist are some works on two or three particular areas or topics. Thekkedath himself enumerates the available works: “There are several good works on the missions of north-east India: a good doctoral thesis (as yet unpublished) of Fr. Guiseppe Casti on the Assam mission from 1922 to 1934; a detailed and, on the whole, reliable history of the Salesians in Assam from 1922 to 1969 by Fr. Archimedes Pianazzi; a synthetic article of Fr. George Kottupallil on the Catholic Church in north-east India from 1627 to 1983; and a chronicle-like history of the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati from 1934 to 1984 by Fr. Orestes Paviotti. Regarding Salesian work in South India during the first thirty years, Fr. Mathew Kapplikunnel has presented us with a history of the early Salesian presence at Tanjore and Mylapore, and Fr. Abraham Kavalakatt has to his credit an unpublished research paper on missionary labours of Archbishops Eugene Mederlet. There are also two biographies of Archbishop Louis Mathias, one by Fr. Paul Mongour, a French Salesian at Lyons, and the other by Fr. Archimedes Pianazzi. Besides all these, we also have the precious memoirs of Archbishop Mathias, which covers the period from 1922 to 1935”¹.

There are also several Souvenirs brought out on various occasions and in different parts of India. The more important of these are: *A Journey with the Young – Don Bosco India Centenary 1906-2006*, SPCSA New Delhi, 2006, edited by Louis Kumpiluvilil sdb and Charles Panackel sdb; *Centenary of the Catholic Church in North-East India 1890-1990*, Archbishop’s House, Shillong, 1990, edited by Fr. M.C. George sdb; *Don Bosco in India, Don Bosco Centenary Souvenir 1888-1988*, Madras, 1988 edited by Louis Kumpiluvilil & Britto Manohar sdb; *His Dream turns Gold, Souvenir of the Golden Jubilee of Madras Province*, DB Publications, Madras 1984 edited by Louis

¹ Joseph THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India: from the beginning up to 1951-52*. Vols. 1 and 2. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2005, p. 10. There are also some other biographies like that of Joseph PUTHENPURA, *Bishop Orestes Marengo: North East India’s Unparalleled Missionary*. Shillong, Sacred Heart Theological College 2000; Sebastian KAROTEMPREL, *Fr. John Med, sdb: A Profile*. Shillong, Vendrame Institute Publications 2010; Barnes L. MAWRIE, *Burnt out for Christ: The Life and Works of Fr. Constantine Vendrame*. Shillong, Vendrame Institute Publications 2008; Sebastian KAROTEMPREL, *Albizuri Among the Lyngams: A Brief History of the Catholic Mission among the Lyngams of Northeast India*. Shillong, Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1985; Paul VADAKUMPADAN – Jose VARICKASSERIL, *Apostle of Christ: Essays in Honour of Archbishop Stephen Ferrando sdb*. Shillong, Vendrame Institute Publications 2003; Theresa THOMAS, *My Vocation is to Serve the Poor: Biography of Sr. Nancy Pereira, fma*. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2011.

Kumpiluvellil sdb & Britto Manohar sdb; the *Memory of the Salesian Province of Bombay 1928-1998*, Provincial House, Mumbai edited by Peter Gonsalves sdb, *Sharing His Love – Silver Jubilee of the Salesian Province of Bangalore 1979-2004*, Provincial House, Bangalore 2004 edited by Paul Puthanangady et al.

However as is evident these deal with some particular areas or topics and celebrate occasions and do not treat of the history of the Salesians for the whole of India nor employ the strictly historical method.

2. Difficulties/Problems

The problems associated with Salesian historiography in India may be enumerated in three words viz., availability (of sources), attitude (of the Salesians) and aptitude (of the writer) all of which are interconnected when referring to historiography.

2.1. Availability of Sources

The more than hundred – year history of the Salesians in India does provide ample resources for the historian to work on. But being a part of the world-wide missionary enterprise of the Salesians and given the fact of the Salesians being found in so extensive and geographically diverse and culturally different areas in the country the sources – especially the archival – need to be looked for both in the country and outside. This calls for time, finance and personal commitment on the part of the historian.

The absence of a National or Regional Documentation Centre further complicates critical historical study, research and publication.

Further the personal correspondence of some of the leading protagonists of Indian Salesian history have been lost forever as may be ascertained in the case of Fr. Carreño².

Dwelling further on archival sources despite the known historical value of the archives which has been so much insisted on from the time of Fr.

² Having been asked by Fr. Fr. Joachim D'Souza, the former Regional Councillor for South Asia to write a biography of Fr. Carreño, the present author met the Provincial of the Province of Bilbao, Spain in Rome in 2008 and enquired of him the possibility of visiting the provincial archives with a view to checking on the personal correspondence of Fr. Carreño. But it was informed him by the Provincial that in his last years Fr. Carreño had them all burnt. This must be considered a great loss from the historian's perspective as they would surely have contained material which would have shed revealing light on such initiative of his as the decision to recruit local vocations and on those issues which caused frictions between him during the last years of his provincialship and Mgr. Mathias.

Ricaldone³ and the more recent reminder of Fr. Vecchi *with special reference to Art. 62 of the Regulations that special importance attaches to the preservation of archives and other documentary material because of their cultural and community value* and despite the exhortation in Regulations Art. 178 that *the Rector should keep the archives in order and up to date, and compile or see to the compiling of the house chronicle* it must lamentably be said that archives are not maintained with the expected degree of order and precision⁴.

Nevertheless there are some bright spots visible on the horizon especially when one considers that in two of the theological centres in the country viz., Kristu Jyotic College, Bangalore and Sacred Heart Theological College, Mawlai, Shillong, there are Salesian documentation centres and that the Province of Bangalore has launched Bosco Institute of Social Sciences (BISS) in the Kristu Jyoti College Campus with the aim of documenting the activities of the Salesians not only in the Province but also in the whole of the country with special reference to the social involvement of the Salesians. BISS was responsible for bringing out the YaR Directory in 2012. BOSCO, Bangalore, too has a documentation Centre which records its activities and their impact.

2.2. *Attitude of the confreres*

Perhaps the more serious problem and which gives a clue to the above situation is the general approach of the Salesians to their ministry. This approach is to consider the Salesian ministry as being primarily pastoral or socially-oriented without an adequate documentation or written reflection on these activities which would endow them with a truly historical/scientific tenor. Most of the works in existence are the result of individual initiatives or the initiative of a few academic institutions like the studentate of theology or the result of the work of ad hoc committees set up to prepare souvenirs to celebrate events. The general interest and sustained effort to preserve our patrimony and pass it on to future generations have not yet found a place in the Salesian mind.

Nevertheless there appear to be silver linings which would contribute albeit indirectly to Salesian historiography in India. The requirements of detailed inventories and documented evidence when applying for projects in sectors like the Yar and DB Tech seem to generate greater urgency in the area of documentation and archiving.

³ Cf "Atti del Capitolo Superiore della Pia Società Salesiana" No. 120 (Nov.-Dec. 1943).

⁴ Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians...*, p. 13. Here the author speaks of the archives of the Bishop's House of Krishnagar, that of Don Bosco, Panjim, of Don Bosco Vellore etc. not being in the expected state of order.

The many biographies that exist are of a hagiographical nature and do not admit of a critical historical approach as they are meant to enthuse and edify. A case in point is the manuscripts of Fr. John Barucci on *Mgr. Mathias titled Monsignor Louis Mathias visto da sinistra* which manuscript has disappeared as the authorities felt that this critical work by a person who was closely associated with that legendary pioneer could do harm to his otherwise heroic image⁵.

2.3. *Aptitude of the Historian*

Engaging in historical research in India calls for particular knowledge, skills and commitment. The historian should have a certain knowledge of the general history of the country with special reference to its social situation, and understanding of the very varied circumstances involved in the evangelization and christianization of the various parts of the country, of the problems associated with the padroado and propaganda conflicts etc. in order to give a rational and valid interpretation of the past in the context of the present⁶. Further he should be endowed with the gifts needed both for analysis and synthesis, competence in reading and interpreting manuscripts which calls for some fluency in several languages, and a commitment to historical research which is content with nothing less than integrality understood in its most complete sense. Understandably enough Salesians having the required qualities and dedication are hard to come by in the circumstances and hence Fr. Thekkedath, the author of the two-volume work, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India from the beginning up to 1951-52*, which will be analyzed in the pages that follow must be considered a stand-out exception⁷.

⁵ The present author has not been privileged to have a look at this work. But has heard from Fr. Barucci himself of the existence of this work when editing his *Reminiscences* for Rapport the newsletter of the Province of Bangalore in the early 1980-s. Subsequent attempts to trace it have proved futile. Fr. Barucci seems to have run foul of Mgr. Mathias and was supported by Fr. Carreño who himself had difficulties with Mgr. Louis Mathias. Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians...*, p. 839. Cf *ibid.*, p. 840 ff. for some serious differences between Fr. Carreño and Mgr. Mathias.

⁶ A case in point is the reasons that led to the decision of Fr. Carreño to take aspirants from Kerala to other parts of the country in such large numbers to train them as Salesians. Was frowned at by some of his critics both in India and Rome but which in retrospect undeniably helped the Congregation to grow and to become increasingly vibrant.

⁷ Fr. Thekkedath completed his B.A. (Hons) from the University of Guwahati in 1949 securing the first rank and completed his doctorate in Church History from the Gregorian University Rome, with *maxima cum laude* for his dissertation *The Troubled Days of Francis Garcia SJ, Archbishop of Cranganore (1641-59)*. A much acclaimed professor, he has taught history with evident erudition and enviable passion for a number of years both in secular

3. A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India – A Brief Presentation

One of the more outstanding phenomena in the mission history of India is undoubtedly the growth and reach of the Salesians of Don Bosco. In the little more than hundred years of its existence, the Congregation has spread to every part of the country with a steady rise in both personnel and the number of institutions as well as involvement outside the strictly Salesian administered centres together with the extent of networking with both governmental departments and non-governmental organizations. However no comprehensive historical work on this astonishing presence had ever been attempted till Fr. Thekkedath Joseph took up this challenging task and completed it after 12 years of arduous and competent reading, research and writing. Dr. Thekkedath has brought into this work his long personal experience of the Salesian missions, his personal acquaintance with several of the personalities involved as well as his unquestioned competence as a master historian capable of having a global view of the subject matter and that with an eye for details.

The book was inspired by Fr. Thomas Panakezham, the then General Councillor for Asia and president of the Salesian Provincial Conference for India (SPCI)⁸ who wrote to Fr. Joseph Thekkedath, an acknowledged historian and former president of the Church History Association of India who had already two critically acclaimed historical works to his credit⁹ in December 1991 asking him if he would be willing to make the necessary research and write the history of the Salesians in India¹⁰. Fr. Thekkedath accepted it as a labour of love for all that he had received from the Congregation and as a tribute to the pioneer Salesians and set out with his characteristic thoroughness to produce what must be considered a truly monumental work. Fittingly enough this two-volume work was solemnly released by Rev. Fr. Pascual Chavez, the Rector Major, in March 2005 on the occasion of the inauguration of the centenary celebrations for the arrival of the Salesians in India¹¹.

and ecclesiastical colleges. A former president of the Church History Association of India Fr. T.J., as he is popularly known, is highly regarded for his objectivity, forthrightness and precision in the use of words – all of which are evident also in all his historical works. India as understood during this period of Salesian history would include also Myanmar (erstwhile Burma) and Sri Lanka.

⁸ SPCI has since been renamed SPCSA (Salesian Provincial Conference of South Asia).

⁹ Joseph THEKKEDATH, *The Troubled Days of Francis Garcia S.J. Archbishop of Cranganore (1641-59)*. Roma, Università Gregoriana Editrice Roma 1972 and *History of Christianity in India*. Vol. II. *From the Middle of the Sixteenth Century to the End of the Seventeenth Century (1542-1700)*. Bangalore, Published for the Church History Association of India by Theological Publications in India 1982.

¹⁰ J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians...*, vol. I, p. IX.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, XI.

3.1. *Organisation of the Work*

The work organized both chronologically and geographically is truly monumental in dimension (pp.xlv + 1412) and is divided into eleven sections and 40 chapters each bearing proof of the meticulous archival research which is so characteristic of the entire work. It succeeds in “portraying step by step the growth of the Salesians in various parts of India from 1906 to 1951-52”. (intro. p. 1).

The work unfolds with an introduction which describes the political situation in India and the state of the Catholic Missions in the 19th and early twentieth century in an attempt to situate the work in its proper historical context. The author then proceeds to indicate the sources – both secondary and primary – the few published works already existing and more especially the various archival sources which understandably form the more important sources for the subsequent narration. The introduction concludes indicating the method, criteria and approach followed by the author.

3.1.1. A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India – Volume One

Section I of Volume one titled *The Salesians at Tanjore and Mylapore (1906-28)* has four chapters and speaks of the two first Salesian presences in India from where despite the hard work and the many sacrifices of the Salesians, they were forced to withdraw in 1928 due to the very untenuous situation created by the Diocesan authorities notably Mgr. Texeira, the Vicar General of the Padroado Diocese of Mylapore (Cf pp. 73 ff.).

Section II with three chapters and titled *The Salesians in North-East India under the Leadership of Mgr. Louis Mathias (1922-1935)* deals with the period between 1922 and 1935 when the Salesians first landed in the area with Mgr. Mathias at their head to 1935 when his translation to the Archdiocese of Madras was effected. These years which Mgr. Mathias had spent in the region were indeed years which defined the Salesian presence in the region as Louis Mathias with his powerful personality succeeded in building up true family spirit and union among the Salesians and left behind a mechanism which would provide a constant flow of missionary personnel for the growing needs of the Assam Mission which by the end of his tenure counted more than half a lakh Christians.

Divided into four parts Section III deals with the Salesian presence in Calcutta, Mumbai, Krishnagar and Saharanpur. Each of these areas is dealt with in a separate part with Calcutta and its environs having three chapters dedicated to them (Chapter 8: *The Catholic Orphan Press*, Chapter 9: *Don Bosco School, Lilluah*; and Chapter 10: *The Shrine of Our Lady of Bandel*) while the others are treated each in a single chapter.

Section IV narrates in five vibrant chapters the progress of the Salesian Mission in the South from 1928-43. It treats of the Archdiocese of Madras

under Mgr. Eugene Mederlet and later under Mgr. Mathias who would eventually be made the Metropolitan Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore¹², the establishment of the Salesian Province of South India, the house and parish of Vellore and the setting up and progress of the novitiate and the studentate at Tirupattur besides giving a brief write-up of the other presences in Tamilnadu.

The establishment of the novitiate and the studentate at Tirupattur will prove to be of special significance as it will in course of time be considered the cradle of Salesian life in South India.

Section V titled: The Salesians in Burma (1939-52) has just one chapter and could very well be considered the most moving and engrossing chapter of the entire work. The heroism of the Salesians under Fr. Alessi during the Second World War and the Japanese occupation must equal that of missionaries anywhere at any time in the long missionary history of the Church.

Section VI which is the last section of Volume I is titled: *The Salesians in internment camps during the Second World War (1939-46)* and deals with the vicissitudes of the German and Italian Salesians in the internment camps. The author faithfully points out the differences of opinions and misunderstandings between the Salesians from the North and those from the South.

3.1.2. History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India – Vol. Two

Section VII with just one chapter speaks of the first years of the Salesian work in Goa – at Panjim, Calangute and Valpoi – a work begun under the dynamic leadership of Fr. Scuderi.

Rapid growth of South India under Mgr. Mathias and Fr. Carreño (1943-52) is the title of section VIII. This long section has eight chapters which dwell on a number of issues like the establishment and growth of Salesian presences in various places in the south, the establishment of the formation houses, the extraordinary visitation by Fr. A. Fedrigotti, the disagreements between Mgr. Mathias and Fr. Carreño, the two Salesian stalwarts in the South and the opening and closing of the two houses of the St. Joseph's English Medium School, Trivan-

¹² By the Apostolic Constitution *Ex primaevae Ecclesiae* of 13th November 1952, portions of the Archdiocese of Madras (Propaganda) and the Diocese of Mylapore (Padroado) were dismembered from the western side and the Diocese of Vellore was created. The extreme southern portion of the Diocese of Mylapore was created into the Diocese of Thanjavur. From the remaining portions, a new Archdiocese was created, to be known as the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore. On 14th November, 1952 Most Rev. Dr. Louis Mathias sdb, was transferred from the old Archdiocese of Madras to the new Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore, and on 29th November made his solemn entry and took charge as the new Archbishop. Cf *A Catholic Directory of India 2005-2006*, Bangalore.

drum and the Carmel High School, Nagercoil, to mention some of the more salient aspects of this section.

Section IX is titled *Further Growth of the Missions and Houses of the Northern Province (1935-52)* and has eight chapters. As is evident from the title, this section makes a return to the northern province and indicates both the stabilization of the works there as well as the opening up of some new mission territories. It also speaks of the extraordinary visitations by Fr. Candela and Fr. Fedrigotti, the studentate of theology at Shillong and the studentate of philosophy at Sonada, as well as some of the more prominent works of the region like the Don Bosco Industrial School and Orphanage, Shillong. The impact of the war years on the Salesian works is also opportunely described.

The last two sections viz., X & XI have only a chapter each. While chapter 39 briefly outlines the Salesian structures in India from 1906 to 1952, Chapter 40 gives critical estimates of some of the more prominent Salesians who figure in the narration.

The maps (4 in vol. I and 1 in vol. II), the photos and the index doubtless enhance the scientific value of the work.

4. General Comments

Having gone through the entire work carefully one is struck by the precision evidenced in the book in every sense – organization of the matter, choice of words and the surprisingly few printing errors found in a work that runs to more than 1400 pages. The author appears also not to take anything for granted as far as his readers are concerned and gives explanations of terms like *visitatore* (p. 147) and extraordinary visitation (p. 144) which though familiar to the Salesians/religious may not be clear to a lay readership.

Overall the book succeeds in presenting the Salesian pioneers as ordinary human beings with an extraordinary attachment to Don Bosco and to the Salesian Mission. True there were some great minds and organizers like Carreño and Mathias, but the run of the mill Salesian missionary was content to play his part in the great enterprise that was beginning to unfold in India. The following aspects of the life and work of the early Salesians as indicated in the book appear important enough to be emphasized.

4.1. *They worked to a plan*

That the early Salesians had a clear vision and orientation and worked in line with them may be seen from the wise recommendations given by Fr. Peter Ricaldone in 1927. These recommendations included the stress on maintaining the chronicles of the individual houses and that of the province in general, diligent gathering and preserving of the relevant information to facilitate the later

compiling of the history of the Salesian Missions in India, utmost importance to be given to the formation of personnel, due importance to be given to the publication of good books for the general public, text-books for schools and other reading material, the presence of two missionaries in each of the mission stations and the need to expose the Christian doctrine in clear and simple ways following the spirit and practice of St. Francis de Sales and Don Bosco setting aside all polemics (p. 149).

4.2. *They lived a life of heroism and sacrifices*

Heroism and sacrifice of a very high order are evident in several pages of the book like Fr. Alessi, the hero of Mandalay, Myanmar, during the war years (pp. 609 ff), moving his bed to the room of Fr. Ravalico in order that they could nurse each other since they were both suffering from malaria (p. 194). The terrible climate, polluted water, poor food and excessive work were often cited by the missionaries as being the causes for their frequently falling ill (p. 320) and even dying (p. 327). Fr. Cusini who was operated upon 4 times in 1950-1951 accepted the situation in a way that was quite edifying to all who visited him (p. 989).

In the early years, the report of the visitors and other records speak of the generally good spirit (p. 831) that reigned in the communities despite deprivations and excessive work (p. 253).

4.3. *Ability to adapt and to Network*

The Salesians from the beginning adapted their mission to the situation they found themselves in. In the Assam Plains for example they published a magazine in Hindi beginning from October 1928 with the aim of making Don Bosco known and of helping to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians. This magazine always had an article or discourse against drunkards in a dialogue form. The dialogue was between a drunkard and the devil. In the Assam plains the habit of drinking doing much harm, the argument of hell was far more effective with the simple people than sermons on the love of God (p. 186).

In Mumbai they organized charity dances with the support of many collaborators notably Lady Lumley, the wife of the Governor of Bombay and Sir Richard Temple (p. 289) and in Shillong it was the Architect Barrington who persuaded Mgr. Mathias to trust in Mary Help of Christians and to continue with the construction of Our Lady's House (p. 114).

The reasons for the later flourishing of the Salesian works in India must be attributed to the Salesians paying attention to the fundamentals like the traditional Salesian devotions – to the Blessed Sacrament, to Marian Devotion (p.

823), and devotion to the Pope (p. 794). The fostering of the traditional community spirit through community celebration of the major liturgical feasts, the feast of the Rector (pp. 960, 965-967), picnics (p. 995 & p. 1000) etc. The Salesians' trust in Divine Providence was typically in line with that of Don Bosco (p. 1020). They made the annual celebration of the Corpus Christi a very popular event especially in Shillong (106, 1322).

4.4. Foresight and Vision

The vision of the pioneers, especially in beginning the novitiate in India and the recruitment of local vocations and the proper formation of personnel – as the lack of personnel would leave reasons to fear for the future of the Salesian works in India (p. 808). However there would be strong prejudices to be overcome. Thus for instance the Extraordinary Visitor Fr. A. Fedrigotti, already before his arrival in India appears to have had his mind poisoned by adverse rumours about the aspirantate and formation house at Tirupattur. In fact Thekkedath states: “He had come to the house with many prejudices against it, but they were dissipated in the course of his stay because of what he actually saw. He left with the best of impressions.” (p. 931). And during the meeting of the Provincial Council presided over by the Visitor, it was again pointed out that there must be strictness in the selection of personnel: no second rate candidate was to be admitted, and this was to be applied especially when admitting candidates to perpetual profession and ordination (pp. 831-832).

Fr. Carreño in particular was ahead of his times and this may be seen from his attempts to have volunteers from Europe spending some time in the missions sharing the apostolate of the Salesians (p. 844). He was also very much in favour of moving out into new areas and taking up works even if it meant there was not always sufficient Salesian personnel. However the policy of the superiors was that a work could be undertaken only if it could be ensured that the majority of the staff would be Salesian. Disregarding this policy in his great zeal Fr. Carreño had taken up the school in Trivandrum which had to be given up after some time. This led the Superiors to reiterate the validity of their stand that taking up works without ensuring a Salesian majority in the staff would spell disaster (p. 845). However today volunteering has become a regular feature of the Salesian works and due to the expansion of the works and the paucity of personnel the Salesians have been constrained to be reconciled to their being a minority in their own institutions and the Congregation has today come around to the idea of insisting on lay collaboration¹³.

¹³ The theme of General Chapter (GC) 24 was that of lay collaboration.

4.5. *Standing up for Principles*

The Salesians also showed a reluctance to sacrifice principles and values and would give up works which they had begun at great cost in order to be true to their educative mission. This was in evidence when they were forced to leave the school at Trivandrum due to the non-cooperative attitude of the diocesan clergy and the undisciplined behavior of the teachers and students. Writing to Fr. Edward Corcoran at Trivandrum, Fr. Carreño, the Provincial, said: "And should the ecclesiastical authorities take objection to such a step, we shall have to remind them that ultimately the responsibility of the education of the Catholic youth is theirs and if they think that the school should remain open even at the cost of our principles and our purposes they may take upon themselves such responsibility but not ourselves [...] We take our men to other more promising fields of labour" (pp. 1047-1048).

Such boldness was seen also in the closing down of the house of Mylapore in the face of the lack of cooperation from the diocesan authorities. The letter of Fr. Ricaldone to Mgr. Texeira, the Vicar General, is proof of the decisiveness of the Salesians. He wrote: "We have decided to leave Tanjore and the district on 1 May 1928. As I told Your Reverence already, we are sorry to leave the field of labour where the Salesians have worked for so many years, but for the reasons known to Your Reverence we think it our duty to take such a decision" (p. 78).

4.6. *Constraints of Internationality*

The Second World War which broke out in September 1939 gave evidence of the latent national animosities also among the Salesians. Prudent and firm steps were necessary to prevent unpleasant incidents. Fr. Scuderi asked the Salesians to be very prudent in speaking whether it was among themselves or with outsiders. They were not to interest themselves in politics. For this purpose he forbade everyone except the rectors to read the newspapers or to listen to the radio! He repeated the same in another circular letter at the end of May of the following year, when Italy was almost about to enter the War (pp. 1146-1147). Matters were in fact not helped by the negative attitude of the Italians to the Anglo-Irish confreres expressed so unambiguously by Fr. Uguet: "As for those who could be found in the province of Fr. Crouche (i.e. the English Province) it is not useful that they come here. The people do not want them because of political reasons, besides to preserve our good Salesian spirit and to keep alive the love for work and sacrifice, it is better that they go elsewhere!" (p. 1148). This was also an issue for the Church in general as the Instruction of the Propaganda indicates: "Whoever proposes to spread the Gospel in foreign countries must renounce any immediate interest in the temporal affairs of their home country" (p. 1154).

The internationality of the confreres coming as missionaries to India may be gathered from the list of eight missionaries sent by Fr. Berruti to Fr. Carreño in 1946. In the list there was a French man, an Englishman, a Portuguese, a Spaniard, two Argentinians, a Brazilian and a Pole! (p. 802).

4.7. Good Relations with the Government

The Salesians also won favour with government officials some of whom were quite generous with their help for Salesian works. This was evident in Assam where a certain number of Italian missionaries remained free from internment during the Second World War as the government wanted that the work of the Salesians should continue to function for the good of the people. Further the Governor sanctioned a grant of Rs. 7,000/- despite the opposition from some quarters. He did it with the words: “If the Salesians are doing good it is precisely now when they cannot get help from elsewhere that the government should show its gratitude!” (p. 1161).

Conclusion

Don Bosco wrote his *Memoirs of the Oratory* much like the Biblical writers wrote the Scriptures – as a history of salvation remembering what the Lord had done for them. They had experienced God’s salvific interventions in their lives and later looking back with gratitude decided to put them down for the benefit of future generations indicating that God was with them and proclaiming that they would not have been where they had arrived if not for the Lord’s presence in their lives. Don Bosco himself did much as the biblical authors had done millenniums before – he penned his Memoirs to keep alive his experience of God’s providence and to exhort his sons to trust in Him.

Dr. Thekkedath has done a remarkable job to keep alive the memory of the period of the origins, development and the stabilization of the Salesian presence in India. Led by few towering personalities like Mgr. Mathias and Fr. Carreño, a motley band of men drawn from across the European landscape launched out into the challenging Indian missions with but their commitment to the Lord, trust in Divine Providence, belief in the maternal accompaniment of the Blessed Virgin and their deep love for Don Bosco to guide them and have helped write some of the more glorious chapters ever in the long history of the Catholic Missions. While congratulating Fr. Thekkedath on this his singular contribution it is hoped that others will help keep alive this memory by similar competent contributions in the future.