

GREETING OF PRESIDENT AT THE OPENING OF THE ACSSA SEMINAR OF SALESIAN HISTORY SUD ASIA-INDIA REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Bangalore (India), 15-17 November 2013

The talks and discussions during these days are aimed at emphasising the close link between the pursuit of history and the ability to recognise one's specific identity in the Church and society, and coming to know how to assimilate it and hand it on to the new generations.

The Salesian presence is well consolidated in many parts of India, while still being of recent foundation and expansion in other areas. It is becoming more and more evident that we need to document in a suitable way the quality of our educational commitment, to write its history through using a variety of different types of sources. We need to preserve the heritage that is being built now through the contribution of confreres and sisters who have dedicated or who are at this time dedicating their lives to education. There follows the necessity of leaving a trace and of doing it in a proper way so that the story of the development of the Salesian work in the social, cultural and religious context of India may be told in a convincing fashion.

Our congregations are international, so the history of our presence in India which is in itself a vast and complex sub-continent, is a part of an even wider history. For this reason it must be told in convergence with the one great Salesian history. It will, moreover, open it up for those interested in knowing about it, both religious and lay people. It is precisely the awareness of this responsibility which has urged us to unite our energies, to call people together, and with joy we note how various SDB, FMA and members of other religious congregations have accepted the invitation.

The participation of the provinces, in continuity with previous gatherings (see ACSSA Bulletin by our secretary, Fr. Stanisław Zimniak, who is taking part in this Seminar despite having just concluded another international ACSSA meeting in the Philippines) indicates that there is a gradual, growing sensitivity to history. This is coupled with the awareness that better knowledge can favour a renewed recognition of ourselves as sons and daughters of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello in our choice of education of the young. It is an encouraging sign which we hope will be strengthened by the enrolment of new members of ACSSA who will continue the journey.

This Seminar is not an isolated event; it forms part of the activities planned by ACSSA. The Association was founded seventeen years ago and we wish to thank the person who thought of it and proposed it. We remember, therefore, Fr. Francesco Motto, who as director of the Salesian Historical Institute for twenty years, has been a tireless promoter of cultural initiatives among the various branches of the Salesian Family. Expert that he is, he has put forward new

perspectives and supported the up-grading of local Salesian historical studies. At the same time, we want to salute Fr. José Manuel Prellezo, the current director of the Salesian Historical Institute and already a member of ACSSA, for the collaboration that he will continue to offer in favour of historical research that will reach out to those interested throughout the world. Right from the beginning, in fact, the Association has organised international seminars and congresses thanks to the indispensable support of the Salesian Historical Institute. A grateful thought, joined to a fraternal prayer of suffrage, is addressed in particular to Fr. Antonio da Silva Ferreira who died in October. He was a passionate supporter of investigating Salesian History from a collaborative point of view.

Between the past international congress on Fr. Michael Rua (2009) and the next one on the occasion of the bi-centenary of the birth of Don Bosco (2015), the Presidency of the Association has concentrated on organising continental seminars on the *State of Salesian Historiography* in the respective regions. These involve the preservation and evaluation of the cultural heritage and also a reflection on *History and Salesian Identity* in some contexts. A seminar took place in 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya (Africa); in 2012 there was one in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, (America) and also in Benediktbeuern, Germany (Europe). A few days ago (4-8 November 2013) there was a seminar at Cebu in the Philippines, and now it is the turn of India.

In addition to repeating the importance of documentation, the idea has been to take stock together of the type of Salesian publications to be found in the various countries. We write in order to enter into dialogue with the readers, possibly with those beyond the Salesian Family. So it is necessary not to be just self-refereed, nor turning only to those favourable to the Salesian work, but to become aware of the wider dimensions of historical research, given that the Salesian presence is an integral part of the history of the country and of the Church. It needs, therefore, to be situated and understood in its context.

In order better to place ourselves in the general framework of Indian and Asian history, we have asked some experts to illustrate the current direction of history in this area. We have to place ourselves within this picture so as to understand where and how we are situated, whether we have already written something or whether we are approaching our initial research. We are aiming at starting off with clearer and more motivated ideas. In accordance with the aims of ACSSA, we intend, in fact, to foster Salesian historiography in such a way that its quality may be improved. The Seminar offers an opportunity to share strengths and weaknesses.

We look at the past, beginning from what we are, to better understand and to transmit to others our distinctive characteristics, distinguishing them from the merely circumstantial ones of Salesian experience in its temporal and spatial development. Listening to the witness of those who have gone before us in the

mission is not only a question of justice towards their memory; it also refines our capacity to decode present situations in the light of our reading and responsibility, harvesting the seeds of the future that are waiting to germinate and flower.

Towards the end of these days, reference will be made to the themes of the next international ACSSA conference, planned for the autumn of 2015, so that perspectives may be defined and responsibilities assumed. These days, then, will be rich in reflection and meaning.

We believe that our saints will support the work undertaken during these days and the commitments that will follow. I assure you of my fraternal remembrance and prayer that the meeting may prove a favourable occasion to grow in awareness and collaboration, so that you may experience the joy of contributing to the realisation of the one educational mission, enriched by reflection and study.

With much gratitude, in the name of the members of ACSSA and in my own name, I wish you all fruitful and pleasant days ahead.

*Sr. Grazia Loparco FMA
President ACSSA*

Roma, 15 novembre 2013